

# Beyond Creationism: Towards a Restoration of Catholic Creation Theology

By Hugh Owen

## Part I

**D**URING RECENT YEARS CATHOLIC INTELLECTUALS and academic journals have devoted more and more attention to origins. A pattern has emerged. Catholics who resist attempts to baptize macro-evolutionary theory are dismissed as “fundamentalists” and “creationists” or accused of confusing natural science with philosophy. But rarely does a *Catholic* intellectual offer a Catholic alternative to Protestant creationism and theistic evolutionism. This article will show that Catholic Tradition offers an explanation for the origins of man and the universe which avoids both the errors of Protestant creationism and fundamentalism on the one hand and pseudo-Catholic compromises with evolutionism and naturalism on the other.

Fundamentalism originated as a Protestant attempt to uphold the plain and obvious sense of Scripture in the face of modernist revisionist interpretations of the Bible. As a subset of fundamentalism, creationism defends the plain and obvious sense of the first eleven chapters of Genesis. But both ideas suffer from the inherent weakness of *sola Scriptura* which separates Biblical exegesis from any magisterial authority and from Sacred Tradition, including the consensus of the Church Fathers. On the other hand, the Catholic doctrine of creation and the early history of mankind presupposes the literal historical truth of the Bible, but understands the first eleven chapters of Genesis in the light of two millennia of patristic

commentary and magisterial teaching.<sup>1</sup> It clearly distinguishes between the period of creation when God created, formed, and furnished the universe and established the framework of natural laws, and the period of providence, in which we live, and in which creatures interact according to their various natures within the framework of natural law. Thus, Catholic metaphysics respects the integrity of the natural world, provides a proper framework for the development of the natural sciences, and welcomes the discoveries of natural scientists, confident that these discoveries will never contradict but will rather confirm the truth of divine Revelation.

The traditional Catholic doctrine of creation differs drastically from theistic evolutionism and progressive creationism, the two main efforts to reconcile Catholic doctrine with evolution and long ages of geologic time. Theistic evolutionism is the belief that God created matter and energy but used natural processes over long periods of time to produce all of the different kinds of living and nonliving things in the universe. Progressive creationism is the belief that God created matter and energy and intervened periodically and supernaturally over long ages of time to produce the variety of life forms in the universe. Thus, like Protestant creationism, neither theistic evolutionism nor progressive creationism recognizes any clear distinction between God's activity during the creation period and God's activity in the present order of things.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The "literal sense" of Scripture means both "the plain sense of the text" and the sense of the text intended by the sacred author. According to Pope Leo XIII in *Providentissimus Deus*, unless there are clear indications that a sacred author had a purely figurative meaning in mind for a particular text, the words should be accepted at face value. For this reason, Leo XIII wrote that the "literal and obvious" sense of the text must be accepted unless "reason makes it untenable."

<sup>2</sup> The work of Protestant creationists has been invaluable in many areas, but *sola Scriptura* has led to futile efforts to extrapolate from conditions in the present order of providence back to the period of creation.

## ***Humani Generis* and the Seeds of Confusion**

ONE OF THE REASONS WHY Catholics and non-Catholics alike are so confused about Catholic teaching on creation is that there have been relatively few authoritative magisterial teachings on the subject in modern times. To many outsiders, statements by Popes or Curia cardinals in non-authoritative settings carry equal weight with the most authoritative teachings of the past. This leads to widespread confusion. The last authoritative papal teaching on creation was Pope Pius XII's *Humani generis* in 1950.

Contemporary references to *Humani Generis* often focus on permission to discuss the possibility of the origin of the human body from pre-existing living matter in section 36:

The Teaching Authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions, on the part of men experienced in both fields, take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution, in as far as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter....<sup>3</sup>

But this is not a doctrinal statement—it is merely permission to discuss an idea—much as Pope John XXIII and Paul VI permitted a discussion of the morality of birth control more with a view to exposing its errors than to reconciling it with Catholic doctrine. In *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II explained why Pope Pius XII wanted errors “not simply to be rejected” but to be “examined critically.”

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Humani generis*, 36.

In his Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis*, Pope Pius XII warned against mistaken interpretations linked to evolutionism, existentialism and historicism. He made it clear that these theories had not been proposed and developed by theologians, but had their origins “outside the sheepfold of Christ.” (68) He added, however, that errors of this kind should not simply be rejected but should be examined critically: “Catholic theologians and philosophers, whose grave duty it is to defend natural and supernatural truth and instill it in human hearts, cannot afford to ignore these more or less erroneous opinions. Rather they must come to understand these theories well, not only because diseases are properly treated only if rightly diagnosed and because even in these false theories some truth is found at times, but because in the end these theories provoke a more discriminating discussion and evaluation of philosophical and theological truths” (69).<sup>4</sup>

Besides taking a decidedly negative view of “mistaken interpretations linked to evolutionism,” *Humani Generis* also contains clear reaffirmations of traditional Catholic teaching on the creation and early history of man which provide the context for the permission granted in section 36. To safeguard these doctrines, Sections 35-39 of *Humani Generis* enumerate the following “eleven opinions of the positive sciences not to be advanced or taught”:

1. Those having some sort of scientific foundation, in which the doctrine contained in Sacred Scripture or in Tradition is involved, and which are directly or indirectly opposed to the doctrine revealed by God
2. Acting as if the origin of the human body from preexisting and living matter were already completely certain and proved by the facts which have been discovered up to now and by reasoning on those facts

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<sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 54.

3. Acting as if there were nothing in the sources of divine revelation which demands the greatest moderation and caution in this question [of the origin of the human body from preexisting and living matter]
4. After Adam there existed on this earth true men who did not take their origin through natural generation from him as from the first parent of all
5. Adam represents a certain number of first parents
6. Denial of the doctrine of original sin, which proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which through generation is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own
7. A certain too free interpretation of the historical books of the Old Testament
8. Denial that the first eleven chapters of Genesis pertain to history in a true sense
9. Denial that if the ancient sacred writers have taken anything from popular narrations, they did so with the help of divine inspiration, through which they were rendered immune from any error in selecting and evaluating those documents
10. Popular narrations inserted into the Sacred Scriptures are considered on a par with myths or other such things
11. Our ancient sacred writers are not clearly superior to the ancient profane writers

To underscore the urgency of this prohibition, the Holy Father went on to “charge the Bishops and the Superiors General of Religious Orders, binding them most seriously in conscience, to take most diligent care that such opinions be not advanced in schools, in conferences or in writings of

any kind, and that they not be taught in any manner whatsoever to the clergy or faithful."<sup>5</sup>

Let the teachers in ecclesiastical institutions be aware that they cannot with tranquil conscience exercise the office of teaching entrusted to them, unless in the instruction of their students they religiously accept and exactly observe the norms which We have ordained. That due reverence and submission which in their unceasing labor they must profess towards the Teaching Authority of the Church, let them instill also into the minds and hearts of their students.<sup>6</sup>

Let them strive with every force and effort to further the progress of the sciences which they teach; but let them also be careful not to transgress the limits which We have established for the protection of the truth of Catholic faith and doctrine. With regard to new questions, which modern culture and progress have brought to the foreground, let them engage in most careful research, but with the necessary prudence and caution; finally, let them not think, indulging in a false "irenism," that the dissident and erring can happily be brought back to the bosom of the Church, if the whole truth found in the Church is not sincerely taught to all without corruption or diminution.<sup>7</sup>

In light of these solemn warnings, it is shocking to think how few Catholic seminaries, universities and schools in Europe and North America appear to have been careful "not to transgress the limits" established by Pope Pius XII for the "protection of the truth of Catholic faith and doctrine"! Indeed,

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<sup>5</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Humani generis*, 41.

<sup>6</sup> *Humani generis*, 42.

<sup>7</sup> *Humani generis*, 43.

is there even one Catholic university where one or more of these errors is not set forth as Catholic doctrine or, at least, as worthy of belief?

### **Catholic Metaphysics: The Key to the Restoration of the Truth of Creation**

PERHAPS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT than Pope Pius XII's defense of the traditional Catholic doctrines mentioned above was his defense of Catholic metaphysics in relation to creation and evolution. In sections 32-34, Pope Pius identifies six philosophical premises to be avoided, including the following:

Denial that there can be a metaphysic that is absolutely true.

The method of Aquinas hardly offers a method of philosophizing suited to the needs of our modern culture.

The precise explanation of truths like creation *ex nihilo* that transcend the senses and the unaided intellect requires the use of the language of metaphysics. According to Pope John Paul II, it is this discipline which alone can guarantee the right relationship between theology and philosophy, faith and reason:

The word of God refers constantly to things which transcend human experience and even human thought; but this "mystery" could not be revealed, nor could theology render it in some way intelligible, (102) were human knowledge limited strictly to the world of sense experience. Metaphysics thus plays an essential role of mediation in theological research. A theology without a metaphysical horizon could not move beyond an analysis of religious experience, nor would it allow the

*intellectus fidei* to give a coherent account of the universal and transcendent value of revealed truth.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, traditional Catholic metaphysics holds the key to distinguishing the traditional, authoritative, patristic doctrine of creation from Protestant creationism, theistic evolutionism, and progressive creationism, all of which deny, to one degree or another, the metaphysical distinction between the order of creation in which God created all things “at once from the beginning” and the order of providence in which we live and which natural science investigates. According to the Church Fathers and St. Thomas, natural science cannot investigate the creation period directly not only because it took place in the past but also because the order of nature that humans experience through their senses differs radically from the order of creation in which God supernaturally created all things in the beginning. On this point St. John Chrysostom writes:

With great gratitude let us accept what is related (by Moses), not stepping out of our own limitations, and not testing what is above us as the enemies of the truth did when, wishing to comprehend everything with their minds, they did not realize that **human nature cannot comprehend the creation of God** (emphasis added).<sup>9</sup>

Commenting on Jesus’ words in John’s Gospel, “My Father worketh hitherto and I work,” St. John Chrysostom summed up the consensus of the Eastern Doctors on the distinction between the order of creation and the order of providence:

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<sup>8</sup> *Fides et Ratio*, 83.

<sup>9</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 2:2*, p. 9) (quoted in Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation, and Early Man*, (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2002), p. 402).



The Divine Scripture indicates here that God rested from His works; but in the Gospel Christ says: “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). In comparing these utterances, is there not a contradiction to be found in them? May it not be so; in the words of Divine Scripture there is no contradiction whatsoever. When the Scripture here says: “God rested from all his works,” it thereby instructs us that on the Seventh Day He ceased to create and to bring out of nonexistence into existence; but when Christ says: “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,” it thereby indicates to us His uninterrupted Providence, and it calls “work” the preservation of what exists, the giving to it of continuance (of existence) and the governance of it at all times. Otherwise, how could the universe exist, if a higher hand did not govern and order everything visible and the human race?<sup>10</sup>

In the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas reveals the same understanding of creation as a symphony of natures created in and through Christ, completed on the sixth day of creation. Thus, he writes that Adam “had knowledge of all things by divinely infused species”—that is, by the ideas God placed in his mind, which corresponded to the essence of each kind of creature.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, he adds that, if Adam had not sinned, he “would have advanced in natural knowledge, not in the number of things known, but in the manner of knowing; because what he knew speculatively he would subsequently have known by experience.”<sup>12</sup> According to the Angelic Doctor, it was impossible for Adam to advance in the number of things known, because that number had been fixed and completed on the sixth day of creation. By “things” St. Thomas obviously referred to the “created

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<sup>10</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 10:7.

<sup>11</sup> These divinely infused species that God placed in Adam’s mind correspond to the various created “kinds” of creatures, not to the diverse individual species that have descended from them. For example, the various breeds of dogs, wolves, and hyenas are almost certainly descended from an original “dog kind.”

<sup>12</sup> *ST*, I, q. 94, a. 1, ad 1 and ad 3.

essences” of things and not to the total number of individuated expressions of those essences.

In the first production of corporeal creatures no transmutation from potentiality to act can have taken place, and accordingly, **the corporeal forms that bodies had when first produced came immediately from God**, whose bidding alone matter obeys, as its own proper cause. To signify this, Moses prefaces each work with the words, “God said, ‘Let this thing be,’ or ‘that,’ to denote the formation of all things by the Word of God . . .<sup>13</sup> (emphasis added)

According to St. Thomas, the perfection of the original creation did not preclude a development of that creation to a final end. But this was not an evolutionary development, because he insists that “all the parts” of the first creation were complete in the beginning:

The perfection of a thing is twofold, the first perfection and the second perfection. The first perfection is that according to which a thing is substantially perfect, and this perfection is the form of the whole; which form results from the whole having its parts complete. But the second perfection is the end, which is either an operation, as the end of the harpist is to play the harp; or something that is attained by an operation, as the end of the builder is the house that he makes by building. But the first perfection is the cause of the second, because the form is the principle of operation. Now the final perfection, which is the end of the whole universe, is the perfect beatitude of the saints at the consummation of the world; and the first perfection is the completeness of the universe at its first founding, and this is what is ascribed to the seventh day.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *ST*, I, q. 65, a. 4. With this commentary, St. Thomas shows that the creation of “each creature” by God refers to the creation of each kind of creature—whale kind, bird kind, cat kind, and so on—and not merely to the material elements from which the bodies of these creatures were made.

<sup>14</sup> *ST*, I, q. 73, a. 1.

## **The Appearance of Age and the Perfection of the First Created World**

ONLY THE TRADITIONAL CATHOLIC METAPHYSICS of creation can explain the perfection of the first-created world, without any prior natural development. Our Lord's first sign at Cana paralleled His first work of creation. In an act that recalled the marvel of His work of creation, Jesus supernaturally changed six containers of water into a marvelous vintage. A contemporary vine-grower at Cana would have recognized that to produce the best of wines required many years for planting, dressing, harvesting, pressing, fermenting, and aging. Indeed, a Galilean Pliny—if one were to be found—could be forgiven for insisting that it was “impossible” to produce a vintage of such excellence in a mere instant.

But what could be done in the face of his skepticism except to confront him with the trustworthy witnesses—the Virgin of Nazareth and St. John the Beloved Disciple who never told a lie? These two would testify that the wine had been produced instantaneously by Jesus of Nazareth. And if the Galilean naturalist insisted that this was “impossible” and that any one making such a claim must be a fool or a deceiver—what could the disciples do but pray that he would come to trust their truthful testimony more than the fallible testimony of his own—severely limited—senses?

In the same way when theistic evolutionists claim that God would be a deceiver if the universe with its appearance of great age proved to be thousands of years old—according to the Biblical chronology as understood by all of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church—they make the same category mistake as our Galilean naturalist. They deny a supernatural reality on the ground that it does not accord with their experience of the

natural world. Indeed, how foolish it would be for our Galilean naturalist to call Jesus a deceiver for making his new wine appear old when Jesus had arranged for truthful witnesses to testify to its actual age! But is it any less foolish to call God a deceiver because He instantaneously created the heavens and the earth with an appearance of great age—when He inspired the sacred author of Genesis to testify to the rapid creation of the universe in plain language?<sup>15</sup>

The temptation to respond to such a question with speculation in the form of extrapolation from this order of providence into the order of creation—“the uniformitarian principle”—is almost irresistible for modern man. But it can be overcome with the help of a most prophetic statement in *Humani Generis*—wherein Pope Pius XII reveals the key to *fruitful* theological reflection on the creation of man. He writes:

The sacred disciplines always remain vigorous by a study of the sacred sources, while, on the other hand, speculation, which neglects the deeper investigation of the sacred deposit, becomes sterile.<sup>16</sup>

## **Part II**

### **The Sacred Sources and the Doctrines of Genesis**

IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT two of the most fruitful recent papal reflections on the creation of man have drawn genuine inspiration from the sacred

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<sup>15</sup> In 1906, when the Pope viewed the Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC) as an arm of the Magisterium, the Commission upheld the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. In his book *Sword of the Spirit*, Monsignor Steinmuller, who was a consultant of the PBC from 1947 to 1971, shows that these PBC decrees have never been abrogated by contrary rulings with an equal or greater degree of magisterial authority (cf. *The Sword of the Spirit: Which is the Word of God* (Fort Worth, TX: Stella Maris Books, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, DS, 2314.

sources: Scripture, Tradition, and the Fathers. These are the Servant of God Pope John Paul II's theology of the body and Pope Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas est*. But neither of these papal reflections fulfills Pope Pius XII's implicit request for a thorough review of the contents of the sacred sources with regard to creation. While it would be impossible in a brief essay to make a "thorough study" of the sacred sources on creation, even a brief dip into the sacred deposit will be enough to show the beauty of the traditional doctrine of creation and its incompatibility with theistic evolutionism or—to a lesser degree—with Protestant creationism. Our brief examination will focus on the riches contained in the Sacred Liturgy and in the Church's conciliar teaching on creation.

### **Creation and the Sacred Liturgy**

ACCORDING TO AN AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE, "a dogma can be proposed either by a solemn definition of pope or council, or by the Ordinary Magisterium, as in the case of the Athanasian Creed, to which **the church has manifested her solemn commitment by its long-standing liturgical and practical use and commendation**"<sup>17</sup> (emphasis added). In the light of this principle, the long standing usage and commendation of certain ideas in sacred art constitutes an authoritative defense of those doctrines. Indeed, according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1160), "Christian iconography expresses in images the same Gospel message that Scripture communicates by words. Image and word illuminate each other":

We declare that we preserve intact all the written and unwritten traditions of the Church which have been entrusted to us. One of

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<sup>17</sup> *On the Value of Theological Notes and the Criteria for Discerning Them* by Father Sixtus Cartechini S.J. (Rome, 1951), a work drafted for use by auditors of the Roman Congregations.

these traditions consists in the production of representational artwork, which accords with the history of the preaching of the Gospel. For it confirms that the incarnation of the Word of God was real and not imaginary, and to our benefit as well, for realities that illustrate each other undoubtedly reflect each other's meaning. [28] (Council of Nicea II 787)

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In a profound reflection on the relationship between art and the Liturgy, then-Cardinal Ratzinger pointed out that the Second Council of Nicea simply articulated an understanding that had been handed down from the synagogue.

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As a result of archaeological discoveries, we now know that the ancient synagogues were richly decorated with representations of scenes from the Bible. They were by no means regarded as mere images of past events, as a kind of pictorial history lesson, but as a narrative (*haggadah*), which, while calling something to mind, makes it present. The feasts are a participation in God's action in time, and the images themselves, as remembrance in visible form, are involved in the liturgical re-presentation.

Christian images, as we find them in the catacombs, simply take up and develop the canon of images already established by the synagogue, while giving it a new modality of presence . . . Still more than in the synagogue, the point of the images is not to tell a story about something in the past, but to incorporate the events of history into the sacrament. In past history Christ with His sacraments is on His way through the ages. We are taken into the events. **The events themselves transcend the passing of time and become**

**present in our midst through the sacramental action of the Church** (emphasis added).<sup>18</sup>

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With these words, Cardinal Ratzinger reminded the Church of the Nicene teaching that Sacred Art does not exist to decorate our churches but to make sacred realities present in them. Recalling the steadfast implementation of this conciliar teaching in the East, the Servant of God Pope John Paul II noted that: the East firmly insists on the spiritual qualities which must characterize the artist, to whom Simeon of Thessalonica, the great defender of Tradition, addresses this important exhortation: "Teach with words, write with letters, paint with colours, in conformity with Tradition; the painting is true, as is the writing of books; and the grace of God is present in them, because what is represented there is holy" (*Dialogue against Heresies*, 23: PG 155 113).<sup>19</sup>

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But do the sacred icons have anything to say about the creation of man and the universe?

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Indeed, the sacred icons make present the reality of the supernatural creation by God of all the different kinds of creatures in the beginning, as related by Moses in Genesis and confirmed by the Fathers and the Church Magisterium. The sacred icons also portray Moses as a prophet who not only received written records of the past from the Patriarchs who preceded him but who was shown the creation of man and universe and the fall by divine revelation. The icons which portray Moses in this way transmit the

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<sup>18</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger *Online Edition* - Vol. VII, No. 10: February 2002  
Art and Liturgy - The Question of Images <http://www.adoremus.org/0202artliturgy.html>

<sup>19</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Angelus*, November 17, 1996.

same tradition in images that St. John Chrysostom transmitted in words when he wrote that:

All the other prophets spoke either of what was to occur after a long time or of what was about to happen then; but he, the blessed (Moses), who lived many generations after (the creation of the world), was vouchsafed by the guidance of the right hand of the Most High to utter what had been done by the Lord before his own birth. It is for this reason that he begins to speak thus: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,” as if calling out to us all with a loud voice: it is not by the instruction of men that I say this; He Who called them (heaven and earth) out of non-being into being—it is He Who has roused my tongue to relate of them. And therefore I entreat you, let us pay heed to these words as if we heard not Moses but the very Lord of the universe Who speaks through the tongue of Moses, and let us take leave for good of our own opinions.<sup>20</sup>

It may be argued that God could not reveal to Moses the reality of evolution, because Moses would not have been able to understand this revelation. But this is patently absurd. Natural history museums all over the world are decorated with the anti-icons of evolutionary anti-science showing the imaginary progression from chimp-like primates to *homo sapiens*. Can anyone seriously argue that God could not have revealed the “evolutionary” history of man to Moses by means of such a series of images! Pagan philosophers like Lucretius had no difficulty in imagining a macro-evolutionary origin of living things without divine assistance, so Moses, who possessed the finest Egyptian education of his time, as well as

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000), pp. 94-95.



divine inspiration, could easily have understood such a “revelation”—if such a truth had existed to be revealed in the first place!

If, as Pope John Paul II reaffirmed, “the painting is true, as is the writing of books,” the sacred icons represent the reality of the supernatural creation of all things, up to and including the creation of Eve from Adam’s side, the original harmony of the first created world, the temptation, and the Fall. The sacred icons also represent the reality of the lives of the patriarchs, the global flood, and all the rest of the sacred history of Genesis 1-11. The fact that Catholics in the West find this line of argument quaint (at best) merely underscores the profundity of Pope Benedict XVI’s insight concerning the failure of the Latin Church to fully receive the teaching of the Seventh Ecumenical Council:

The Church in the West does not need to disown the specific path she has followed since about the thirteenth century. But she must achieve a real reception of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, Nicaea II, which affirmed the fundamental importance and theological status of the image in the Church.<sup>21</sup>

An obvious consequence of the Seventh Ecumenical Council’s theology of the icon is that authentic icons do not change. Indeed, the Eastern Christian icons of creation have not changed since the first millennium. The mosaics of the days of creation and of the creation of Adam and Eve in the 11<sup>th</sup> century Catholic Cathedral of Monreale in Sicily are virtually identical to the icons that represent those mysteries in the East today. Just as the historical and spiritual reality of the Nativity, the Baptism, the Transfiguration and the Resurrection of Our Lord is reflected in the

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<sup>21</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *op. cit.*

constant iconographical tradition of the Eastern Church, so the historical and spiritual reality of creation and the early history of mankind is faithfully reflected in the same tradition. For this very reason the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* directed all Catholic pastors to:

inform the unlettered and those who may be ignorant of the use of images, that they are intended to instruct in the history of the Old and New Testaments, and to revive from time to time their memory; that thus, moved by the contemplation of heavenly things, we may be the more ardently inflamed to adore and love God Himself.<sup>22</sup>

### **Lex Orandi, Lex credendi**

As noted above, the Church's long-standing tradition of sacred art representing the supernatural creation of all things and the subsequent sacred history of Genesis 1-11 constitutes an authoritative teaching of the Ordinary Magisterium, "to which **the church has manifested her solemn commitment by its long-standing liturgical and practical use and commendation.**" The same is true of the liturgical texts regarding creation and the early history of mankind, all of which uphold the literal historical truth of Genesis 1-11 as understood by all of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. The Council of Ephesus articulated the principle of "Lex orandi, lex credendi," when it affirmed the necessity of grace for salvation. Mindful that the Holy Spirit prays in and through the Church's liturgy, the Council Fathers recognized that the liturgical recognition of mankind's need for grace firmly established the truth of that doctrine:

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<sup>22</sup> *Roman Catechism.*

. . . let us be mindful also of the *sacramenta* of sacerdotal supplications which, having been handed down from the Apostles, are uniformly celebrated in the whole world and in every Catholic Church with result that the rule of prayer establishes the rule of faith.<sup>23</sup>

The liturgical prayers of the East and the West abound with references to the sacred history of Genesis. Books could (and should) be written establishing the literal historical truth of Genesis 1-11 from the liturgy. In a short article it will only be possible to cite a few examples from the Eastern and Latin liturgical traditions regarding the supernatural creation of all things in the beginning, the creation of Adam from the slime of the earth, the creation of Eve from Adam's side, and the completeness of the first created world at the Sabbath rest of the Lord.

Of particular interest are the prayers of an office composed by St. Bridget of Sweden—recently proclaimed a patron saint of Europe—and recited by the Brigittine sisters for more than 600 years. The liturgy is of particular interest in that it was conceived and approved after Lateran Council IV and shortly before the Council of Florence, councils which produced two of the most important dogmatic statements on creation. In the prayers for “Sunday of Week One” the sisters chant:

Since God is eternal and timeless,  
all things were eternally known to him,  
before their existence in time.  
Then, when he willed them to be,  
they came to be

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<sup>23</sup> Denzinger-Schönmetzer 246.

with that exact perfection which suited their purpose.<sup>24</sup>

Field Code Changed

As shown below in more detail, with these words, the sisters affirm the Lateran IV doctrine on divine creation—a creation by divine fiat, without process, instantly resulting in the essential perfection of each kind of creature, as conceived in the Mind of God before the beginning of time.

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Similarly, in the first reading for Monday the sisters recall that:

God's creation of the world and all it contains  
took place in the instant of his will's expression;  
and with that design and perfection foreseen by Him.<sup>25</sup>

The liturgical traditions of the East also establish a connection between the patristic doctrine of six, natural days of creation and the celebration of the Lord's Day on Sunday, instead of on Saturday. The writings of the Fathers express their conviction that it was appropriate to gather for solemn worship on Sunday not only because it was the day of the Resurrection, but also because it was “the first day of creation.” Indeed, the Gospel of John does not call Sunday “the Sabbath,” but “the first day of the week” (*John* 20:19). Writing in the second century, St. Justin Martyr described the Sunday observance of the early Church:

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<sup>24</sup> The modern English version of this office is read daily at Brigittine Syon Abbey in Devon. Latin and Swedish texts of the Brigittine Lessons are published in Den heliga Birgitta och den helige Petrus av Skanninge, *Officium parvum beate Marie Virginis*, ed. Tryggve Lunden (Lund, 1976), Acta Universitatis Upsalienensis: Studia Historico Ecclesiastica Upsaliensia 27-28; Latin Text, Sancta Birgitta, *Opera Minora II: Sermo Angelicus (Revelationes XI)*, ed. Sten Eklund (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1972); Middle English Text in the Myroure of oure Ladye, ed. John Henry Blunt (Early English Text Society, Extra Series, 29), Modern English Text in the *Word of the Angel*, trans. John Halborg (Peregrina Publishing)

<http://www.umilta.net/1syon.html>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

The day of the sun is the day on which we all gather in a common meeting, because **it is the first day, the day on which God, changing darkness and matter, created the world**; and it is the day on which Jesus Christ our savior rose from the dead. For he was crucified on the day before that of Kronos [Saturn]; and on the day after that of Kronos, which is the day of the Sun, He appeared to His Apostles and disciples, and taught them these things which we have also submitted to you for your consideration (bold added).<sup>26</sup>

According to St. Gregory the Theologian, fourth-century Patriarch of Constantinople:

Just as **the creation begins with Sunday** (and this is evident from the fact that the seventh day after it is Saturday, because it is the day of repose from works) so also the second creation begins again with the same day [i.e. the day of the Resurrection] (bold added).<sup>27</sup>

The strong link between the original creation and the “new creation in Christ” also stands revealed in the ancient Liturgy of Antioch. According to the 1994 *Catechism*, the Syriac Office of Antioch includes the following prayer:

When we ponder, O Christ, the marvels accomplished on this day, the Sunday of your holy Resurrection, we say: “**Blessed is Sunday, for on it began creation**” (emphasis added).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, quoted in W. A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1979), p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> St. Gregory Nazianzen, Homily 44, “On the New Week, Spring, and the Commemoration of the Martyr Mamas,” quoted in Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation, and Early Man* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000), p. 402.

<sup>28</sup> Fanquith, *The Syriac Office of Antioch*, vol. VI, first part of Summer, 193 B. (CCC, 1167).

In a similar way the ancient Liturgy of the Armenians links the new creation in Jesus Christ resurrected with the original creation of all things “out of nothing”:

**Thou didst form in lordly manner, O Mighty One, the complete natures of all beings and of all things out of nothing.** Through Thee all these thy creatures are created for the renewing of the resurrection, which will be in that time which is the last day of this life and the first day of the land of the living (bold added).<sup>29</sup>

The liturgies of East and West continually recall the supernatural creation of Adam from the slime of the earth and the creation of Eve from Adam’s side. The following prayers are taken from the Byzantine Liturgy:

**In the beginning** you made man in your image and likeness. You placed him in paradise and gave him power **over the whole world**. But he was deceived by the devil and transgressed your command by tasting of the forbidden fruit. You sentenced him to return to that dust from which he had been taken: wherefore we pray to You, O our God, to grant peace and rest to the soul of your departed servant.<sup>30</sup>

O Most Immaculate Mother of God, He who from the beginning formed Eve, our first Mother, from the rib of Adam, took flesh in your very womb .

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<sup>29</sup> *Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Church* (Paris: Imprimerie Araxes, 1954), p. 29.

<sup>30</sup> Seventh Tome, Troparia of John of Damascus, *Byzantine Daily Worship*, p. 988.

<sup>31</sup> Prayer Hymns for the Dead, First Ode, *Byzantine Daily Worship*, p. 997.

The Liturgy establishes beyond doubt that Adam and Eve were created not as insignificant specks of spiritualized matter in a hostile universe but as the king and queen of the entire created world—a world made complete and harmonious for our first parents from the beginning.

O Saviour, after You had made all things in perfection, You fashioned me a man and put me in the world a being made of grandeur and weakness . . .<sup>32</sup>

The liturgy establishes that the whole universe—from the tiniest creatures of the earth to the most distant galaxies—was created for man, to achieve its perfection through man. Thus, it proclaims that “The whole creation fell with Adam”<sup>33</sup> that Christ restores “happiness for the whole universe”<sup>34</sup> and that He “renew[s] the whole creation.”<sup>35</sup> It is a sad reflection of our devaluation of the liturgy that Catholics can now pray such prayers without noticing, much less believing, what we are saying!

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<sup>32</sup> Prayer Hymns for the Dead, First Ode, *Byzantine Daily Worship*, p. 996.

<sup>33</sup> *Byzantine Daily Worship* p. 349.

<sup>34</sup> *Byzantine Daily Worship* p. 441.

<sup>35</sup> *Byzantine Daily Worship* p. 484.