

## CARDINAL SCHÖNBORN'S CHANCE OR PURPOSE?

*Chance or Purpose? Creation, Evolution, and a Rational Faith*, Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, (English translation by Henry Taylor of *Ziel oder Zufall? Schöpfung und Evolution aus der Sicht vernünftigen Glaubens*), San Francisco (Ignatius Press), 2007

---

The Archbishop of Vienna, Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, sets out in *Chance or Purpose?* his position on evolution following the short article he wrote for the *New York Times* on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005. He develops in nine chapters what he had to say in a series of catechetical lectures in the Cathedral of St Stephen in Vienna in 2005-6. The book is attractively presented and, with each of its short chapters focussed on a topic demanding the reader's consideration, should prove a useful handbook for those struggling to reconcile true religion and science. It has an index of persons but lacks an index of subject matter.

One must commend the Cardinal for taking the fight into the atheists' camp. He is right to insist that the works of nature disclose finality and design and that it is irrational to deny it. Demonstrating these things conclusively, however, requires a firm grasp of sound philosophy. While he is in a better position than his opponents, his commitment to something of their subjectivism and materialism trammels his arguments. He borrows from St Thomas, but demonstrates a poor understanding of his principles (derived from Aristotle) in respect of matter and form, substance and accident, and potency and act, or of his doctrine of essence and existence. Inevitably, then, the Cardinal's endeavour to counter the atheist imperative has shortcomings.

\*

\*

"According to Cardinal Schönborn, before the nineteenth century it was 'widely believed' that each species had been separately created by God (cf. Gen 1: 12), but Charles Darwin, 'through an honest and intense intellectual struggle', freed himself from this view (p. 53). It is Schönborn's opinion that Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) was 'a stroke of genius' in itself, but that afterwards the model of evolution became for many a key to the interpretation of everything, so as to give the theory 'a strong general philosophic character' (p. 26)..."<sup>1</sup>

This synopsis of the Cardinal's views by Monsignor John F McCarthy of the *Roman Theological Forum* exposes two errors. The first is philosophical—he accepts Darwin's thesis. The second is theological—he depreciates the Church's teaching on the revelation contained in the early chapters of the Book of *Genesis*.

That each species of natural thing is separately created by God is not simply a matter of belief but of rational conclusion from facts, supported by Divine revelation. That modern thinkers are incapable, because immersed in materialism, of drawing that rational conclusion does not compromise its truth. Secondly, however "honest" or "intense" Darwin's "intellectual struggle", it was the same philosophical defects

---

<sup>1</sup> Monsignor John F McCarthy, "Reviewing Cardinal Schönborn's stand on Evolution by chance or by purpose", at <http://www.rtforum.org/lt/lt135.html>

that influenced him to deny that truth. Thirdly, it was not Darwin who formulated evolution as a philosophical world view, but Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). Darwin applied Spencer's thesis to the natural world. If it proved attractive to the general populace, the cause is to be found in the tendency to atheism inchoate in a burgeoning Protestantism—for atheism cannot flourish unless the doctrine of causality is suppressed. Fourthly, *Origin of Species* was no "stroke of genius" but simply a studied attempt to explain nature by excluding every cause but the material. As an intellectual exercise it may have been diverting; as an explanation of reality it was incompetent.

Darwin was correct when he asserted that development may occur *within* a species—so called "micro evolution". Indeed, in doing so he simply confirmed a truth known to any farmer or gardener; namely, that it is possible to develop a particular characteristic within living stock by selective breeding.<sup>2</sup> The same farmer or gardener knows, however, that there is a limit to the selections he can make. He has a framework, a set of boundaries, beyond which he cannot go. In asserting that one species could cross these boundaries and be transformed into another—so called "macro evolution"—Darwin contradicted the evidence available. In the place of facts grounding a scientific conclusion which was rational he substituted imagination grounding a theoretical conclusion which was irrational.

### Philosophical and Theological Problems

On page 165 of his book, the Cardinal sets out one of St Thomas's principles in this way: "Every activity is done for a purpose." This is a poor rendition (though the original German may be more accurate) of the Principle of Finality, *omne agens agit propter finem*<sup>3</sup>—"every agent acts for the sake of an end". The principle refers not to *activity*, but to agent. Nor is it *purpose* which is in question, with its connotation of uncertainty in something merely proposed, but *end*, a fixed determination.

The end, *finis*, that for the sake of which every operation is performed, is at the heart of St Thomas's doctrine of causality. The end is the pre-eminent cause of any effect. If there be no end, none of the other three causes—*efficient*, *formal* and *material*—can, or will, operate. The *formal* cause, that which makes the effect be what it is, is next in importance. For it *realises*—i.e., puts into the effect—the end, the order, intended by the agent. The other two causes, the *efficient* cause, the agent itself (which causes by making, or producing), and the *material* cause (the matter out of which the effect is produced), are both in a sense secondary. Two (of these four) causes are outside the effect: two of them, *form* and *matter*, remain in the effect. Dr Don Boland of Sydney's *Centre for Thomistic Studies* explains.

"[A]s Aristotle noted long ago the changing character of natural things or bodies can only be fully explained if we posit two principles; a principle or reason why things can be called the same... which is called 'substance'; and a reason why they are not the same... called 'accident'... Aristotle took [this] twofold principle of explanation

---

<sup>2</sup> The Austrian Augustinian priest, Gregor Mendel (1822-1884), had anticipated Darwin; indeed, he had gone further with his discovery of the genetic laws that apply, but his findings were lost to posterity until the twentieth century.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 44, Resp. It may be found in numerous other places.

into the very substance of material things, and called them primary matter and substantial form. Form, then, [is] the fundamentally unchanging reason or determining principle in bodies; matter the determinable principle... With accidental change, what changes are the accidental forms... With substantial change, the [form of the] substance is changed... and what remains unchanged is primary matter. Hence matter... [itself] not subject to change... is the principle of change, the reason why things can change forms. Change itself is explained in terms of a new form; change is a transformation, from one form in matter to another."<sup>4</sup>

The ordination of each species of living thing in creation unto an end is implicit in another quotation the Cardinal cites from St Thomas's *Disputed Questions about Truth* (139), *res [naturalis] inter duos intellectus constituta*, "the natural thing [is] constituted between two intellects"<sup>5</sup> Each species bears the mark of the intellect of its author—design—and that mark is capable of recognition by the created intellect, man. One intellect is the natural thing's originator; the other its recognisor or perceiver.

On page 81, the Cardinal says this:

"There is no doubt that our world is a world of becoming, in which the unfolding of the cosmos, and evolution, have made human life possible on our planet."

This statement expresses not a metaphysical but a physical, a materialist, view of reality, a view that confuses the accidental with the substantial. There is no such reality as "becoming": there are only things that become. An illustration will assist. *Sir Isaac Newton* is (does be) an astronomer. A boy, *Christopher*, is not an astronomer, but he can become one. The boy's dog, *Spot*, is not an astronomer, and cannot become one. Thus, there is something real in the boy that is not in his dog. This is not something imaginary, or something merely of the mind. St Thomas calls this reality *potency*, and its fulfilment, *act*. The boy *Christopher* is an astronomer *in potency*: *Sir Isaac Newton* is an astronomer *in act*. Thus, "becoming" can only be said about something in *potency* to be, something which is on the way to fulfillment of that potency; and which will be fulfilled *in act*. Every *potency* is, thus, ordered to—is determined by—some *act*. Every being in potency arrives, not at any conjectural destination, but at a fixed and determined end—*finis*. And that end is determined for it by the agent that produced it: *omne agens agit propter finem*.

The cosmos did not "unfold", blindly as it were, but developed in accordance with the Divine ordination of distinction and adornment, "each succeeding work add[ing] to the world a fresh state of perfection", as St Thomas says.<sup>6</sup> Nor did "evolution" occur, if by that term it is meant that one species of natural thing developed from another as a result of a series of innate forms. St Thomas shows why this is impossible. We will set out his reasons shortly. Further only insofar as it was necessary for matter to be disposed suitably to support life, can it be said that developments in the cosmos "have made human life possible".<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere the

---

<sup>4</sup> Dr D G Boland, "The End of Evolution", Centre for Thomistic Studies, Sydney, 2008. Cf. <http://www.cts.org.au/0808/THE-END-OF-EVOLUTION%20.pdf> Emphasis in original.

<sup>5</sup> Though he translates it poorly, at least in the English rendition.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 74 a. 2

<sup>7</sup> By 'matter' here, we mean, in metaphysical terms 'secondary matter'. That is, primary matter combined with substantial form to produce the elements necessary to life, such as, oxygen, hydrogen,

Cardinal quotes scientists Arnold Benz and Marco Bersanelli in support of the proposition that man is directly related to the development of the stars (117). But this respects only man's *material* aspect, not his infinitely more important *formal* aspect.

It does not compensate for his lack of precision in thought that the Cardinal recognises that life requires the creative act of God (82), or has recourse to the *Principle of Reason of Be*<sup>8</sup>, which he paraphrases in the rhetorical question "Can lower things bring forth, of their own power, higher and more complex things?" (81) Neither principle requires that Almighty God used "evolution" to accomplish His creative work.

The philosophical consideration of natural things operates at a different level to that at which science operates. Philosophy is not primarily concerned with things as they are physical, or material—the particularity of phenomena; observable characteristics; atomic structure—it is concerned with them as they are species of being. There is no reason why science should not acknowledge that true philosophy studies reality from this higher perspective and give it precedence accordingly<sup>9</sup>, but in the rush to embrace atheism science has long since committed itself to materialism, the philosophy of the gutter. Because the scientist cannot think outside the materialist square he cannot see that the reality of any material thing owes almost nothing to its matter. He cannot see that what determines the species of some plant or animal is like the exemplary form of the architect—something capable of independent existence as the form of the building exists in the architect's mind, in his plans and specifications—something *like* that work of human art, but infinitely more subtle.

"[T]he modern scientific mind... does not penetrate beyond the accidental or phenomenal... This has important consequences when we come to talk about the species of things. For the scientist... does not have a concept of species in any substantial sense. His notion of species has to be taken from the accidental order [where] [t]hings... are subject to incessant change, though some accidental features have a certain stability... e.g., their shape and size. These and other constants discovered are then used to identify a 'species' and to denote a difference of 'species' for scientific purposes. But... these constants and variables are still within the accidental order. They... are only [indicators] of the true species of things within the order of substance..."<sup>10</sup>

The Cardinal has the advantage of science in a certain grasp of the concepts of metaphysics. But he is still committed to the materialist line. He sees some things clearly, but others he does not see.

---

carbon, calcium, sodium, chlorine and aluminium etc., and the molecules formed from their combination of which the bodies of living things are constituted.

<sup>8</sup> The principle is: *Nothing is without a reason of be.*

<sup>9</sup> The title *Doctor of Philosophy* in any scientific discipline used to be an indicator that the one on whom it was conferred was able to reconcile his discipline with the queen of the sciences. That is no longer the case.

<sup>10</sup> D G Boland, "The End of Evolution", op. cit.

- He dismisses the credulity of the Protestant Fundamentalist view that creation occurred only 6,000 years or so ago (37-8), but is himself credulous of the Darwinian hypothesis.
- He sees that Descartes was the point of departure from sane philosophy but, instead of seeing Darwinism as it is, a logical consequence of Cartesianism, he thinks Darwin somehow restores man to a right understanding of nature (66).
- He praises the Augustinian monk, Gregor Mendel, for his work in discovering, through rigorous observation, the laws of genetics (23), but declines to condemn Darwin for ignoring rigorous observation in urging his evolutionary hypothesis (63).
- He asserts that the existence of the human soul cannot be demonstrated (122), though it can<sup>11</sup>, and implies that the truth of evolutionary theory can be demonstrated (168), though it cannot<sup>12</sup>.
- He sees that evolution is an ideology (28), a belief system (77), but he does not explore the obvious implications—that belief in God is grounded in reality; while belief in evolution is grounded in nothing but an idea; utterly *subjective*.
- He concedes that God created each thing according to its kind (53), but asserts that “all things are in a process of becoming” (98)<sup>13</sup>.
- He sees the intimate involvement of God in creation and the maintenance of the world in existence (46) yet he insists that “the only way science can proceed is to assume that there is no divine intervention” (43).

On pages 55 and 56 the Cardinal says this:

“It is not the aim of [the first chapter of Genesis] to give us information as to how this world originated... The Bible does not offer any theory about the origin of the world and the development of the species...”

He is wrong, ignorant apparently of the force of the ruling of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1909 *against* the suggestion that the first three chapters of Genesis do not contain the narrative of things which actually happened, a narrative corresponding to objective reality and historical truth. This was one of eight rulings issued that day. The Pontifical Biblical Commission was established as an organ of the Church’s Magisterium by Pope Leo XIII in 1902. Pope St Pius X, in his *Motu Proprio Praestantia Scripturae* of 1907, upheld the binding force of its decrees:

“[W]e find it necessary to declare and to expressly prescribe, and by this our act we do expressly declare and decree, that all are bound in conscience to submit to the decisions of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, both to those given up to now and those which shall be given hereafter, in the same way as to the decrees of the Sacred Congregations which pertain to doctrine and are approved by the Pontiff; and that all who impugn such decisions as these by word or in writing cannot avoid the charge of disobedience, or on this account be free of grave sin.” (DS 3503)

---

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it is self evident. What he means is that it is not directly susceptible of experimental proof.

<sup>12</sup> “For anyone who wants a scientific picture of the world... the story of the world as recounted in accordance with an evolutionary model is the real, true story.”

<sup>13</sup> This view confuses two realities. The first is the process whereby a natural thing fulfills its potency (as when the boy becomes a man). The second is the process of corruption which is the inevitable concomitant of composition from matter (as the man suffers debility through sickness or growing old, and dies).

On 16<sup>th</sup> January 1948 the same Commission addressed a letter to Cardinal Suhard, Archbishop of Paris, *inter alia* confirming the 1909 rulings. The letter, and therefore also the 1909 rulings, were specifically endorsed by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical *Humani Generis* in 1950.

“The letter... clearly points out that the first eleven chapters of Genesis, although properly speaking, not in conformity with the historical methods used by the best Greek and Latin writers or by competent authors of our time, do nevertheless pertain to the genus of history in a true sense... [T]he same chapters, in simple and figurative language adapted to the mentality of a people of little culture, both state the principal truths upon which the attainment of our eternal salvation depends, and give a popular description of the origin of the human race and the Chosen People.”<sup>14</sup>

*Genesis* is not just a fairy story, a fable, as Modernist heretics would have us believe. It is God’s revelation of the truth of something unknown to us. It tells us how the world originated and how the species of living things came to be. Any scientific or philosophic theory which contradicts this narrative is *eo ipso* in error.

Monsignor McCarthy comments on a problem raised by the Cardinal’s views, the postulated production, somehow, of successive species out of matter.

“This... would imply that the power to transform a species into a different and higher species was packaged into the laws of nature from the beginning by the Creator... But it does not seem to me to be at all likely. How could the almost totally formless mass of primal matter have had packaged in it all of the forms that exist in the world today? How can such a package even be visualised?... From within the magnificent synthesis of St Thomas Aquinas, can one say that creatures with lower forms may be given the potency to become creatures with higher forms?...”

The answer to this rhetorical question is ‘No!’<sup>15</sup> Each living creature is comprised of primary matter and substantial form. Its substantial form (its soul) is an instance of an essence, fixed and determinate, which makes it both to live and to be what it is. The alleged “successive species” could not be in the primary matter from which the natural thing is constituted, for primary matter is of itself utterly formless. They could only be in it as a second (or third, or fourth...) substantial form—for the assertion of evolutionists is that evolution effects a *substantial* change in the thing. But St Thomas teaches that it is impossible for more than one substantial form to be in one body. He gives a number of reasons where he deals with the suggestion that man may have more than one soul, including the following:

“[A]n animal would not be absolutely one in which there were several souls. For nothing is absolutely one except by the one form by which a thing has existence: because a thing has from the same source both its existence and its unity... If, therefore, man were living by one form—the vegetative soul, and animal by another form—the sensitive soul, and man by another form—the intellectual soul, it would follow that man is not absolutely one. Thus Aristotle... against those who hold that there are several souls in the body... asks, *what contains them?*—that is, what makes them be one? It cannot be said that they are united by the one body; because it is the soul that contains the body, rather than the reverse.”<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> DS 3898

<sup>15</sup> I repeat here *mutatis mutandis* what I have said in another paper, “Shaking the Darwinian Foundations”, cf. [http://www.superflumina.org/shaking\\_darwin.html](http://www.superflumina.org/shaking_darwin.html)

<sup>16</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 76, a. 3

It is the creature's form that holds together, and organises, the matter. The proof is obvious: take the soul away and the material structure resolves into its elements.

The Cardinal endeavours to find support for Darwin's thesis in the powers God gives his creatures.

"[A]re these the only alternatives: either a Creator or natural causes?... God addresses the earth, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation', and so it 'brought forth vegetation' (Gen. I: 11-12). God commands the waters, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures' (I: 20), and finally God tells the earth to 'bring forth living creatures' (I: 24). Does that not mean that God can also work through the earth? All this is pointing toward something that is an essential part of the Christian understanding of creation. The Creator endows the creatures not only with existence, but also with effective activity. He grants them being 'without presuppositions', so to speak, in creating them out of nothing. Yet his creatures become fellow creators, through his giving them the laws, the powers, and the capacities to be active. We men can be his fellow creators..." (65)

This confuses secondary causes with the primary cause. By definition, creatures can never be creators. Man can only ever be a creator *secundum quid*—in a qualified sense—and that in virtue of his possession of intellect<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, the Cardinal contradicts something he has said earlier:

"[A]ll [human] making... is the moving about and changing of what is already there... it is always just a re-shaping of what already exists. God's act of creation... does not shape something that already exists. (45)

As Monsignor McCarthy notes, the Pontifical Biblical Commission, in another of its rulings of 30<sup>th</sup> June 1909, allowed that the Hebrew word for day (*Yom*) in the text of Genesis "may be taken either in its strict sense as the natural day, or in a less strict sense as signifying a certain space of time." Thus, Holy Church permits an interpretation of sacred scripture which accords generally with the findings of modern science on the age of the earth and the universe.

It is part of the evolutionist thesis that life is a continuum, that living things differ only in degree—quantatively, as it were—rather than in kind. "Creation evolutionists" rightly see some difficulty with this, at least in respect of the differences between human life and that of the brute animal. But, as we will see, St Thomas's teaching on the issue is fatal to the whole of the evolutionist thesis.

It will assist if we illustrate the principle he applies with an example. Consider the farmer who wishes to water the stock he has in a paddock via a trough. He has a number of options: he can siphon the water through a pipe from the nearby dam; he can transport the water with a water tanker attached to his tractor; or, he can use the services of his four children and their buckets, which will bring the additional benefit of reinforcing their self esteem as helpers on the farm. He chooses the third option, and the children proceed to carry the water to the trough. In this operation there are three factors: 1) his aim of watering his stock—the *end*; 2) the use of the services of his children and their buckets—the *form* or manner of operation he adopts; and, 3) the

---

<sup>17</sup> As Bach, Mozart and Beethoven were the 'creators' of their splendid musical works.

actual transmission of the water to the trough by the children—the *execution* of the work. These three factors, *end*, *form* and *execution*, are common to every operation.

Now living things carry out operations by moving themselves: they are *automotive*. The modes of living things correspond to these three factors. The first, vegetative life, St Thomas teaches, is automotive only at the level of *execution*. The *end* and the *form* of its operations are each determined for it by its author, God. The second, sensitive or animal life, is automotive not only at the level of *execution*, but also of *form*. The animal moves itself to the *execution* of its operations through a certain *form*, sensed knowledge of what is fitting to keep itself, and its species, alive. The *end* of these operations, preserving its own life and that of its species, is determined for it by its author, God. The third form of life, human life, is automotive at all three levels, *execution*, *form* and *end*. For a man has the powers of the brute animal, but in addition the power to determine the *end* of his operations.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the three modes of life are not just quantitatively different from each other, but *specifically* different.

The materialist approaches creation naïvely. He assumes its existence, just as he denies its creation, never troubling himself with causality. The “creation evolutionist” shares somewhat in this naivety. He ignores the fact that at every moment the *essence* no less than the *existence* of every thing in the universe is utterly dependent on God. Every *essence*, every species of plant and animal, is a design—God’s design. Every instance of such a species is a design executed—by God. None of them, not one, has happened accidentally or fortuitously or has “evolved” somehow from another.

### **Derivative errors**

The Cardinal seeks to distinguish “evolutionism”, the ideology that follows on Darwin’s thesis, from evolution (150). Yet the one is the inevitable corollary of the other. Anyone who has tried to persuade a fellow Catholic trained in science’s evolutionary mindset of the folly of its thinking will understand what we mean. Because he is infected with the ideology of “evolutionism” such a Catholic has real problems accepting the Divinely revealed narrative of creation. With respect, the Cardinal demonstrates his own commitment to this ideology with his dismissal of what God has revealed of the creation of the world in *Genesis*.

The Cardinal makes concessions to science which are unnecessary, such as his adoption of the view of Copernicus: “The earth is not the centre of the universe” (124). That proposition may be true scientifically, and that on the supposition that science’s identification of the position of the planet in the universe is correct.<sup>19</sup> Taken either philosophically or theologically, however, it is false because on earth life, and most importantly, intellectual life, is found. Those who reject this assertion on the basis that we do not know that living things do not exist elsewhere in the universe give more weight to speculation than to reason. They do so, moreover, because of a

---

<sup>18</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 18, a. 3

<sup>19</sup> But it must be doubtful whether any scientist would be prepared to assert it is certainly true, since no scientist knows the extent or ambit of the universe.



prejudgement in favour of atheism, a prejudice which ignores all causality save material causality and pretends that the intricate order in earth and universe are the result of chance and accident. Order and finality are the marks of intellect. Of a more universal effect, as St Thomas says, the cause is more universal. But nothing is more universal than the earth and the universe. Therefore, the order and finality found in them demand an intellectual cause which is most universal.

Materialism denies that man's intellect is anything more than a very refined material organ. This is nonsense. The intellect has the power to abstract from singular material things their formal, unifying, principles. To know is to have the forms of other things in oneself formally, not materially.<sup>20</sup> The intellect deals with immaterial things like love, justice, order, truth. It can do none of these things unless it is itself immaterial, for there is an essential proportion between powers, the acts of those powers, and their ends. Man is, thus, a blend of material with the immaterial. Though his body will perish, the immaterial part of him, his soul, cannot. It follows that man is not made simply to live out his allotted span of days on the earth.

These arguments are philosophical but they ground the theological, the Catholic Church's teaching of what God has revealed, namely, that He—

- is the creator of all living and non living things;
- has created man, an intellectual being—male and female—as the highest and most noble of material beings, in His own image and likeness;
- has created the earth to house mankind for a limited period;
- has communicated with man and provided him with certain knowledge about his existence and the reason for it.

Man, the intellectual being, is the reason for God's creation of the earth and the universe.<sup>21</sup>

The reader will see that it is possible from metaphysics and theology to mount a suasive, if not conclusive, argument—deduced from principle; not induced from facts—that there is no living creature anywhere in the universe but on earth.

The Cardinal's conviction about Darwin's thesis demonstrates the characteristic ambivalence of the believer in evolution. He acknowledges Darwin's worries over the lack of evidence of "intermediate links" (63). He quotes Karl Popper: "Neither Darwin, nor any Darwinian, has so far given an actual causal explanation for the adaptive evolution of any single organism or any single organ. (63)<sup>22</sup> Yet he does not let these concerns weigh against the populist view.

---

<sup>20</sup> "Intelligent beings are distinguished from non-intelligent beings in this that the latter possess only their own form, whereas the intelligent being is naturally adapted to have also the form of some other thing; for the idea of the thing known is in the knower." Cf. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 14, a. 1

<sup>21</sup> In fairness to the Cardinal, though he does not lay out this reasoning, he endorses the Church's teaching that the world was created for the sake of man (110 et seq).

<sup>22</sup> He might have quoted any number of other sources critical, even at the scientific level, of Darwin's thesis, notably, the studied work of New Zealand molecular biologist, Dr Michael Denton, *Evolution, a Theory in Crisis*.

“We have to realise clearly that everywhere today evolution is recounted as the valid history... [I]t is dominant in school books, the media, and public debate as well as in advertisements, caricatures, and so on. And it is presented as claiming to tell us how things really happened. What is left to the biblical story is at best the narrow freedom of saying something about the meaning of human life. For anyone who wants a scientific picture of the world then the story of the world as recounted in accordance with an evolutionary model is the real, true story.” (168)

This hardly shows rigour of thought.

The Cardinal’s treatment of the problem of evil is wanting. He gives only half the answer. Though he insists that good always outweighs evil, he does not spell out the truth that evil is the lack of a *due* good. He quotes St Augustine’s doubts about evil in *The Confessions*—the biography of his conversion from disbelief—but neglects to cite his solution of them in the *Enchiridion*, a text book.

“God, since He is supremely good, in no wise would allow something of evil to be in His works were He not good and omnipotent even up to this point, as to bring forth good even from evil.”<sup>23</sup>

There is, moreover, an agnosticism in his approach. He says:

“Arguments ultimately cannot convince anyone that the ills of the world are not just a pointless absurdity... Nonetheless, we have to develop arguments... Reason wants to understand why evil exists in the world...” (94-5)

Given this premise, his referral of the reader to the *Catholicism of the Catholic Church* is hardly likely to persuade him that Catholicism has a rational answer to the problem. St Thomas condemns the raising of a doubt like this without resolving it as like leaving the lid off a sewer<sup>24</sup>. It is a pitfall for the hearer.

As Monsignor McCarthy notes in his review, the Cardinals’ opinions evidence a degree of subjectivism. On page 56 of the book he says:

“[N]atural science’s way of looking at the origin of species is not the only approach to reality... there are various approaches to reality—philosophical, artistic, religious and scientific. Each one is no less real than another, for they are approaches to the same reality.”

On page 73:

“[I]s [the] approach of poetry less real than the approach of natural science?... Does the poetic/religious approach open up a different sphere of reality, which has nothing to do with the one that natural science is interested in?”

And on page 86:

“Would it not be a good thing to look at the theory of evolution in the light of the creative power of someone like Mozart...?”

These views are reminiscent of Avery Dulles’ “models” of reality, categories which exist only in the mind of Avery Dulles. As Monsignor McCarthy rightly says, there are not a number of different realities: reality is one. So also truth, the identity between what is asserted about reality and reality itself, is one. Philosophy, art,

---

<sup>23</sup> *Enchiridion* Bk. xi; cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 79, a. 4

<sup>24</sup> In a sermon given in July 1270 at the University of Paris. Cited by Ceslaus Spice O.P in his, *St Paul and Christian Living*, Dublin (Gill & Son Ltd), 1964, ch.1. In fact he says ‘cistern’; but ‘sewer’ better illustrates his thought.

religion, science, all deal with aspects of this one reality. This is implied in a quote from the first Vatican Council which the Cardinal cites earlier in his text (at p. 24):

“God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth.”<sup>25</sup>

Notwithstanding his subjectivism, the reader is likely to be surprised to find the Cardinal lauding the thought and influence of that theologian manqué, *de facto* heretic and fraud, Fr Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Monsignor McCarthy does well to reiterate de Chardin’s shortcomings in his review. Regrettably, in his enthusiasm for the task he neglects to provide a concluded assessment of the Cardinal’s book.

## Conclusion

As the wise man says in *Ecclesiastes*, “there is nothing new under the sun”. The strivings of the modern atheist are simply an endeavour to systematise, in a pretence at rationality, the disbelief that has ever dogged man’s dealings with his creator. The Cardinal does well to quote this passage from the Book of *Wisdom* (19):

“Men... ignorant of God were foolish by nature... unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists... not recognising the craftsman while paying heed to his works.”<sup>26</sup>

There is no room for ideology in the teaching of the Catholic Church, or in her philosophy. The view that the forms of natural things must somehow bear within them the seeds of change—a sort of God-directed evolution—panders to the spirit of the age. It is fashionable. It is unnecessary. Almighty God created all things at once as He revealed in the first line of *Genesis*.<sup>27</sup> Thereafter, He elaborated His creation over time (*Gen. I: 3-31*), as St Thomas explains:

“God created all things together so far as regards their substance in some measure formless. But He did not create all things together so far as regards that formation of things which lies in distinction and adornment.” (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 74, a.2, ad 2).

“On the day God created heaven and earth, he created also every plant of the field, not indeed in act, but before it sprang up in the earth, that is, in potency.” (a. 2, ad 1)

“All things were not distinguished and adorned together, not from a want of power on God’s part, as requiring time in which to work, but that due order might be observed in the instituting of the world. Hence it was fitting that different days should be assigned to the different states of the world, as each succeeding work added to the world a fresh state of perfection.” (a. 2, ad 4)

Almighty God brought the various elements in His creation from potency to act as and when He willed. Modern science shows when He appears to have done so in respect of a great number of the immense variety of species of living things. Yet, even using their best endeavours there is much the scientists cannot tell us. Of one

---

<sup>25</sup> *Dei filius*, ch. 4; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 159

<sup>26</sup> *Wisdom* 13: 1

<sup>27</sup> In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council issued a Profession of Faith, *Firmiter*, some parts of which bear on Genesis and creation: “Firmly we believe and simply we confess that the one true God ... by His own almighty power at once (*simul*) from the beginning of time made each creature from nothing, the spiritual and the corporal, namely, the angelic and the earthly, and then man” (DS 800).

thing, however, we can be certain: the form of every creature that has ever existed on the face of the earth emanates from, and endures in, the mind of God who gave them, *who gives them*<sup>28</sup>, in addition both existence and life.

Despite the shortcomings referred to, *Chance or Purpose?* is a useful book. The Cardinal has real insights into the dilemmas confronting those faced with a choice between Darwinism and belief in God. But because he does not abandon the atheists' philosophical position he does not succeed in solving them. Catholics should treat the book and its conclusions with circumspection. No one should think that it represents the mind of the Catholic Church.

Michael Baker

9<sup>th</sup> October 2008

*St Denis and his companions—Fiftieth anniversary of the death of Pius XII*

---

<sup>28</sup> Those whose species have not been extinguished.