

What does the catechism of the Roman Catholic Church say about creation?

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Over the past one or two centuries many within the Roman Catholic Church have departed from not only the teaching of their own church on creation but also the clear teaching of the Bible. This, despite the fact that some Roman Catholics have made notable contributions to creationism and that the Roman Catholic Church had adhered to a literal creation before that. This paper reviews the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church; namely, the Catechism of the Catholic Church as to what it has to say about biblical creation. Interestingly enough, the catechism is generally much in line with a literal-historical interpretation of Genesis 1–11. For example, individuals such as Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, and Noah are mentioned as well as historical events, such as the Fall into Sin, the Flood and the Tower of Babel. Compromising Roman Catholics are lovingly urged to consider these findings and to return to a biblical understanding of creation and to reject the teaching of evolution which has damaged biblical authority in the church to a large extent.

Despite several examples to the contrary,¹ such as the Kolbe Center for the Study of Creation,² many in the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) have, to a large part, embraced and accepted evolutionary theory, due especially to the influence of the Jesuit order. According to a 2013 Pew Research poll,³ more than 2.5 times as many white Roman Catholics believe that humans have evolved over time, as opposed to a minority that believes that humans have existed in their present form since the beginning. In contrast, about 2.5 times as many white evangelical Protestants believe that humans have stayed the same, as opposed to having evolved over time.

For example, Pope Francis states that when reading the Genesis account of creation, it must be kept in mind that God is not like a magician, who can make everything with a wave of His ‘magic wand’.⁴ The Jesuit order has had a long history of accepting, embracing, and cultivating evolutionary theory; for example, in the person of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin,⁵ whose ideas even influenced the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*.⁶ Yet others, such as Guy Consolmagno, the Vatican’s Jesuit astronomer, aggressively denounce creationism as a ‘destructive myth’ and a ‘kind of paganism’⁷

Whereas some within the RCC espouse a literal six-day creation, many others compromise in this area. Therefore, the goal of this paper is to analyze the official teaching of their church on the issue of creation, found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC).⁸ We shall see that the catechism (the official teaching of their own church) strongly supports a literal six-day creation, and we therefore encourage more and more Roman Catholics to take up this position, which is clearly taught in Scripture.

Historical figures and events described in the CCC

In 52 paragraphs (pars.), the CCC mentions several historical figures and events from Genesis 1–11, which only makes sense if Genesis 1–11 is to be taken literally. Table 1 summarizes the number of times the names of these figures occurs in the Old Testament (outside of Genesis 1–11), the New Testament, and the CCC. For example, par. 359 of the CCC makes it quite clear that just as Christ was a real person, so also was Adam, and that Jesus Christ as the Creator brought Adam into existence as the first member of the human race:

“359: ‘In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear.’ St. Paul tells us that *the human race takes its origin from two men: Adam and Christ ... the first man, Adam, he says, became a living soul, the last Adam a life-giving spirit. The first Adam was made by the last Adam, from whom he also received his soul, to give him life ... the second Adam stamped his image on the first Adam when he created him. That is why he took on himself the role and the name of the first Adam, in order that he might not lose what he had made in his own image. The first Adam, the last Adam: the first had a beginning, the last knows no end. The last Adam is indeed the first; as he himself says: ‘I am the first and the last’ [emphasis added].*”

In this, the CCC is referring to the Bible (which is the sole highest authority), namely 1 Cor. 15:45: “And so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.”

Par. 504 of the CCC further echoes this sentiment:

Table 1. Biblical names and the number of times they occur in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the CCC

	Old Testament (outside of Gen. 1–11)	New Testament	CCC
Adam	8	7	14
Eve	0	2	8
“our first parents”	–	–	5
Cain	1	3	2
Abel	4	4	2
Noah	8	5	1

“Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary’s womb because *he is the New Adam*, who inaugurates the new creation: ‘*The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven*’ [emphasis added].”

This paragraph of the CCC refers to 1 Cor. 15:47 and back to the creation of Adam from the dust of the earth as a historical event. Pars. 505 and 539 of the CCC talk also about Jesus being the last Adam. In addition, par. 538 draws a parallel between Adam and Christ in that just as Adam and the nation of Israel were tempted, so was Jesus Christ also tempted three times (Luke 4:13), again underlining the historicity of Adam’s personhood.

Besides the creation of man, the CCC speaks about original righteousness in the Garden of Eden, the Fall into sin, Noah’s Flood, and the Tower of Babel, which are all important events in salvation history. These events are interlinked with each other (a chain of events which lead up to the coming of Christ), and if one is historical, then all the other events must be historical. If these events did not occur during salvation history, then there is no basis for the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ. For example, pars. 56–58 describe Noah’s Flood and the covenant that God made with him as well as the dispersal of mankind over the face of the earth after Babel:

“56: After the unity of the human race was shattered by sin God at once sought to save humanity part by part. *The covenant with Noah after the flood* gives expression to the principle of the divine economy toward the ‘nations’, in other words, towards *men grouped ‘in their lands, each with (its) own language, by their families, in their nations*’ [emphasis added].”

57: “This state of division into many nations, each entrusted by divine providence to the guardianship of angels, is at once cosmic, social and religious. It is intended to limit the pride of fallen humanity united only in its perverse ambition *to forge its own unity as at Babel*. But, because of sin, both polytheism and

the idolatry of the nation and of its rulers constantly threaten this provisional economy with the perversion of paganism [emphasis added].”

“58: *The covenant with Noah remains in force during the times of the Gentiles, until the universal proclamation of the Gospel. The Bible venerates several great figures among the Gentiles: Abel the just, the king-priest Melchisedek—a figure of Christ—and the upright ‘Noah, Daniel, and Job’.* Scripture thus expresses the heights of sanctity that can be reached by those who live according to the covenant of Noah, waiting for Christ to ‘gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad’ [emphasis added].”

In this last paragraph, Noah is mentioned together with other well-known historical figures such as Melchisedek, Daniel, and Job. Here Abel, the son of Adam is also mentioned by name. The murder of Abel by Cain is also referred to in pars. 401 and 1736 of the CCC, besides a reference to the garden of Eden:

“Thus the Lord asked Eve after the sin in the garden: ‘What is this that you have done?’ He asked Cain the same question. The prophet Nathan questioned David in the same way after he committed adultery with the wife of Uriah and had him murdered [emphasis added].”

Taking all of this evidence into consideration, we can robustly state that the CCC views Genesis 1–11 in a literal context with real-life human ‘actors’ in the events which take place in these chapters of the Bible.

The CCC and Mary

The CCC makes several references to Mary as being the ‘new Eve’ (pars. 2618 and 2853), just as Jesus was the last Adam. Par. 494 even goes so far as to claim that “Comparing her with Eve, they call Mary ‘the Mother of the living’ and frequently claim: ‘Death through Eve, life through Mary’.” But according to the Bible, Jesus Christ is truly the last Adam: “For if by one man’s [Adam’s] offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17). It is only a fallible tradition that Mary is equated to be the ‘New Eve’; it is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible. It does make the point, though, that the CCC views Eve as a literal person.

To compare Mary to Eve in this vein is also superficial: Adam and Eve were our first parents, and each other’s spouse, and both fell into sin. In contrast, Mary is the mother of Jesus Christ. Eve gave birth to the human race, save Adam, but Roman Catholics hold that Mary was a perpetual virgin (par. 499). Yet, however much of an example of faith that she was, she also was a sinner in need of grace. Pope

Innocent III and Cardinal Cajetan from the Reformation era opposed the teaching of the immaculate conception (of Mary), which was first introduced only in the 15th century (it also contradicts even par. 402 of the CCC, which states that one man's [Christ's] act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men). Regarding the supposed 'immaculate conception' of Mary, in Luke 1:47, we read Mary's words: "And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior", meaning that just like everyone else, Mary was a sinner, in need of being saved. 2 Cor. 5:21 also states that "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God", speaking about Jesus Christ. Mary is not mentioned to be without sin in this manner.

The Fall into sin

Central to the Christian Gospel message is the Fall into sin from a state of original righteousness in the Garden of Eden (figure 1). Pars. 374–412 of the CCC cover these facts. For example, the Garden of Eden is mentioned as a historical-geographical place, where the first man was put to till and keep it, and where work was not yet a burden (par. 378), referring back to Genesis 2:15. Man was created good (par. 374), and Adam and Eve, our first parents, mentioned by name, were created in an original state of holiness and truth (par. 375) and until they sinned they did not have to suffer or die (par. 376). Par. 379 describes how original righteousness was lost by the sin of our first parents. If this is so, then this excludes any kind of evolutionary development, which presupposes suffering, pain, death, and extinction. Pars. 385, 388, and 389 summarize this well:

"385: *God is infinitely good and all his works are good. Yet no one can escape the experience of suffering or the evils in nature which seem to be linked to the limitations proper to creatures: and above all to the question of moral evil [emphasis added].*"

This paragraph refers back to Genesis 1:31, which states that God saw that all He had made was very good:

"388: *With the progress of Revelation, the reality of sin is also illuminated. Although to some extent the People of God in the Old Testament had tried to understand the pathos of the human condition in the light of the history of the fall narrated in Genesis, they could not grasp this story's ultimate meaning, which is revealed only in the light of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We must know Christ as the source of grace in order to know Adam as the source of sin. The Spirit-Paraclete, sent by the risen Christ, came to 'convict the world concerning sin', by revealing him who is its Redeemer [emphasis added].*"

"389: *The doctrine of original sin is, so to speak, the 'reverse side' of the Good News that Jesus is the*



Figure 1. The catechism of the Roman Catholic Church mentions Adam and Eve a number of times as real, historical people. By this, it underscores that the account of creation and the Fall, as described in the book of Genesis, is literally true, despite the convictions of many Roman Catholics.

Saviour of all men, that all need salvation and that salvation is offered to all through Christ. The Church, which has the mind of Christ, knows very well that we cannot tamper with the revelation of original sin without undermining the mystery of Christ [emphasis added]."

Other paragraphs of the CCC which corroborate this idea are pars. 54, 55, and 391.

The consequences of sin on the world

Pars. 397–407 of the CCC give a detailed description of the effects that the Fall had on mankind. Important for this discussion here is par. 400:

"The harmony in which they had found themselves, thanks to original justice, is now destroyed: the control of the soul's spiritual faculties over the body is shattered; the union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions, their relations henceforth marked by lust and domination. Harmony with creation is broken: visible creation has become alien and hostile to man. *Because of man, creation is now subject to its 'bondage to decay'*. Finally, the consequence explicitly foretold for this disobedience will come true: *man will 'return to the ground', for out of it he was taken. Death makes its entrance into human history [emphasis added].*"

In this paragraph, we read that death makes its first entry into human history as a heretofore foreign element. Furthermore, all of creation is subject to decay and eventual destruction (Romans 8:19–22). This is why there is pain in child-bearing; this is why labour becomes tiresome, and why the ground is cursed because of man (Genesis 3:16–18), but also why the earth itself is awaiting the liberty of the children of God.

Pars. 406–407 also describe the will of man. The RCC upholds the teaching of free will in these paragraphs. However, the church completely misses the evident consequence of the teaching of the Fall into sin, which it even cites in par. 402: “*Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men* [emphasis added].” In par. 407 we read: “*Original sin entails ‘captivity under the power of him who thenceforth had the power of death, that is, the devil’* [emphasis added].” If man is spiritually dead, even a captive of the devil (John 8:44–45), then that means he is incapable in and of himself relating to God in any kind of spiritual manner. Man’s Fall is complete and total.

Creation is supernatural and not a random, naturalistic process.

Also important is how the CCC speaks about the way that God created the universe, in pars. 279–314. According to par. 295: “We believe that God created the world according to his wisdom. *It is not the product of any necessity whatever, nor of blind fate or chance* [emphasis added].” Thus, the RCC disavows any kind of random, evolutionary process which gave rise to life from non-life. Furthermore, par. 338 states:

“Nothing exists that does not owe its existence to God the Creator. *The world began when God’s word drew it out of nothingness; all existent beings, all of nature, and all human history are rooted in this primordial event, the very genesis by which the world was constituted and time begun* [emphasis added].”

Furthermore, par. 327 also states:

“The profession of faith of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) affirms that *God ‘from the beginning of time made at once (simul) out of nothing both orders of creatures, the spiritual and the corporeal, that is, the angelic and the earthly, and then (deinde) the human creature, who as it were shares in both orders, being composed of spirit and body’* [emphasis added].”

This means that human beings, such as Adam, which are spiritual beings (along with angels) were created from the beginning of time, and not after billions of years of evolution.

Moreover, the CCC states (in reference to Genesis 2:1–3), that creation happened in six days, after which God rested from His works:

“345: *The Sabbath—the end of the work of the six days. The sacred text says that ‘on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done’, that the ‘heavens and the earth were finished’, and that God ‘rested’ on this day and sanctified and blessed it* [emphasis added].”

Creation in six days would exclude any kind of evolution. Just as God laboured six days and blessed the seventh day (the Sabbath), so is man also to work for six days and rest in the seventh, according to Exodus 20:8–11.

Summary and conclusion

It is a paradox that many Roman Catholics, including the pope himself as well as Roman Catholic seminaries and higher institutions of teaching, have capitulated to the theory of evolution, yet the CCC aligns with a literal interpretation of Genesis 1–11. Not only does it speak about people such as Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, and Noah as having really existed, but also talks about the Garden of Eden, the Fall into sin, Noah’s Flood and the Tower of Babel as geographical and historical events. The CCC compares these people to other people from the Bible about whom we have no doubt as to whether they truly existed, such as David, Uriah, Daniel and, above all, Jesus Christ, the last Adam. In par. 345 it also apparently affirms creation in six days. Overall, what the CCC says about creation and the Fall into sin is accurate. We can be grateful that many Roman Catholics generally see clearly in this question, but would urge those who compromise to believe in a literal Genesis.

Endnotes

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