

Did Woman Evolve From the Beasts? A Defense of Traditional Catholic Doctrine

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Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to defend a doctrinal thesis which is quite simple, very clear, very classical, but now very unpopular—not to say outrightly scorned and derided. I will argue that the formation by God of the first woman, Eve, from the side of the sleeping, adult Adam had, by the year 1880, been proposed infallibly by the universal and ordinary magisterium of the Catholic Church as literally and historically true; so that this must forever remain a doctrine to be held definitively (at least) by all the faithful. I would express the thesis in Latin as follows:

Definitive tenendum est mulierem primam vere et historice formatam esse a Deo e latere primi viri dormientis.

Some explanation of several terms I have just used will be in order at this point. First, by including the words “sleeping, adult” (*vir*—in both classical and ecclesiastical Latin—nearly always means an adult human being), my intention is to exclude as unorthodox not only the usual naturalistic evolutionary assumptions about female human origins, but also a certain ‘concordist’ hypothesis which has at times been suggested over the last sixty years as a possible way of reconciling the traditional understanding of the origin of woman with evolution. I refer to the hypothesis that Adam and Eve were mutant twins, conceived in the womb of a hominid creature. According to this fanciful scenario, the original human female could thus be said to have ‘split off,’ as it were, from an originally single male human zygote which had evolved from hominid forebears. This would be like the normal process in which monozygotic (identical) twins are formed, except that in this case a miracle would have been necessary in order for the second twin to be of the opposite gender; for, as scientists are agreed, this cannot happen in the course of nature.

Secondly, I have chosen to speak of Adam’s “side” (*latus* in Latin), rather than his “rib” (*costa* in Latin), simply because the former term, which has often been used in the theological literature, is more general and comprehensive. The Hebrew noun used in Gen. 2:21-22 (*tselaj*) is apparently a little obscure and can, it seems, mean either “rib” or “side.” Since the former could be understood, if necessary, to be included in the latter expression, but not the latter in the former, it seems better to use “side” in an attempt to express what we are required to hold as Catholics.

When I say that the doctrine, as enunciated, is “to be held definitively,” I am referring to the second category of doctrines enumerated in the new (1989) Profession of Faith and in the 1998 Apostolic Letter of John Paul II, *Ad Tuendam Fidem* together with the accompanying “Doctrinal Note” from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (especially its article 8). These are doctrines which have been infallibly proposed by the ordinary or extraordinary magisterium as being at least inseparably linked to the revealed deposit, but which have not—or at least, not yet—been proposed by the Church as themselves revealed, and so to be believed “with divine and Catholic faith.” Using a more traditional theological note, I would suggest that the thesis I am defending is “proximate to faith” (*proxima fidei*), that is, one which has been generally understood by the Fathers, Doctors and approved theologians as the true meaning of something revealed in Sacred Scripture and/or Sacred Tradition, but which has not so far been proclaimed unequivocally as revealed by the Church’s teaching authority. (I have included the words “at least” in parenthesis in my opening paragraph, in order not to rule out the possibility that the doctrine in question might one day be elevated by a Pope or Council to a truth of divine and Catholic faith, obstinate dissent from which would then become heresy.)

Having clarified these terms, I will now proceed to defend the thesis by considering the accepted theological sources—Scripture, Tradition, Magisterium—as well as arguing that the doctrine is not

contrary to reason, that is, to any legitimate conclusion of the human sciences. I will then address the question of how binding this teaching had become by the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. Finally, I will respond to objections to my thesis based on an appeal to certain more recent magisterial interventions.

I. Scripture as Witness

I.1. The fundamental text that interests us is of course the well-known passage of Genesis which reads:

So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The Lord God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man. When he brought her to the man, the man said: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; This one shall be called 'woman,' for out of 'her man' this one has been taken."¹

Nevertheless, while this is undoubtedly the key biblical text, I will not embark on any detailed exegetical study of it, precisely because the whole issue before us revolves around the question of what precise literary genre we are faced with in this passage. The conventional theological and biblical wisdom of recent decades maintains that we have here some kind of imaginative, metaphorical, parabolic, or even quasi-mythical account of the origin of woman. But since this reading of Genesis contradicts, as we shall see, a Judaeo-Christian consensus of several thousand years, it would seem well-nigh impossible to demonstrate conclusively that the new 'parabolic/metaphoric' reading of the passage was true.

Indeed, the currently fashionable concept of a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' would in this case seem quite applicable, in view of the obvious fact that the general rise in popularity of this parabolic/metaphorical reading among Christians over the last century has coincided precisely with the general rise in their acceptance of evolution as the supposedly 'scientific' and 'rational' answer to the question of human origins. Why do I say that this coincidence should make us suspicious of the new reading of Genesis? Simply because the discernment of literary genres—another autonomous human science—clearly ought to be based on literary criteria, not on biological or paleontological criteria! Data from such external physical sciences ought to be seen as quite alien and irrelevant to the task of literary science in discerning what was meant by an ancient author in a given piece of writing. Unlike the cosmos, literature (whether written or orally transmitted) is the creation of men; and it is created precisely in order to be understood by other men. Hence (aside from Rosetta-Stone-type situations where translation is a problem), there is no reason why we should expect literature to contain profound secrets which cannot be unlocked by other men without laborious research requiring thousands of years of effort. If Gen. 2:21-23 were really just intended as symbolic or metaphorical in character, why was this never discovered long before the advent of Darwin? Why did neither the classical Jewish commentators—undoubted experts on literary genres coming from their own culture and language—nor the Church's Fathers, Doctors, Bishops and Popes—assisted collectively by the Holy Spirit—ever discern this truth about the Genesis passage? Why, indeed, did they consciously decide against giving it any such figurative or symbolic interpretation? Sceptics, atheists, and ultra-liberal theists can often see the point I am making more clearly than many believers. They will maintain that since there is no serious literary or linguistic reason to suspect a parabolic/symbolic intention on the part of the ancient author, those believers who postulate such an intention, in an attempt to reconcile the divine inspiration of Genesis with the perceived need to read it through Darwinian-tinted spectacles, are merely resorting to a self-deceptive ploy. That is, they are shielding themselves from the unpleasant, but more rational, conclusion that the evolutionary account of human origins, if correct, will render the integral truth (and, therefore, the divine authorship) of Genesis untenable—a fact which will in turn debunk the whole of historic Christianity (Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox), which has committed itself irrevocably to the divine inspiration of the entire Bible as a dogma of faith.

Whatever may be said about a ‘hermeneutic of suspicion,’ it remains true that any consideration of the direct or intrinsic arguments for or against a parabolic/metaphorical reading of our Genesis passage will inevitably produce uncertain results. For, by the very nature of the case, the issue will involve trying to weigh uncertain and indemonstrable hypotheses of greater or lesser probability. Therefore, in this section on Scripture, I shall bypass such controversies entirely, assuming as given the inconclusive nature of any direct historical/literary analysis of the Genesis passage itself, and appealing instead to an indirect approach which involves a different biblical text, and a different hermeneutical principle—that of the ‘analogy of faith’—in order to resolve the issue.

I.2. The ‘analogy of faith’ is a classical Catholic principle employed as a hermeneutical tool for the correct interpretation of Scripture. The idea is that since we know by faith that God’s Word cannot contradict itself, passages which are obscure or uncertain in meaning can sometimes be clarified by a comparison (‘analogy’) with others which treat of the same doctrine more clearly. Thus Scripture itself is used to interpret Scripture.

In the case before us, the typically modern uncertainty as to whether the Genesis text before us is to be understood as belonging to the genre of history or non-history can be resolved by taking note of the clear affirmation by St. Paul in the New Testament that “man did not come from woman, but woman from man” (I Cor. 11:8). The Greek text reads: “ou gar estin aner ek gunaikos, alla gune ex andros” (the last three words meaning, literally, “woman . . . is out of (or, from) man”). The Apostle repeats this in verse 12: “As woman came from man, so man is born of woman” (Greek: “he gune ek tou andros”—“the woman [is] out of (or, from) the man”).

Now, there should really be no need for any lengthy discussion about the exegesis of these texts, as Paul’s intended meaning is quite transparent. There can be not the slightest question of this passage of I Corinthians being written in any kind of symbolic, imaginative, allegorical or other ‘creative’ literary genre. Teaching within the cultural context of that time, the Apostle is insisting here, in straightforward, prosaic language, that women, but not men, should have their heads covered in worship, as a sign of their subordination to masculine authority (cf. vv. 7, 9-10). And as evidence for this relationship, Paul cites the way that God brought woman into existence: she is “from man,” and not vice versa. It is quite evident that the Apostle uses these few words as a summary of Genesis 2:21-22, and that he understands and affirms them as literal history (along with all other ancient Jewish and Christian commentators). Not only do the words themselves in their context bear this obvious meaning, but it would be patently anachronistic to suggest otherwise, since Paul was writing eighteen hundred years before evolutionary preoccupations began to sow doubts in believers’ minds about the literary genre of the Genesis text. Thus, we have here a divinely inspired witness to the historicity of the Genesis account of Eve’s formation. As Vatican II reminds us, confirming the age-old faith of the Church, “all that is affirmed by the inspired authors or hagiographers must be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit” (*Dei Verbum* §11). Here, the inspired author Paul indubitably affirms, twice, that in historical truth woman came from man. Ergo, the Holy Spirit, who cannot err, also affirms this.²

Some curious sophistries are employed by certain Catholics in order to evade the clear force of this argument from I Corinthians and the teaching of Vatican II on biblical inspiration. I have seen it affirmed, for instance, that Paul is here “simply repeating” the Genesis text, the implication being that he thus prescind altogether from the question of its interpretation and its literary genre. But what the Apostle is doing, clearly, is not “simply repeating” the Genesis text, but summarizing it and reaffirming it as recording something that really happened.

Again, some try to argue that in fact Paul does not really assert, affirm or teach here that “woman is from man,” claiming that his only “real” teaching or assertion in this passage is that to which his reference to Genesis is subordinated, namely, that women should cover their heads in worship. But this implausible hermeneutical ploy runs up against a papal censure found in one of the carefully selected references in footnote 5 to *Dei Verbum* §11—references which must be taken into account in order to understand correctly this crucial passage on biblical inerrancy. I am referring to that passage from Leo XIII’s foundational biblical encyclical, *Providentissimus Deus*, which is referenced in the footnote as *Enchiridion Biblicum* (EB) §124. The main content of this passage is Pope Leo’s censure of “the false

opinion that when it is a question of the truth of statements [made by the inspired writers], one should not so much inquire into what things God has said, but rather, give greater weight to why He has said them.”³ Once this papally-proscribed shift of emphasis is allowed free rein, almost any Scriptural passage whose truth the reader finds problematical can be readily ‘saved’ from the charge of error by gratuitously ‘demoting’ or ‘downgrading’ it, so to speak, from the status of a true affirmation on the part of God and His inspired author! Exegetes enamored of this kind of hermeneutical sleight-of-hand have been using it for over a century now in order to undermine the essential Scriptural basis for belief in Jesus’ miraculous conception. What (they ask) is the true purpose of Matthew and Luke in saying that Mary was a virgin in giving birth to Our Lord? Well (we are told), such miraculous ‘language’ is simply their ‘literary’ or ‘culturally-conditioned’ way of expressing the higher, more fundamental, Christological truth that Jesus has a totally unique relationship with the Father. And that truth (the modernist exegete concludes) is the only teaching that the evangelists ‘truly intend to affirm’ in these texts.⁴

Another similar hermeneutical manoeuvre is to draw a spurious distinction between what the human author affirms and the message that God intends to communicate by his words—as though the two might at times be disparate. The devotee of this approach will conveniently be able to find pretty much whatever he wants to find as the Holy Spirit’s supposed message in any given passage of Scripture. He reads it through, mentally sifting the text with a view to discerning, in an a priori fashion, what he feels is its essential ‘salvific’ or ‘theological’ content. This is then dubbed the only ‘real’ divine message communicated to us by the Holy Spirit in this text, so that anything left over can be politely laid aside as ‘merely human,’ ‘non-salvific’ and therefore possibly not free of error. Thus, in the case of I Corinthians 11 before us, we will be told that the only truth that God wants to communicate to us here is something like the intimate reciprocity or interdependence of man and woman (and perhaps of the interpreter is not strongly feminist, the headship of men over women). Once again, Paul’s ‘inconvenient’ statement that woman actually did come from man is thus excluded from the supposed divine or ‘salvific’ message of this passage. But Vatican Council II also rules out this approach. First, in DV §11, it teaches a necessary identity of content between the divine and human message in stating that “all that the sacred writers affirm must be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit.” Then, in article 12, *Dei Verbum* teaches the same thing in a different way: it tells us that the only means of discovering what God teaches in a given passage is to determine first what the human authors teach therein; for that will *ipso facto* be the divine teaching. As the Flannery translation puts it:

Seeing that, in sacred Scripture, God speaks through men in human fashion, it follows that the interpreter of sacred Scriptures, if he is to ascertain what God has wished to communicate to us, should carefully search out the meaning which the sacred writers really had in mind, that meaning which God had thought well to manifest through the medium of their words.⁵

I will rest my case from Scripture by summarizing it as follows: a sound exegesis of St. Paul’s statements in I Corinthians 11 (backed up implicitly by Acts 17:26), and a sound exegesis of pertinent magisterial teaching on Scriptural inspiration and interpretation, leave room for only one possible conclusion: St. Paul, and therefore the Holy Spirit, both affirm here that woman did indeed come from man; and this settles the prior question about the literary genre of Gen. 2:21-22 in favor of its literal historicity.

II. Tradition as Witness

II.1. It is well-known that the unanimous consensus of those many Fathers of the Church who commented on the account of Eve’s formation from Adam’s side testifies that this passage is to be understood as literal history, and as part of the doctrine of faith concerning Creation. The only ancient ecclesiastical writer to give a symbolic or allegorical reading to the Genesis account was Origen,⁶ who is notorious for his excessive penchant for such free departures from the literal sense of a great many biblical texts. In any

case, Origen, not being a saint, is not strictly to be considered among the Fathers, especially when their consensus is being considered to establish the certainty of a given Catholic doctrine from Scripture.

It is sometimes alleged that St. Augustine was at least uncertain as to whether the account of Adam's rib being formed into Eve was factual, or perhaps indicated a dream or vision on the part of Adam. If, however, Augustine ever did express such uncertainty (and commentators disagree on this), this was only in one of his earlier works.⁷ He later confessed that in the work in question, written shortly after his conversion, he had offered figurative explanations for passages in Genesis which, after "more diligent reflection and consideration," he realised were meant to be understood literally.⁸ Certainly, in all his mature works, Augustine expounds Gen. 2:21-23 quite literally.⁹

Lest it be suggested that the consensus of the Fathers on biblical interpretation regarding matters of faith can no longer be considered decisive, it is worthwhile noting that as recently as 1970, Pope Paul VI made this telling observation when blessing a new Institute of Patrology at the Augustinianum in Rome on 4 May 1970: "We can understand, then, how important the study of the Fathers is for a deeper understanding of Holy Scripture, and how decisive for the Church is their agreement on how it is to be interpreted."¹⁰ Several years later, Pope Paul was if anything more emphatic in a letter of 10 May 1975 to Cardinal Michele Pellegrino of Turin, commemorating the centenary of the death of Jacques-Paul Migne, editor of the monumental edition of the entire corpus of the Latin and Greek Fathers. Here the Pope insists that Vatican Council II itself upholds this ancient dogmatic criterion:

In fact the Church, in her function as "pillar and foundation of the truth," has always referred herself back to the teaching of the Fathers, considering their consensus as a rule of interpretation for Holy Scripture. Saint Augustine had already formulated and applied this rule in his own time. Vincent of Lérins, in turn, had expounded it at length in his *Commonitorium Primum*. It was taken up again and solemnly proclaimed by the Council of Trent and by the First Vatican Council. The recent Second Vatican Council has shown itself if anything even more insistent on this point.¹¹

II.2. Later Catholic tradition, up until the turn of the twentieth century, was almost as unanimous as the Fathers had been in upholding the literal reading of Gen. 2:21-23. The only significant theologian in the sixteen and a half centuries between Origen and Joseph-Marie Lagrange who questioned the literal reading of Eve's formation was Cardinal Thomas Cajetan (sixteenth century), whose rather superficial and idiosyncratic reason for rejecting the literal reading never sounded persuasive to other theologians. Significantly, his doubts had nothing at all to do with the literary style or linguistic characteristics of the Genesis passage—that is, with the criteria which modern exegetes and theologians appeal to in order to justify a symbolic/parabolaical reading. Cajetan's position was based not on the text's form, but on its matter: he had a kind of moral scruple to the effect that a literal reading of this passage would call in question the goodness of God's creation. But this was an objection which St. Thomas Aquinas had already anticipated and satisfactorily answered three centuries earlier, in his classic four-point treatise on the historical formation of Eve from Adam's side.¹² Not until the very end of the nineteenth century, under the increasing pressure of the *Zeitgeist* to accommodate this and other texts to the Darwinian worldview, did a few Catholic scholars such as Lagrange, Hummelauer, Hoberg and Schöpfer begin to resurrect Cajetan's conclusion, if not his argumentation, as a supposedly respectable Catholic precedent for giving a non-literal reading of the passage on the first woman's creation;¹³ but this tendency was promptly (if only temporarily) repressed by the anti-modernist program initiated a few years later by Pope St. Pius X.

If one prescind from these late nineteenth- and subsequent twentieth-century Catholic authors, it is evident that the isolated figures of Origen and Cajetan before the modern period scarcely make a dint in the solid wall of almost bimillennial patristic and theological consensus on this point. It is fully reasonable, therefore, to conclude that a literal reading of Gen. 2:21-23 is the clear witness and verdict of Sacred Tradition.

III. The Ecclesiastical Magisterium as Witness

I shall now seek to demonstrate that the explicit witness of the Church's teaching authority supports that of Scripture and Tradition.

III.1. The earliest known papal affirmation of Eve's historical formation from Adam's side is that of Pope Pelagius I. His epistle of 3 February 557 to King Childebert I contains a profession of faith ("*Fides Pelagii papae*") which was shortly afterwards repeated in the epistle *Vas Electionis* addressed to the whole Church.¹⁴ In reference to the Last Judgment, the profession of faith includes the following affirmation:

I confess . . . that all men from Adam onward who have been born and have died up to the end of the world will then rise again and stand "before the judgment-seat of Christ," together with Adam himself and his wife, who were not born of other parents, but were created: one from the earth and the other from the side of the man.¹⁵

This ancient profession of faith is not found in versions of Denzinger earlier than that of 1965 (Denzinger-Schönmetzer), and seems to have fallen into oblivion. It was apparently unknown to many or most theologians of the last century, judging by the failure to cite it of so many¹⁶ who opposed evolution and so would have welcomed this document as a weapon in their armoury. Nevertheless, it is clear that *Vas Electionis* has high authority. This is the Successor of Peter addressing a formal profession of faith to the universal Church; and while its degree of solemnity or decisiveness in formulation perhaps does not quite warrant its qualification as an *ex cathedra* definition, it would certainly be roughly comparable in authority to a modern equivalent such as Paul VI's 1968 *Credo of the People of God* (which Pope Paul himself considered the most weighty document of his entire pontificate¹⁷). And in what Pope Pelagius affirms about how our first parents came into being, the accent on historicity is evident, since the context is an overview of the entire panorama of cosmic history, from Creation till the Last Judgment.

III.2. Passing to the mediaeval period, we find that the Ecumenical Council of Vienne in 1312 published another solemn profession of faith, directed against errors which had been propagated by the Franciscan Peter Olivi (or Olieu). This document, the *Constitution Fidei catholicae*, takes up and canonizes the classical Patristic theme that the formation of Eve from Adam's side, far from being some kind of strange, incomprehensible and perhaps salvifically insignificant prodigy, was a profound and beautiful foreshadowing of the very heart of the work of our Redemption: the mystical foundation of the Church, the immaculate Spouse of Christ, in the water and blood—symbols of the principal sacraments—which flowed from the Saviour's side as he 'slept' in death on the Cross. The relevant text reads as follows:

[We confess] that after [Jesus'] spirit was already rendered up, his side suffered perforation by a lance, so that through the ensuing flow of water and blood, the one and only, immaculate, virgin Mother Church, the Spouse of Christ, might be formed, just as Eve, spouse of the first man, was formed for him from his side as he slept. This happened so that the reality manifested in our last Adam, that is, Christ, might correspond to a certain prefiguring of that reality constituted by the first and ancient Adam, who, according to the Apostle, "is a type of the one who was to come" [cf. Rom. 5:14].¹⁸

Again, historicity is clearly affirmed here with the past tense "was formed" (*formata est*). Moreover, the historical reality of the water and blood flowing from the Second Adam's side would scarcely have been "prefigured" appropriately by a merely mythical or imaginary formation of Eve from the First Adam's side.

III.3. As we move closer to modern times, we find that magisterial affirmations of Eve's formation from Adam are in conscious opposition to the rival explanations of human origins being offered by evolutionists. Just before Darwin's great controversy broke upon the world, however, an interesting

witness to the teaching of Bishops in communion with Peter's successor appeared in the United States. (Since we are considering in this essay the witness of the Church's ordinary and universal magisterium, it is not inappropriate to include some evidence of episcopal as well as papal teaching, in accordance with what *Lumen Gentium* §25 teaches about their authority, even when dispersed throughout the world.) This was a Bible dictionary by Fr. B. O'Reilly, first published in the 1850s or early 1860s, which continued to enjoy great popularity for decades afterwards.¹⁹ A list of twenty-three American and English bishops and archbishops who gave their express approval to this work, including Cardinal Wiseman of Westminster, and Cardinal McCloskey of New York, is found immediately after the title page in the facsimile edition. In regard to our first parents, this book offers 'thumbnail biographies' of "Adam"²⁰ and "Eve" which no more hint at any doubt or uncertainty regarding historicity than do the entries for the New Testament historical figures, including Our Lord himself. The dictionary entry that interests us here reads, in its entirety, as follows:

EVE, the first woman, made out of a rib of Adam (Gen. ii.21); induced by the serpent to eat the forbidden fruit (iii.6); persuades Adam to eat thereof (6); her sentence (16); God makes her a garment of skins (21); mother of Cain (iv.1); of Abel (2); of Seth (25) and of daughters (v.4).²¹

Moreover, O'Reilly's summary of the Book of Genesis positively exults in the blessed certainty which it gives, precisely as a cosmogony—a true historical account of our origins:

Of all books ever written, this five-fold book of Moses is the only one that enlightens us with infallible certainty on the origin of all things in this universe, visible and invisible; on the creation of mankind and their destinies; on their duties, during this life, toward their Almighty Creator and toward each other, and on the rewards and punishments of the eternal life hereafter. . . . Before the coming of Christ the whole pagan world was plunged in darkness impenetrable concerning the origin of man and the world, and the sublime destinies appointed in Christ for Adam and his posterity in the very beginning. Christian teaching dispelled this midnight darkness and revealed to all believers both the secret of man's origin and the incomprehensible glory of his supernatural destinies. . . . So, in these first verses and pages of Genesis—the Book of Origins—we are treading on abysses of revealed truth—of truth which explains to us both the world beneath and around us, and that unmeasured world which extends on all sides above and beyond our little globe.²²

In short, we have here a book expressly approved by dozens of Catholic bishops which has no hesitation in asserting that the Genesis revelation gives us the kind of "infallible certainty" about "the creation of mankind" and "the secret of man's origin" which "dispelled the midnight darkness" which reigned within paganism in regard to such matters. Such sweeping, even 'triumphalistic,' language makes obvious the fact that O'Reilly has in mind historical "infallib[ility]" here, and not merely (as modern conventional wisdom supposes) the kind of obscurely metaphorical 'revelation' which relinquishes to 'pagan' erudition itself—in the form of secular evolutionary science—the task of telling us 'the real facts' about our origins.

III.4. A still more telling witness than the foregoing illustration is the draft schema prepared by bishops and theologians of Vatican Council I for the proposed Constitution *De doctrina catholica*. More than a decade after *The Origin of Species* appeared, these conciliar Fathers and *periti* consciously defied its implications in the second draft of this schema with the following solemn affirmation:

This, our Holy Mother the Church believes and teaches: When God was about to make man according to His image and likeness in order that he might rule over the whole earth, He breathed into the body formed from the slime of the earth the breath of life, that is, a soul produced from nothing. . . . And blessing the first man and Eve his wife who was formed by divine power from his side, God said: "Increase and multiply, and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28).²³

It is noteworthy that while the words “the breath of life” are explained as being a symbol or metaphor (for the soul), no similar explanation is offered for the expression “from his side.” Yet again, it is manifest that the historicity of this act of “divine power” is being affirmed.

This draft statement was never promulgated by Vatican I; but it is a highly relevant piece of evidence as to the extent to which the directly supernatural origin of the first woman’s body had hitherto been taught by the Successors of the Apostles in union with Peter. After all, those preparing doctrinal statements for an Ecumenical Council are, obviously, drawn from among those regarded by the Holy See as the most learned bishops and the most erudite and trustworthy theologians available. If they are not in a position to know what the ordinary magisterium of the Church has been up till their own time, who ever would be? Moreover, it is worthwhile recalling that the non-promulgation of this draft schema had nothing to do with any expressed dissatisfaction with it on the part of the conciliar Fathers. The problem was simply that proceedings were cut short because of the political crisis of 1870, before the discussion of this schema could be completed. There is no evidence in the *Acta* of Vatican I that any of the conciliar Fathers raised any objections to the passage we have cited above. The initial discussion indicated a favourable response to the doctrine, if not always to the precise wording, of the first draft as a whole. (24) Then, significantly, the bishops deputed to discuss and revise the first draft actually proceeded to make the second draft more explicitly anti-Darwinian by adding the words we have emphasized in citing it above: “formed by divine power from his side” (*e costa eius divinitus formata*). The initial draft, in speaking of Eve, had mentioned that she was the “mother of all living”²⁵ but was silent about the mode of her formation.

III.5. We come now to what is perhaps the most weighty of all magisterial interventions for the direct, supernatural formation of the first woman. Like Pope Pelagius’ sixth-century profession of faith, it seems to have fallen into oblivion, and is never cited, even by those theologians who would certainly have been most happy to enlist it in their cause if they knew about it. But in this case the eclipse is more surprising, since the papal intervention in question is not only highly authoritative, but much more recent, dating, in fact, from ten years after Vatican Council I. I refer to a forgotten passage in Leo XIII’s Encyclical *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* of February 10, 1880. I can only ascribe the almost universal ignorance of this passage among Catholic scholars writing on creation and evolution to the fact that it occurs within an encyclical whose general theme is Christian marriage—a topic which theologians invariably associate with sacramental and/or moral theology, but not with the theology of creation. After many years of reading Catholic and other Christian works on science and creation dating from the late nineteenth century onward, I had never once seen Leo XIII cited or even referred to on this question, until I “rediscovered” his teaching quite by chance in 1998, whilst leafing through a pamphlet edition of *Arcanum* in search of material on marriage.²⁶

Pope Leo himself, however, clearly judged that the origin of woman was indeed to be considered part of the Church’s doctrine concerning marriage—particularly, no doubt, in view of the ancient typological reading of Eve’s formation from her spouse’s side which we saw enshrined in the teaching of the Council of Vienne in relation to the Church as “Spouse of Christ.” Writing shortly after Huxley and Darwin in the 1870s had more explicitly applied evolutionary theory to human origins, Leo wrote as follows to the world’s Catholic bishops:

What is the true origin of marriage? That, Venerable Brethren, is a matter of common knowledge. For although the revilers of the Christian faith shrink from acknowledging the Church’s permanent doctrine on this matter, and persist in their long-standing efforts to erase the history of all nations and all ages, they have nonetheless been unable to extinguish, or even to weaken, the strength and light of the truth. We call to mind facts well-known to all and doubtful to no-one: after He formed man from the slime of the earth on the sixth day of creation, and breathed into his face the breath of life, God willed to give him a female companion, whom He drew forth wondrously from the man’s side as he slept. In bringing this about, God, in His supreme Providence, willed that this spousal couple should be the natural origin of all men: in other words, that from this pair the human race should be propagated and preserved in every age by a succession of procreative acts which would never be interrupted. And so that this union of man and woman might correspond

more aptly to the most wise counsels of God, it has manifested from that time onward, deeply impressed or engraved, as it were, within itself, two preeminent and most noble properties: unity and perpetuity.²⁷

Let us analyze this passage. Pope Leo is clearly proposing here, as one of a series of truths which are “well-known to all, and doubtful to no-one” (*nota omnibus et nemini dubia*), and which are part of “the Church’s permanent doctrine” (*perpetuam . . . doctrinam Ecclesiae*), the formation of Eve from the side of Adam, understood as a sleeping adult male (*vir. . . dormientis*). The normal way of referring in Latin (both classical and ecclesiastical) to a male human being who could be of any age, even an infant or fetus, is to use words such as *mas* (pl. *mares*), *masculus*, or *masculus*.²⁸ Moreover, the fact that Leo XIII mentions also the fact that the *vir* was “sleeping” (*dormientis*) during Eve’s creation reinforces the point that he had an adult in mind. Whoever speaks (or even thinks) of a tiny embryo in the womb as being either “asleep” or “awake”? The Hebrew text, understood literally, must of course be understood to refer to an adult by the word “ish” for “man,” especially since the play on words represented by the Hebrew word for “woman” (“ishshad” and “isha,” = “taken from her man”) requires “ish” to mean “husband.” Nevertheless, it is pertinent to insist that the Latin translation *vir*, used by Leo XIII, must also be understood as meaning an adult male,²⁹ precisely because this demonstrates that the Pope, in this authentic magisterial interpretation of Genesis, is teaching that the literal sense of the Hebrew text is in this case the true sense. Thus, the hypothesis that Eve “came from Adam” by means of monozygotic fission in the womb of a hominid brute is incompatible with this papal teaching.

Furthermore, the fact that the Pontiff is proposing the formation of Eve from (adult) Adam’s side as a historical truth, and not merely as some kind of metaphor or parable, is evident from the literary and historical context. For not only would the immediately succeeding sentence, confirming the ‘monogenistic’ origin of the human race from this one couple, be quite meaningless unless intended to be understood historically, but the opening words of the paragraph globally characterize the whole series of doctrinal points to be enunciated in it—including, therefore, that regarding Eve’s formation—as constituting collectively the “true origin” (*vera origo*) of marriage. And its “true origin” must obviously mean, according to the Pope’s mind and intention, the way it began really and historically, especially when it is recalled that he is here reiterating this “true origin” in deliberate opposition to the accounts of human origins being propagated by those he calls “revilers of the Christian faith” (*fidei christianae vituperatores*). For these Darwinian innovators were of course claiming to give “the real history” of human origins in contrast to the “myths” of Genesis.

III.6. We come now to the final magisterial intervention to be considered in this part of our study, namely the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s *Responsum* of June 30, 1909, on the interpretation of Genesis, chapters 1 to 3. The main point of this document that interests us is the third question addressed by the Commission:

Whether, in particular, the literal historical sense (*sensus litteralis historicus*) may be called in question (*vocari in dubium possit*), where it is a question of facts narrated in these chapters (*ubi agitur de factis in eisdem capitibus enarratis*) which involve the foundations of the Christian religion (*quae christianae religionis fundamenta attingunt*), as are, among others, the creation of all things by God at the beginning of time; the special [or, particular] creation of man; the formation of the first woman from the first man (*formatio primae mulieris ex primo homine*); the unity of the human race; the original happiness of our first parents in a state of justice, integrity and immortality; the precept given by God to man in order to test his obedience; the transgression of the divine precept under the persuasion of the devil in the guise of a serpent; the fall of our first parents from the aforesaid primaevial state of innocence; and the promise of a future Saviour?
Resp.: Negative.³⁰

It was precisely as a result of taking the six Latin words emphasized above in isolation, as if the PBC intended them to be a sufficient statement of orthodoxy, that some theologians developed the undoubtedly ‘creative,’ but sadly ill-founded, hypothesis that Adam and Eve may have been mutant twin

embryos.³¹ For *homo*, in itself, can mean a human being of any age, and the PBC formula does not directly specify any details as to how this “*formatio . . . ex primo homine*” took place. But in fact, the Commission’s decision does exclude the said hypothesis quite clearly, although indirectly, by virtue of the opening lines of the question which it answers in the negative. The PBC does not say here that Catholics are forbidden to call in question “the formation of the first woman from the first man.” Rather, it says they are forbidden to call in question “the literal, historical sense” of the Genesis text which narrates that “formation.” And since nobody could possibly claim that “the literal, historical sense” of Genesis 2:21-2, where Adam plainly appears as a sleeping adult, is compatible with a scenario of tiny pre-born mutants undergoing monozygotic fission, that scenario is certainly ruled out. *A fortiori*, of course, any purely ‘symbolic’ or metaphorical kind of “*formatio . . . ex primo homine*” is ruled out by this PBC “Response.”

So far we have seen an impressive accumulation of patristic, theological and magisterial testimony to the literal, historical formation of Eve’s body from the side of sleeping, adult Adam. It is now time to assess the degree of binding force which this doctrine had acquired by the time these documents were promulgated. But first, a brief word regarding the reasonableness of this doctrine, in the light of what is known from the human, secular sciences.

IV. Reason’s Nihil Obstat

Scientists in recent years have been publishing an increasing body of literature presenting discoveries and arguments which radically undermine the credibility of the long geological time-scale and of macro-evolution in any shape or form. I will not trespass here on their territory, which lies outside of my own modest field of competence, and will merely offer the following methodological thoughts.

Even if we supposed, for the sake of argument, that convincing proof did exist that evolution was, in general terms, the law by which organisms have originated and developed to their present state over the ages, this would by no means, in itself, constitute proof—or even any measurable probability—that the human species in particular originated in that way. In the absence of *a priori* incredulity about the possibility of miracles—which is a mistaken philosophical position, not a genuinely scientific one—such general evidence for evolution would indicate, at the most, that in the absence of any other reliable evidence to the contrary, one should presume that human origins occurred according to the general evolutionary law of nature. For it is obvious that no direct examination of the first members of the species *homo sapiens* will ever be possible to scientists. (Even that arch-champion of evolution among Roman Catholics, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, conceded “that science cannot scrutinize the activities of a unique pair of humans at some distant point in time.”³²) Even supposing that paleontologists one day had the astonishingly good fortune to find some fragmentary mortal remains of these very first members of our species, there would surely be no way for those remains ever to be certainly identified as such. Much less could scientists ever determine positively, even supposing (*per impossibile*) that some such fragments could be proven to come from the first human female, that this woman had not been formed miraculously from someone else’s side. No conceivable DNA tests, genetic information, molecular analysis, or anything else of that sort could, even in principle, justify this kind of flat negation of supernatural causality, for the simple reason that a special intervention of divine omnipotence is, by its very nature, quite capable of duplicating any conceivable state of affairs that is normally brought about by natural causes and is open to empirical observation and interpretation by science.

To recapitulate: no natural science, *per se*, could ever reasonably postulate more than a presumption of the first woman’s evolutionary origin, in the absence of other serious reasons for thinking that she originated otherwise. But of course, a divine revelation on this point would constitute such a reason—indeed, the most serious of all possible reasons! A perfect analogy and precedent to illumine this question regarding the origin of the first Adam and Eve is at hand in the case of what Catholic faith teaches about the Second Adam and His origin from the Second Eve. In the absence of any serious reason for thinking otherwise, we would naturally be led to presume, on the basis of scientifically known laws of nature, that Jesus, like all the rest of us, was conceived by male-female intercourse. But in fact, revelation prevails against this presumption by assuring us that the case of Our Lord’s sonship of Mary was unique

and supernatural. indeed, given the frequently manifested harmony and symmetry in God's providential designs between Creation and Redemption, Old and New Covenants, Nature and Grace, this very revealed fact of Jesus' miraculous origin, at that moment when human nature was elevated to the incomparable splendor of union with the Word, suggests to the devout and reflective Christian mind a certain *a priori* likelihood that God might well have adorned with another miracle (or miracles) that prior and primordial moment when animal nature first became united with spirit, thereby resulting in the first bodily creatures made in God's image and likeness—foreshadowing the Incarnation itself. Therefore, the rational theological step at this point is to investigate Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium on their own merits—that is, without allowing any question-begging evolutionist biases to prejudice our interpretation and evaluation of these sources—in order to determine whether revelation does in fact testify to the occurrence of some such miracle(s) at the origin of the human race.

That, of course, is what I am attempting to do in this essay, observing, indeed, a basic procedural norm in the faith-reason relationship which Vatican II recalled in treating of the inerrancy of Scripture. The Council cites Leo XIII in *Providentissimus* as recalling the age-old wisdom of Augustine:

But if some dispute should arise [between faith and science], the same Doctor sums up the rule to be followed by the theologian: If they have been able to demonstrate some truth of natural science with solid proofs, let us show that it is not contrary to our Scriptures; but if they maintain anything in any of their treatises which is contrary to Scripture (that is, to the Catholic faith), let us believe without hesitation that it is completely false, and if possible find a way of refuting it.³³

Now let us to turn to assess the degree of binding force of the doctrinal sources we have surveyed so far.

V. Assigning a Theological Note

Vatican Council II recognizes four conditions which must be fulfilled in order for a doctrine to be proposed infallibly by the ordinary magisterium; and as we shall show, these conditions had indeed already been fulfilled by the year 1880 in the case of the doctrines regarding the origin of Adam and Eve recalled by Leo XIII.

V.1. The first condition laid down in *Lumen Gentium* §25 is that the bishops teaching the doctrine be “in communion amongst themselves and with Peter's successor.”³⁴ This condition is obviously fulfilled in the case before us, as it was never just heretical and/or schismatic bishops who taught that the bodies of Adam and Eve were produced by supernatural acts of the Creator: Catholic bishops and popes proposed these doctrines for over eighteen hundred years before 1880.

V.2. The second condition to be verified is that bishops be “teaching authentically in matters of faith and morals.”³⁵ Again, the fulfillment of this condition is obvious. The doctrine concerning the formation of Eve was proposed by Catholic bishops and popes throughout all those long centuries in their role as authentic teachers in the Church—not just as individuals expressing private historical, exegetical, or philosophical opinions. Such teaching was expressed in the approved catechesis and preaching about Creation—including even the innumerable artistic representations of Eden in churches, which reinforced catechesis in the ages of mass illiteracy. All this was authorized and/or personally carried out by each bishop in his diocese. The teaching, furthermore, was certainly presented as a matter of faith—as the Church's authentic understanding and exposition of the revealed Word of God in Genesis 2:21-22. As we have noted already,³⁶ Pope Pelagius I proposed the teaching within what he expressly styled a “profession of faith,” while the Council of Vienne also affirmed it in a Constitution entitled “The Catholic Faith” (*Fidei Catholicae*), the literary form of which is also that of a profession of faith: each item is grammatically preceded by the verb *confitemur* at the beginning.³⁷ More recently, the language we saw employed by the Fathers of Vatican I, by Leo XIII and by St. Pius X's Biblical Commission bears the same implication.

V.3. Thirdly, Vatican II states that the teaching in question must be one that the popes and Catholic bishops agree upon (*in unam sententiam . . . conveniunt*). This agreement, as all theologians are aware, need only be that of a moral unity, not an absolute, mathematically exceptionless unanimity—something which in any case would nearly always be impossible to verify in practice. Therefore, the unique dissenting voice of Cardinal Cajetan in regard to the doctrine of Eve’s supernatural formation, during a period of sixteen hundred years, by no means implies the non-fulfillment of this condition.

The proposal of this doctrine by an Ecumenical Council, that of Vienne, also represents a clear instance of the world’s Catholic Bishops teaching it in union with each other and with Peter’s Successor. Significant also is the fact that, as we have seen, the Catholic world’s most doctrinally trusted bishops and theologians could confidently propose the doctrine for the expected promulgation of another Ecumenical Council, Vatican I. Finally, the wording employed by Leo XIII in *Arcanum* is still further evidence of the time-honored unity of Catholic episcopal teaching on this question.³⁸ Leo, addressing his “Venerable Brethren” of the world episcopate, can affirm as a matter of course that this teaching regarding the origin of the first woman’s body, no less than those regarding the unity and perpetuity of the marital bond, are matters of “common knowledge” or “universal agreement” amongst them (*constat inter omnes*). The Pope goes on to emphasize that in this paragraph he is writing neither to settle what has hitherto been controverted among Catholic bishops, nor to inform them of something they did not already know, but simply to “call to mind” or “recall” (*commemoramus*) what is already “well-known to all”—or even “notorious” (*nota omnibus*).

V.4. The fourth and final condition for an infallible teaching of the ordinary magisterium, according to *Lumen Gentium* §25, is that this (morally) unanimous teaching of the popes and bishops be presented as one “to be held definitively” (*tamquam definitive tenendam*). Vatican II’s footnote at this point clarifies the meaning of this expression. The Vatican I schema *De Ecclesia Christi*, cited in this note, makes it clear that by doctrines “to be held definitively” are signified those which are proposed as having to be “held or to be handed on as undoubted.” That is, as certainly true—as the final and unchangeable position of the Church on the point under consideration. This certainty which is correlative to infallibility in a doctrine which is *definitive tenendam* can (as *Ad Tuendam Fidem* and the accompanying *Nota Doctrinalis* have recently clarified), be either the certainty of ‘divine and Catholic faith,’ in which case the theological virtue of faith is operative in response to a truth of God’s revealed Word promulgated by and to the universal Church; or it can be the less supernatural, but still complete, certainty deriving from Christ’s promises to Holy Mother Church of assistance by the Holy Spirit. For she can thereby infallibly discern truths which are logically or practically linked to the revealed deposit, and so are required for guarding and expounding it.³⁹

How well, then, does the historical witness to Eve’s formation from the adult Adam measure up to this final requirement for infallibility? Right from the beginning of the magisterial record on this subject, the note of certainty—at times, the certainty of divine faith, or even ‘divine and Catholic faith’—shines through clearly. Pope Pelagius I’s document, as we have already noted, was itself a “Profession of Faith.” In it the solemn word “*confiteor*”—“I confess”—is used repeatedly to introduce the various articles of the profession, including that affirming the origin of Adam’s wife. In antiquity this verb, and the cognate noun “confessor” are invariably linked to the notion of faith: one recalls the Nicene Creed’s phrase, “*confiteor unum baptisma*,” and the fact that those saints styled “confessors” were originally those who had confessed the faith, especially in times of persecution. Since this document was eventually promulgated to the universal Church, and since the origin of Eve was not a disputed question in the sixth-century Church, we can only presume that the Catholic bishops in general accepted and made their own the Pope’s “confession” that this truth coming straight from Scripture was to be held as certain and undoubted.

In the case of the Council of Vienne, which we have examined, no such presumption is even necessary: for here we find the bulk of the world’s Catholic bishops, gathered together with Peter’s Successor, signing and promulgating with him a solemn Constitution in which the historical origin of Eve from sleeping Adam’s side is closely linked to a central mystery of the Redemption—the origin of the Church in the blood and water flowing from Christ’s side on the Cross. The language with which this

document begins also testifies to the complete certainty which the Pope and Bishops ascribe to its contents: “Firmly adhering to that foundation of the Catholic faith none other than which, as the Apostle testifies, any man can lay [I Cor. 3:11], we confess openly with Holy Mother Church that . . .”⁴⁰ Once again the weighty verb “confess” (*confitemur*) is used, and is understood as repeated before the words “And that . . .” (*Et quod . . .*), which begin the sentence referring to Eve and the wounds of Christ.⁴¹

In the light of such a precedent, it is scarcely surprising that, in that draft Constitution (already discussed) prepared by the bishops and *periti* of the First Vatican Council’s theological commission, the affirmation of the first woman’s origin is preceded by opening words very similar to those of Vienne: “This, our Holy Mother the Church believes and teaches: . . . blessing the first man and Eve his wife who was formed by divine power from his side, God said: ‘Increase and multiply, and fill the earth’ (Gen. 1:28).” According to standard magisterial and theological phraseology, that solemn formula never was, and never has been, used to present Catholic teaching about which there remains some shadow of legitimate doubt or uncertainty—that is, teaching which is merely “authentic” (or “authoritative”) but not infallible. And the commission, it must be remembered, was evidently confident of gaining the approval of the world’s bishops for this text. Indeed, the very title of the draft document, *De doctrina catholica*, implies the intention of handing down what has been definitively and infallibly taught. In recent centuries, the theological note “*doctrina catholica*” has been used to signify the kind of truth which at present the Magisterium since Vatican II classifies as *definitive tenendam*: a truth which is infallible, but which has not necessarily been proposed precisely as revealed. In article 6 of the 1998 *Nota Doctrinalis* accompanying *Ad Tuendam Fidem*, the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith uses the term *doctrina catholica* in this technical sense, stating that those who dissent from doctrines “to be held definitively” would be “rejecting a truth of Catholic doctrine and so no longer be in full communion with the Catholic Church.”⁴²

The final document we would adduce in evidence is Leo XIII’s very strong and explicit affirmation of Eve’s supernatural origin in article 5 of the encyclical *Arcanum*, which we have already considered twice, under different aspects. This has a particular significance in being the first papal reassertion of the doctrine to be promulgated after, and indeed, in conscious response to, the new and supposedly ‘scientific’ challenge to it coming from those Darwinians whom Leo alludes to here as “revilers of the Christian faith.” The aspect of *Arcanum* §5 that interests us now is the degree of force or emphasis with which Leo reiterates this doctrine. On re-reading the pertinent paragraph, we note this time that the Pope, bearing witness in *Arcanum* to the constant faith of all his predecessors in the papacy and episcopate, and confirming that faith of his brethren,⁴³ asserts that the truths recalled here as constituting the “true origin of marriage,” including that regarding the first woman’s formation, belong to the “permanent doctrine of the Church (*perpetuam doctrinam Ecclesiae*).” The word *perpetuam* (which can also be translated as “constant,” “perpetual,” “unchanging,” “uninterrupted,” etc.) expresses clearly the idea of permanence—of that which is fixed and immutable. That idea, of course, is integral to the theological notion of a doctrine taught “definitively.” Then, as if to make the point still more clearly, Leo XIII uses explicitly the key word referred to in Vatican II’s footnote to explain this concept: they are “doubtful to no one” (*nemini dubia*)—certain and undoubted. Moreover, if doctrinal propositions, like men, are (according to the proverb) “known by the company they keep,” then this will also reinforce the point we are making. For in the same paragraph, immediately after asserting the formation of Eve from sleeping Adam’s side, Pope Leo specifies as being equally “permanent”: first, the origin of the entire human race from this one original “spousal couple” (*par coniugum*) blessed by God; secondly, the unity of marriage (excluding polygamy and adultery); and thirdly, its life-long perpetuity. Of those three doctrines, another paper paralleling this one could easily be written demonstrating the infallibility of the first (monogenism),⁴⁴ while for all orthodox and well-informed Catholics, no such defense should even be necessary in regard to the definitive, infallible character of the second and third doctrines, referring as they do to essential properties of marriage. Yet Leo XIII Pope places Eve’s ‘wondrous’ formation from Adam side by side with these doctrines, under the same ‘umbrella’ that guarantees them all as “permanent” and “undoubted” Catholic truth.

Finally, and very importantly, the language used by Leo XIII makes very clear his conviction that this doctrine regarding the origin of woman is already held as “permanent” and “undoubted” by those “Venerable Brethren” of the worldwide Catholic episcopate to whom he is addressing this encyclical. The reader receives the impression that the Pope feels almost embarrassed in insisting to his fellow Successors of the Apostles on this ‘elementary Christian teaching!’⁴⁵ Along with the other doctrines Leo specifies regarding the “true origin of marriage,” this one too, he asserts, is one which is already evident—manifest, well-known, common knowledge—to all the bishops: “*Constat inter omnes, Venerabiles Fratres.*” Then, as the first clause in the sentence regarding the respective origins of our first parents, he prefaces the enunciation of these doctrines by the words “*Nota omnibus et nemini dubia commemoramus*”: “We call to mind facts well-known to all and doubtful to no one.” The verb *commemoramus* indicates that the Pope’s intention is not to hand down a new decision, in order to clarify some existing confusion or controversy among his brother bishops, but just to remind the whole world, along with them, of these truths which are now being challenged anew. Also, the indicative, rather than imperative or subjunctive, verb implied in the words “*nemini dubia*” is significant: it is not that Pope Leo is instructing the bishops not to doubt the historical formation of Eve from Adam’s side, or informing them that this may not be doubted (though of course that is implied *a fortiori*); rather, he is simply recalling the doctrine while expressing his confident persuasion that none of the “venerable brethren” do in fact have any doubts about it.

There is, in fact, a certain similarity between this paragraph of *Arcanum* and those in *Evangelium Vitae* wherein Pope Leo’s successor, John Paul II, makes a point of confirming (although in more formal language than Leo) the already “undoubted” and definitive Catholic doctrines against the direct taking of innocent human life, especially in the cases of abortion and euthanasia which are of particular contemporary relevance.⁴⁶ The *Nota Doctrinalis* of the CDF accompanying *Ad Tuendam Fidem* comments as follows, in referring to this mode of papal teaching:

[W]hen in regard to a given doctrine there is no judgment in the form of a solemn definition, but when the doctrine is taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium—which necessarily includes that of the Pope—as pertaining to the patrimony of the deposit of faith, it is then to be understood as infallibly proposed. Hence, the Roman Pontiff’s declaration of confirmation or reaffirmation is not a new act of dogmatization, but the formal attestation of a truth already possessed and infallibly transmitted by the Church.⁴⁷

V.5. I believe we are now in a position to draw the main conclusion of this essay. In order to demonstrate the infallibility of any Catholic doctrine by virtue of the universal and ordinary magisterium, it is only necessary to show that at some point in Church history the conditions laid down for that infallibility in *Lumen Gentium* §25 reached fulfillment. For the principle ‘once infallible, always infallible’ is evident as a matter of elementary logic. Now, we have seen so far in this section (V. 1-4) several moments in Church history, ranging from the patristic era (the year 557), through the mediaeval era (1312) to the late nineteenth century, during each one of which the only reasonable conclusion to be drawn from the historical evidence is that the Successor of Peter and the bishops in union with him were confirming the unanimous consensus of the Fathers regarding the origin of woman, as a certain and indubitable truth of Christian doctrine. That is, in modern theological parlance, a doctrine “to be held definitively.” Therefore, the cumulative force of the teaching from all three of these moments can only be seen as an overwhelming confirmation that the doctrine has indeed been proposed infallibly since the time of Leo XIII. It was clearly on the basis of this background that the Pontifical Biblical Commission, in 1909, declared that the “literal historical sense” of the pertinent Genesis text “cannot be called in question”—i.e., that it is certain and undoubted—since it “involves the foundations of the Christian faith.”

V.6. In drawing this conclusion, of course, I am far from being alone. A few examples of the theological notes ascribed to this doctrine by recognized theologians will be helpful.⁴⁸

V.6.1. The most universally approved of all theologians, St. Thomas Aquinas, lived before the modern vocabulary of theological notes had been developed, but it is clear that he judged the doctrine, understood literally and historically, to be totally certain. This is evident from ST, Ia, Q. 91, articles 2 and 3, inquiring, respectively, whether in general it was fitting for woman to be formed from man,⁴⁹ and whether, more specifically, it was fitting for her to be formed from the man's rib. In both articles, the 'sed contra' is a peremptory appeal to Scriptural texts: Sir. 17:5 in art. 2 and Gen. 2:22 in art. 3. When, in his 'sed contra,' Aquinas cites a Scriptural text rather than magisterial, patristic or philosophical authorities, he means to show that the answer he discerns to the question being posed is backed up by the supreme authority of God's own written word, in a passage, moreover, whose meaning is so clear that merely to cite it is to understand it. So in modern theological parlance, we would have to say that St. Thomas is proposing the formation of Eve from Adam's rib or side as at least 'proximate to faith.'

V.6.2. Suarez, another truly great theologian, teaches that the immediate formation of both Adam's and Eve's bodies by God is "*doctrina catholica*," that is, *definitive tenenda*.⁵⁰

V.6.3 Perrone, also widely renowned, classifies the same belief as *ad fidem spectare*⁵¹ which would be virtually equivalent to *proxima fidei*.

V.6.4. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., one of Pope Pius XII's trusted theological advisers, joins Suarez in classifying the doctrine as *doctrina catholica*.⁵²

V.6.5. The French Jesuit Fr. Charles Boyer, professor of dogma at Rome's Gregorian University during the era of Popes Pius XI and XII, goes even further than I or the foregoing theologians would do, in classifying the formation of Eve from Adam's side as *de fide catholica*—that is, as divinely revealed, without any doubt or qualification.⁵³

V.6.6. The Spanish Jesuit J.F. Sagüés, also writing in Pius XII's time, and in a widely used manual of dogmatic theology, joins Boyer in giving the note *de fide catholica* to this teaching, "to the exclusion of any form of evolution."⁵⁴

VI. Objections Answered

VI.1. Several relatively minor objections raised by other theology professors who have considered my doctrinal thesis have already been countered in the course of my general argument, and so do not, I believe, require any more explicit discussion. The main objection I find repeatedly being urged is that the Church's magisterium itself has, during the course of the twentieth century, 'moved beyond' the older belief regarding the *formatio primae mulieris*—a belief which no Pope has explicitly enunciated now for more than sixty years, and which has now, quite simply, been 'superseded.'

I would reply that, given the form in which I have argued my thesis in this present essay, that objection is a clear case of begging the question. As I have already stressed above, it is a matter of elementary logic, if we are considering a doctrine proposed infallibly by the ordinary and universal magisterium, that "once infallible, always infallible." Therefore, after any such historical verification of the conditions, any subsequent doubt, dissent or neglect of the doctrine in question, even if it should temporarily become widespread among bishops—or even affect the papacy itself—cannot objectively call in question the certain truth of the doctrine. It is well-known that during the debates at Vatican Council I, over forty instances of misleading or erroneous papal statements over the centuries had to be carefully considered, in order to verify that none of them was proposed with sufficient force to qualify as an *ex cathedra* definition and so militate against the definition of papal infallibility as a dogma.⁵⁵ Therefore, since I have argued that this 'point of no doctrinal return' was already reached by the pontificate of Leo XIII, it follows that if I am right, no subsequent utterances on the part of Popes or Vatican dicasteries—and much less their mere silence—can serve to 'trump' and disprove my thesis. In a word, I must respectfully insist that my argument up till now be taken on its own merits: it will first be necessary, therefore, to refute the arguments I have given in sections I to V of this essay, before any appeal to subsequent Roman interventions can become relevant. So far, no critic of my position has seriously attempted to do this. I admit, certainly, that if some major and highly authoritative magisterial intervention of the twentieth century—in a papal encyclical or a document of Vatican Council II, for

instance—had clearly declared that Catholics may not (or at least, need not) believe any longer that Eve was formed from the side of sleeping, adult Adam, then this, certainly, would be strong presumptive evidence that there must be some fatal error in the argumentation I have presented in sections I to V above. No such clear and weighty intervention does exist, however, and no one is claiming that it does. Even if such did exist, moreover, the probable error in my argument would still need to be identified and rebutted.

In any case, it will be worthwhile to look more specifically at those twentieth-century magisterial documents which some critics of my position have in fact adduced as evidence against it. But in considering the following objections, the reader should remember that the argument I have just advanced—namely, that they beg the vital question—is being urged generically against all of them, and that I consider this argument in itself, strictly speaking, to be a sufficient rebuttal.

VI.2. It has been suggested that with the 1943 encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, Pope Pius XII in effect ‘revolutionized’ Catholic biblical studies by giving much greater recognition than before to the varying literary genres in Scripture, thereby allowing exegetes much more freedom in questioning the historicity of narrative passages such as the early chapters of Genesis. I would reply, first, that *Divino Afflante Spiritu* confines itself to generalizations, and nowhere identifies any specific biblical passages—and certainly not Genesis 2:21-22—which allegedly need no longer be understood in the traditional sense. Secondly, I have argued in detail elsewhere that the so-called “revolutionary” character of Pius XII’s encyclical has in any case been greatly exaggerated in recent decades by biblical scholars deeply influenced by liberal Protestant trends, whose exegesis of *Divino Afflante* is far from impartial.⁵⁶ Finally, the gratuitous idea that Pius XII had the intention here of undermining the biblical basis for the traditional doctrine of Eve’s formation is made still more implausible by the fact that he himself, only two years earlier, had explicitly reaffirmed that doctrine—twice in two lines—in an allocution to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. He declared on that occasion:

God formed man and crowned his brow with the diadem of his image and likeness. . . . Only from man could there come another man who could call him father and parent; and the helpmate given to the first man also comes from him and is flesh of his flesh. . . . Her name comes from the man, because she was taken from him.⁵⁷

VI.3. It has also been put to me by more than one critic that my argument fails to take into account the 1948 *Letter of the Pontifical Biblical Commission to Cardinal Suhard of Paris*, which, it is said, goes much further than the magisterium had ever gone before in relativizing and qualifying the ‘historical’ character, such as it is, of the first chapters of Genesis, and therefore allegedly undermines my insistence on the historicity of the text regarding the formation of Eve. Apart from recalling, once again, the question-begging character of this argument in the face of a claim to infallibility, I would reply that in any case the 1948 PBC *Letter* in no way implies any change in the Vatican’s position regarding the specific doctrine which interests us here.

If anything, the *Letter* implies the reverse: a decision not to change the doctrine regarding the origin of woman! First, it needs to be remembered that when the Biblical Commission sent this *Letter* to the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, it did so in response to a request: Cardinal Suhard had written asking the Commission to declare officially that three of its earlier responses—those of 1905, 1906 and 1909—were no longer binding on Catholic biblical scholars. He wanted them, in effect, to be simply ‘struck from the record.’ But the Commission, after it gained the personal approval of Pius XII,⁵⁸ replied in the negative to this bold request. This is indicated politely in the 1948 *Letter* when it informs His Eminence that the PBC “does not believe there is any good reason—at least for the time being—to promulgate new decrees regarding these questions.”⁵⁹ What the PBC does instead is to point out that the earlier decrees themselves, to the extent that they are merely disciplinary in character, are already open to an interpretation which is broad or flexible enough to leave modern scholars a legitimate and necessary freedom of research, and to accommodate any genuine advances in biblical and other relevant sciences that have been achieved over the intervening forty years.⁶⁰

It would certainly be false to say, however, that everything in the 1909 *Response* was of a merely disciplinary character, open in principle to change in possible future decrees. The 1948 *Letter* implicitly recognizes this by stating that the “full liberty” of research accorded to biblical scholars by the magisterium must still be understood as being confined “within the limits of the traditional teaching of the Church.”⁶¹ And included within that “traditional teaching” were, obviously, each and every one of those doctrines specified in §3 of the 1909 *Response*, which are said to “involve the foundations of the Christian religion,” and which therefore “cannot be called in question” by Catholics. As well as the formation of Eve from Adam, these doctrines listed in §3 include such fundamental defined dogmas as God’s creation of all things at the beginning of time, original justice and original sin.⁶² In short, to claim that the 1948 PBC *Letter* casts any doubt on §3 in particular of its own earlier 1909 *Response* is gratuitous, and indeed, indefensible.⁶³ Moreover, such a claim in any case has little relevance to the precise thesis argued in this essay, which does not depend on the authority of the 1909 PBC *Response*. My claim, after all, is that the traditional doctrine of Eve’s formation had already reached infallible status many years before the Pontifical Biblical Commission even existed.

VI.4. It has also been claimed that doubt has been cast on my thesis by none other than the very conservative encyclical *Humani Generis*, promulgated by Pius XII in 1950.

VI.4.1. First, it is asked, why did the Pope fail to reassert the formation of Eve from Adam’s side in this document? The natural response would be, first, that an appeal to a Pope’s mere silence, in a given document, is scarcely the kind of argument that can overturn a carefully developed case for the infallibility of that doctrine (especially if, as in this case, the Pope in question had in fact reaffirmed it only nine years previously). Also, it needs to be noted that Pius XII expressed no intention in *Humani Generis* of explicitly censuring every specific doctrinal error that might have been circulating at that time. For all we know, the Pope may have thought either that dissent from the doctrine on Eve did not seem to be very widespread anyway, or, that if it was, it was referred to generically in his censure of excessively liberal opinions—often appealing wrongly to the 1948 PBC *Letter!*—on the historicity of Old Testament books, particularly the early chapters of Genesis.⁶⁴

VI.4.2. Secondly, it has been claimed that the Pope’s very observations on these first eleven chapters of Genesis suggest that he is calling in question the true historicity of the particular verses telling of the formation of Eve from Adam’s side. This alleged ‘demythologizing’ is supposed to be somehow implied in Pius XII’s teaching that these chapters give what he calls a “popular description” of human and Israelite origins, in “simple and metaphorical [or figurative, Lat. *figurata*] language adapted to the mentality of a people but little cultured.” Again, there are excellent reasons for rejecting this interpretation of *Humani Generis*. First, what we have said above about the 1948 *Letter* in VI. 3 above applies with even greater force here. As we saw, that *Letter* itself, approved by the Pope, provides not the slightest objective basis for casting doubt on the doctrine in question, which Pius XII himself had explicitly reasserted before an audience of scientists only seven years earlier. How, then, can the same Pope plausibly be interpreted as intending to cast doubt on it only two years after the 1948 *Letter*, in an encyclical wherein he actually makes a point of rebuking false, excessively liberal, interpretations of that document—particularly in regard to its teaching on Genesis, chapters 1-11, which he now reaffirms as being “history in a true sense”? Furthermore, the very words of *Humani Generis* which my critics consider ‘innovative’ in character, and which they therefore adduce as evidence against my thesis, in fact do nothing more than repeat, substantially, what the PBC had already taught in its 1909 *Response*—and indeed, with more detail than we find in the 1950 document! Like Pius XII in 1950, the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1909 had already denied that we should expect modern or scientifically exact terminology in these ancient narratives, and had noted that the inspired author’s intention was “to hand down popular information to his own race, according to the forms of speech common at that time, and accommodated to the sense-experience and intellectual level of ordinary people.”⁶⁵ Like Pius XII in 1950, the same 1909 decision already freely acknowledged that not everything in Genesis 1-3 is to be taken literally, since those chapters contain expressions which are “manifestly” used in a way that is “metaphorical” or “anthropomorphic” (cf. DS 3516). In short, the ‘new development’ of doctrine that we are often told took place between 1909 and 1950, with regard to the literary genre of Genesis 1-3, is basically non-existent.

Now, the 1909 *Response* also insists, of course, on the “literal, historical sense” of (amongst other texts) Gen. 2:21-22, describing the “formation of the first woman from the first man.” Therefore, since the PBC’s clarifications in the year 1909 about the literary genre of Genesis 1-3 were still perfectly compatible with its upholding simultaneously the thesis that Gen. 2:21-22 is essentially historical in character, then, clearly, Pope Plus XII’s substantial repetition of those clarifications in the year 1950 can scarcely be interpreted as casting doubt on that same thesis.

VI.5. Finally, it has been objected against my thesis that the present Supreme Pontiff, John Paul II, has not only failed to reaffirm the traditional doctrine concerning Eve’s formation, but has implicitly denied it on two occasions.

The first of the occasions referred to was the Pope’s Wednesday general audience allocution of 7 November 1979. In the course of commenting on the second chapter of Genesis, the Holy Father made the following observations on Gen. 2:21-22:

The woman is fashioned “with the rib” that God-Yahweh had taken from the man. Considering the archaic, metaphorical and imaginative manner in which the thought is expressed, we can establish that this passage has to do with the homogeneity of the total being of both persons.⁶⁶

It appears to this writer quite unwarranted to conclude from these remarks that John Paul II is necessarily implying a negation of the traditional doctrine we are defending in this essay. In the first place, the context of the Pope’s observations needs to be kept in mind. This was one of a unified series of Wednesday allocutions, beginning on September 12, 1979 and continuing till April 2, 1980, of which the overall theme was precisely that alluded to by the Pope in the above statement: the unity of man and woman.⁶⁷ Neither in this allocution nor in any others of the series was the Holy Father setting out to address, in the light of modern evolutionary claims, the question of the historicity of the Genesis accounts of how the first human bodies were formed. Rather, the Pope consistently prescinded from that issue, and focused his teaching on the spiritual, anthropological and moral dimensions of these first chapters of the Bible. Thus, the mere fact that he observes here that Gen. 2:21-22 “concerns” or “has to do with” (Italian “trattarsi di”) the general theme of this series of talks—“homogeneity” between man and woman—in no way implies that this anthropological truth is the only truth contained in the said Genesis text, i.e., that the text has little or no historical truth.

The Pope says indeed that this anthropological conclusion is drawn (at least partially) from a consideration of what he calls “the archaic, metaphorical and imaginative manner in which the thought is expressed.” But these adjectives are quite compatible with a classical reading of the text. We have already noted that from patristic times onwards Catholic exegetes have recognized a certain amount of figurative, anthropomorphic symbolism in these texts which by no means detracts from their substantial historicity. And that kind of linguistic expression, applied to God, can legitimately be described as “archaic” (‘ancient’ or ‘antiquated’), as it is not found in the most recent pre-Christian Scriptures or in the New Testament. The Hebrew word *tselaj*, as we noted at the outset, can mean either “rib” or “side,” and the fact that the Pope’s written text here places the phrase “with the rib” in quotation marks need not imply anything more than a recognition of this element of vagueness or ambiguity. As regards the language being “metaphorical and imaginative” as well as “archaic,” the Holy Father’s address by no means manifests any intention on his part to apply these adjectives in such a radical way as to deny the substantial historical substratum of the passage. Indeed, certain such symbolic elements in the language of these verses have never been denied by any traditional Catholic commentator. If given a slavishly literal interpretation,⁶⁸ they would awaken a mental image of the Creator, in the manner of a potter or sculptor, physically ‘moulding,’ ‘fashioning’ or ‘building’ (Vulgate *aedificavit*) the woman’s body from the extracted “rib.” Then, having completed this task, the Lord God would be imagined engaging in local motion, walking beside Eve—perhaps taking her by the hand—as He ‘leads her’ or ‘brings her’ (Vulgate *adduxit eam*) to Adam, just as He subsequently (3:8) “walks in the garden in the cool of the day” (Vulgate *deambulantis in paradiso ad auram post meridiem*).

These same considerations are equally relevant—and indeed, almost sufficient—as a reply to the similar objection to our thesis based on another intervention of the present Pontiff. In the 1988 Apostolic Exhortation *Mulieris Dignitatem*, §6, the Pope comments as follows on this passage after referring to the preceding creation account of Genesis 1:

The second description of the creation of man (cf. Gen. 2:18-25) makes use of different language to express the truth about the creation of man, and especially of woman. In a sense the language is less precise, and, one might say, more descriptive and metaphorical, closer to the language of the myths known at the time.⁶⁹

Here again, the context of these papal observations is important. They are part of a discourse (a chapter entitled “The Image and Likeness of God”) whose formal object is by no means the question of just how much (and what sort of) historical content we should recognize in this Genesis text at a time when the dominant secular scientific consensus pressures us to accept an evolutionary scenario as the ‘true history’ of both man’s and woman’s origins. Rather, as in the Pope’s 1979 allocution, his teaching emphasis here in *Mulieris Dignitatem* prescind from such questions and focuses on what we can learn from Genesis about the personal dignity and complementarity of man and woman, especially in marriage, and their relationship to God. The Pontiff’s only reason for mentioning, in passing, the differing literary characteristics of the accounts of human origins found in Genesis 1 and 2 respectively is to point out (immediately after the passage cited above) that in spite of such differences, “there is no essential contradiction between the two texts.” It should be stressed that, in saying that the language of the “second description” is “closer to the language of the myths known at that time” (emphasis added), the Pope is not saying or implying that Genesis 2 is itself a “myth.” His remark is certainly true, since the kind of anthropomorphisms we have noted in that chapter are not in fact found in the previous one (cf. Gen. 1:26-30) and they are indeed “closer to” (but not nearly as crude as) the grossly anthropomorphic representations of pagan divinities found in the creation myths of the Babylonians and other ancient peoples of that era. (Recognizing this relative similitude does not imply that the Genesis 2 accounts were written under the influence of such pagan mythologies, as many ‘higher critics’ contend. Common elements in the mode of thinking and writing of these ancient Near Eastern cultures could well account for the degree of similarity that exists.)

Over and above these reasons for seeing no conflict between the thesis of this essay and the teachings of John Paul II, it should be added that, in any case, it seems certain that the Holy Father himself would agree that his comments on the literary form of Genesis 2:21-22 make no pretense at being definitive, and that it was not his intention to require the assent of the faithful to the exegetical observations expressed in those comments, as if this were in itself a teaching of faith or morals. The guarded and tentative language used by the Pope, especially in the more authoritative document (the Apostolic Exhortation), make this clear: “In a sense the language is less precise . . .”; “one might say, . . . closer to the language of the myths . . .”

VI.6. Finally, we should consider the most recent and most authoritative teaching of John Paul II’s pontificate on the question that interests us, namely, that found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992). The *Catechism* discusses the Genesis account of the origin of woman, and does so without any implication that the traditional doctrine of Eve’s formation from Adam’s side might be unhistorical. It is true that in article 371 (the main pertinent passage) the *Catechism*, like John Paul II’s personal observations on this point, gives more stress to the spiritual and moral significance of woman’s formation from man rather than to its historicity as such. This, as well as other points narrated in the relevant verses of Genesis 2, are said to teach us the intimate communion and complementarity of man and woman. But in referring to this supernatural mode of formation, the *Catechism* in no way states or suggests that the Genesis text is at this point substantially ‘metaphorical,’ ‘symbolic,’ or ‘figurative,’ or in other words, unhistorical. Article 371 in its entirety reads as follows (with emphasis added):

God created man and woman together and willed each for the other. The Word of God gives us to understand this through various features of the sacred text. “It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.” None of the animals can be man’s partner. The woman God “fashions” from the man’s rib and brings to him elicits on the man’s part a cry of wonder, an exclamation of love and communion: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Man discovers woman as another “I,” sharing the same humanity.

Some might argue that the *Catechism*’s use of the present tense here, rather than the past, could be taken to insinuate a non-historical interpretation of the corresponding biblical text. But this suggestion would be gratuitous, given that the *Catechism* (following a usage which is more common in some other languages than it is in English) frequently uses the ‘historic present’ tense in other passages where past realities of biblical history are most certainly intended and affirmed.⁷⁰

Again, it might perhaps be claimed that the *Catechism* sees the Genesis creation narratives (chapters 1 and 2) as being globally or generally “symbolic” in character, so that this adjective would implicitly encompass what is said about the formation of Eve. There is, however, no such sweeping generalization in the *Catechism*—a generalization which would contradict (among other magisterial statements) Pius XII’s insistence in *Humani Generis* that these narratives are “history in a true sense.” It is true that the *Catechism* uses the word “symbolic” (and related words) four times in relation to the creation accounts; but never is the scope of these words all-encompassing, and they are always applied in such a way as to be compatible, not only with *Humani Generis*, but even with the 1909 *Responsum* of the Pontifical Biblical Commission. This is worth demonstrating in detail.

VI.6.1. The first instance is in §337, where we read that “Scripture presents the work of the Creator symbolically as a succession of six days of divine ‘work,’ concluded by the ‘rest’ of the seventh day (Gen. 1:1-2:4).” Not only does the word “symbolically” here refer to nothing in Genesis coming after the so-called first Creation account, but the only expressions which the *Catechism* places in quotations marks here, as if to underline their figurative or symbolic character, are “work” and “rest.” This is quite in harmony with the Church’s constant recognition, from the patristic era onwards, that the inspired text of Genesis describes some divine actions in figurative, anthropomorphic terms.⁷¹

VI.6.2. The second instance is in §362, where the *Catechism* states:

The human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual. The biblical account expresses this reality in symbolic language when it affirms that “then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” Man, whole and entire, is therefore willed by God.

This passage of the *Catechism*, emphasizing the spiritual as well as corporeal nature of man, is also entirely compatible with the traditional and patristic understanding that the Creator’s act of “breathing” into Adam the “breath of life” is a symbol for the infusion of a spiritual soul. Far from implying an equally ‘symbolic’ reading of the subsequent text regarding the origin of woman, this understanding of Gen. 2:7 is quite in harmony with a substantially historical reading of 2:21-22, as we saw in the draft text prepared for Vatican Council 1.⁷²

VI.6.3. The *Catechism*’s third reference to ‘symbolism’ in Genesis 1-2 is in §375, where we read: “The Church, interpreting the symbolism of biblical language in an authentic way, in the light of the New Testament and Tradition, teaches that our first parents, Adam and Eve, were constituted in an original ‘state of holiness and justice.’” No specific Genesis texts are cited here, but presumably the most relevant one would be 2:17 (especially read in the light of 3:5), where the man is forbidden to eat of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” Indeed, this has generally been taken by classical commentators to symbolize the fact that, prior to disobeying this divine precept, man had no personal experience of evil, i.e., was originally holy and just. Likewise, 2:25, in the light of 3:7, is relevant: the original lack of shame in nakedness also symbolizes the state of original justice, wherein the disorder of concupiscence was absent.

VI.6.4. In its fourth and final reference to ‘symbolism’ in Genesis, the *Catechism* effectively confirms what we have just said in relation to §375. We read in §396, which speaks of the original test of man’s obedience to God: “The ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ symbolically evokes the insurmountable limits that man, as a creature, must freely recognize and respect with trust. Man is dependent on his Creator and subject to the laws of creation and to the moral norms that govern the use of freedom.” Again, this kind of “symbolic” understanding of Gen. 2:17 is entirely in accord with the ancient and constant tradition of the Catholic Church.

VI.6.5. In reading the *Catechism*, one also needs to keep in mind its own general affirmation in the Prologue that it sets out to present the essentials of Catholic doctrine not only on the basis of the most recent papal or Vatican documents, but “in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the whole of the Church’s Tradition . . . the Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy and the Church’s Magisterium” (§11, emphasis added). Thus, given the constant tradition of the Church from patristic times right through to *Humani Generis* that the Creation narratives—and especially the second chapter of Genesis⁷³—are fundamentally historical in character, it seems entirely reasonable to interpret the *Catechism* as intending to ascribe definitely a ‘symbolic’ or figurative meaning only to those specific expressions in Genesis which it clearly designates as such.

Let us apply that hermeneutical norm to the particular case of article 371, which deals with the origin of woman. As we have already noted, the emphasis in this article is upon the ‘timeless’ anthropological and spiritual significance of the man-woman relationship (“‘Each for the other’—‘A unity in two,’” as the sub-heading preceding §371 puts it). Nevertheless, we may conclude from the absence of any mention of symbolism, metaphor, or figurative language that the *Catechism* is implicitly presenting here, in line with Tradition, an essentially historical reading for this Genesis passage which it paraphrases.⁷⁴ I use the word “essentially” here in a restrictive sense, because the *Catechism* does in fact indicate one ‘symbolic’ or figurative element in the Genesis account of the first woman’s formation. This indication, however, actually strengthens, rather than weakens, our case that the *Catechism* is quietly upholding the historicity of Eve’s origin from Adam’s side. As can be readily seen from our above citation of article 371, the one word “fashions” in this statement (*efformat* in the definitive Latin version of the *Catechism*) is placed in quotation marks, signaling imagery or metaphor of some sort. And that is perfectly in accord with Tradition, as we have already pointed out above in discussing Pope John Paul II’s observations on this Genesis text. But the very fact that the *Catechism* deliberately limits its quotation marks to the word “fashions,” and does not extend them to the following words (“from the man’s rib”), speaks for itself, reinforcing our contention that the Church is here presenting those words as historical in character.

VI.6.6. Finally, it is also worth noting that in reaffirming the monogenistic origin of the human race in §360, the *Catechism* adopts the more common textual reading of Acts 17:26, wherein Paul’s words to the Athenians, which are cited here, imply the literal formation of woman from man which he has asserted in I Corinthians 11: “From one ancestor [God] made all nations to inhabit the whole earth.”⁷⁵

Conclusion

The mere reserve, or near-silence, of Catholic magisterial documents in recent decades regarding the historicity of Genesis 2:21-22 does not constitute a serious theological basis for considering nullified, overruled or ‘out-dated’ the great weight of evidence, from Scripture, Tradition, Magisterium and natural reasoning, for our contention that the essential historicity of this text is a definitive, infallibly-proposed part of Catholic doctrine. Such reserve is humanly understandable in the light of the massive (though, as we have argued, rationally unwarranted) consensus of the contemporary scientific elite or ‘establishment,’ which today pressures all of us simply to take for granted the evolutionary origins of both man and woman. Also, it should be kept in mind that since the doctrine which interests us here has never been considered especially high up in what Vatican Council II calls the “hierarchy of truths” contained in (or connected with) the deposit of faith, it is not the kind of doctrine that, by its very nature, needs to be repeated in every age with great frequency in the Church’s teaching and preaching.

When any part of infallible Catholic doctrine comes to be widely neglected, questioned and even denied, however, it is for that very reason timely, and the task of responsible theology, to reassert and defend the endangered truth in question. We may thus conclude by repeating the thesis enunciated at the beginning of this study: since the year 1880 at the latest, it has been, and so will forever remain, true to affirm the following: *definitive tenendum est mulierem primam vere et historice formatam esse a Deo e latere primi viri dormientis*. And this truth of Catholic doctrine, if it regains its rightful recognition among the People of God after a half-century or more of relative oblivion, will necessarily have some impact on our understanding of a closely-related question which we have deliberately not touched upon at all in this essay: the origin of the body of the first man, Adam. Karl Rahner, among others, has said that once we accept an evolutionary origin for the male human being, we can scarcely deny it for the female. On the basis of that kind of logic—which may or may not be watertight—the reverse would appear to be an equally valid inference: that is, once Catholics return to recognizing the non-evolutionary origin of the female human being as a truth taught by God’s Word, they can scarcely uphold an evolutionary origin for the male. Whether or not such inferences are in fact valid would be an interesting and timely subject for another article.

NOTES

¹Gen. 2:21-23, *New American Bible* translation.

²It is probable that Paul implicitly confirmed his repeated assertion to the Corinthians in his speech to the Athenians, which includes the proclamation, in a statement clearly intended as historical, that “God has made the whole human race *from one*” (Acts 17:26). The meaning would clearly be “from one *man*,” reflecting the Apostle’s understanding that the first woman, as much as the rest of the human race, came physically from Adam. However, some textual variants have “from one *blood*,” which would be less conclusive in this respect. A similar textual uncertainty weakens the force of Sirach 17:5, which many classical writers, including Aquinas (*ST*, Ia, Q. 92, a. 2, *sed contra*), cite as further biblical proof of Eve’s formation from Adam. This verse, which begins, “And [God] created *from him* [i.e., from the first man] a helpmate similar to him,” is absent in some important manuscripts.

³“*Nec enim toleranda est eorum ratio, qui ex istis difficultatibus sese expediunt, id nimirum dare non dubitantes, inspirationem divinam ad res fidei morumque, nihil praeterea, pertinere, eo quod falso arbitrentur, de veritate sententiarum cum agitur, non adeo exquirendum quatenam dixerit Deus, ut non magis perpendatur, quam ob causam ea dixerit*” (DS 3291 [EB 124], emphasis added for the lines given in English above).

⁴One could almost imagine finding the following entry in a certain type of modern catechism:

Q. When is an affirmation not an affirmation?

A. When it’s subordinate to a higher or more fundamental affirmation.

No one, of course, would ever think for a moment of playing this preposterous hermeneutical game with any piece of merely human literature; for in the case of any work other than the Bible, no one feels obligated to pay even lip-service to its “inerrancy.” Could we imagine any historian replying to an unfavorable review of one of his books along the following lines? “This is unfair! This reviewer has employed a blatantly fundamentalist approach in interpreting my book! Those historically inexact details he highlights aren’t ‘errors,’ for crying out loud! I don’t really affirm any of them! They’re all just mentioned in passing! My only true purpose and intention in those passages is to affirm the broad sweep or outline of events in that historical period, and to present an overall thesis regarding their root causes.”

⁵The original text of the last twenty-five words in the above English translation is “. . . *quid hagiographi reapse significare intenderint et eorum verbis manifestare Deo placuerit*.” In the Abbott version of the Council documents, this sentence is incorrectly translated as though it had another “*quid*” between “*et*” and “*eorum*”: the Council is made to say that interpreters should carefully investigate “what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words”

(W.M. Abbott [ed.], *The Documents of Vatican II* [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967] p. 120). This of course favors the false distinction criticized in our main text above.

⁶Cf. *Contra Celsum*, 1, IV, ch. 38, in Migne, *PG*, vol. VIII, n. 530, p. 631.

⁷Cf. *De Gen. contra Manich.*, II, 12, 17.

⁸Cf. *De Gen. ad Litteram*, VIII, 2.

⁹Cf. *De Gen. ad Litteram*, IX, 15-16; *De Civitate Dei*, XII, 21, 23, 27; *In Joannem*, Tract. IX, 10; *In Psalm. 56*, 11. For this research into St. Augustine's position I am indebted to G. Van Noort, *De Deo Creatore*, 2nd. ed. (Amsterdam: Van Langenhuisen, 1912), 116-117, note 2.

¹⁰“*Si comprende allora quanto sia importante lo studio dei Padri per una più profonda intelligenza della Sacra Scrittura, e come sia decisivo per la Chiesa il loro accordo sull'interpretazione della medesima*” (*AAS* 62 [1970], 425).

¹¹*AAS* 67 (1975), 470-471. Paul VI then goes on to quote a number of passages from various Council documents stressing the perennial importance of Patristic studies.

¹²Cajetan objected that if Adam began with an extra rib, he would have been a ‘monster’—something which God would never create; but if, on the other hand, Adam was created with the normal number of ribs, then, argued Cajetan, he was left mutilated by God after the creation of Eve—something equally unjust and absurd before sin merited any kind of penalty (cf. Cajetan's *Commentarii*, Vol. I, p. 22). But the ‘Angelic Doctor’ had already answered that objection to the satisfaction of all other classical theologians. Aquinas argued that Adam was indeed created with one more rib than a perfectly formed man needs for his own individual well-being. But this did not make the first man a “monster” with a superfluous body part. Rather, the extra rib was given to him uniquely, for the sake of the species; for, in view of his own headship of the race, the first woman too was to be formed from his own substance. St. Thomas sees this as analogous with a man's semen, which is not given for the sake of his own bodily life, but for continuing the life of the species. Its release and loss from the individual for procreative purposes is no ‘mutilation’; and so, reasons Thomas, neither would the loss of Adam's rib for the sake of the new species have constituted any kind of penalty or mutilation. (Cf. *ST*, Ia, Q. 92, a. 3, ad. 2 & 3).

¹³Cf. Van Noort, *loc. cit.*

¹⁴“ . . . *ad universum populum Dei*” (note prior to DS 444). According to the editorial note introducing the earlier epistle addressed only to the king (DS 441-443), it was in the subsequent (universal) epistle that “*Fides* [the Pope's profession of faith], seems to have appeared for the first time in its entirety, that is, with a repetition of the text presented below (. . . *in hac altera ep. primum Fides qua tota exstitisse videtur, repetito scl. textu infra posito*)” That “text presented below” includes the statement about Adam and Eve cited in note 15 below.

¹⁵“*Omnes enim homines ab Adam usque ad consummationem saeculi natos et mortuos cum ipso Adam eiusque uxore, qui non ex aliis parentibus nati sunt, sed alter de terra, alter [altera] autem de costa viri creati sunt, tunc resurrecturos esse confiteor et adstare ante tribunal Christi . . .*” (DS 443, emphasis added).

¹⁶In fact, none of those many theologians this writer has consulted refers to Pope Pelagius' intervention.

¹⁷The text of this *Sollemnis Professio Fidei* is to be found in *AAS* 60 (1968), 436-445. The Index to this volume of *AAS*, on p. 833, ranks this document ahead of both the Decretal Letters and Encyclical Letter (*Humanae Vitae*) published in the same year. Moreover, the Pope implicitly confirmed this evaluation of its importance ten years later, in the last public homily before his death. Reviewing the major acts of his pontificate, he recalled how he had constantly sought to hand on the authentic and orthodox faith, and mentioned a number of leading Encyclicals and Apostolic Exhortations. But then he added: “But above all We do not wish to forget our Profession of Faith—the *Credo of the People of God*—which, just ten years ago, on 30 June 1968, We solemnly pronounced in the name of the whole Church and as a commitment of the whole Church. This was in order to recall, reaffirm, and re-emphasize the main points of the Church's own faith, as they have been proclaimed by the most important Ecumenical Councils, at a moment when facile experimentations in doctrine seemed to be shaking the

faith of both priests and laity, thus calling for a return to the sources.” (Homily for Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, 29 June 1978, *AAS* 70 [1978], 396, present writer’s translation)

¹⁸“ . . . *emisso iam spiritu perforari lancea sustinuit latus suum, ut exinde profluentibus undis aquae et sanguinis formaretur unica et immaculata ac virgo sancta mater Ecclesia, coniux Christi, sicut de latere primi hominis soporati Eva sibi in coniugium est formata, ut sic certae figurae primi et veteris Adae, qui secundum Apostolum ‘est forma futuri’ [cf. Rom. 5:14], in nostro novissimo Adam, id est Christo, veritas responderet*” (DS 901, = D 480, emphasis added).

¹⁹*An Illustrated and Comprehensive Catholic Bible Dictionary and Comprehensive History of the Books of the Holy Catholic Bible* (Boston: E.W. Sawyer, 1881 ed., reproduced in facsimile edition by Catholic Treasures [Monrovia, California: 1991]). The book was originally published, it seems, in the 1850s or early 1860s (Wiseman, named among the endorsing prelates as Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, held that position from 1850 to 1865).

²⁰Cf. *ibid.*, 6.

²¹*Ibid.*, 45.

²²*Ibid.*, 3-4, second part of book, emphasis added. (The page numbering for the “Comprehensive History” of the biblical books begins again from 1 after 128, where the dictionary section, with entries in alphabetical order, finishes.)

²³“*Haec credit et praedicat Sancta Mater Ecclesia: Facturus Deus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem suam, ut praeesset universae terrae, corpori de limo terrae formato inspiravit spiraculum vitae, animam scilicet de nihilo productam. . . . Primo autem homini et Hevae uxori, e costa eius divinitus formatae, benedicens ait: Multiplicamini et replete terram (Gen. 1, 28)*” (*Schema reformatus constitutionis de doctrina catholica*, ch. 2, emphasis added). This text can be found in *Acta et Decreta Sacrorum Conciliorum Recentiorum: Collectio Lacensis*, Vol. VII (Freiburg: Herder, 1890), cc. 554-555.

²⁴“Having carefully considered everything, the deputed Fathers are of the view that the doctrine in the proposed schema should be retained, while the form in which it is expressed can be changed (*Omnibus perpensis Patribus deputatis visum est, ut doctrina in schemate proposita retineretur, ratio vero eam proponendi immutaretur*)” (*Collectio Lacensis, op. cit.*, c. 78).

²⁵“ . . . *Adam, . . . cum uxore sua Heva matre cunctorum viventium*” (*ibid.*, c. 515).

²⁶Cf. B.W. Harrison, “Did the Human Body Evolve Naturally? A Forgotten Papal Declaration,” *Living Tradition* 73-74, January/March 1998, 1-20. (The article can also be found online at the Roman Theological Forum website: www.rtforum.org.) A slightly abbreviated version of this article was published as “A Forgotten Papal Declaration on Human Origins,” *The Latin Mass*, Summer 1999, 106-117. Apart from these publications of my own, and others quoting them, I have since found only one fleeting mention of the *Arcanum* passage in other published works on creation: referring to St. Augustine’s view that the formation of Eve from Adam’s side was “a sacred symbol, a *magnum mysterium*, of something which was to be realized in the order of Redemption,” Fr. E.C. Messenger (*Evolution and Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1932) simply remarks—without any footnote references or actual citation from *Arcanum*—that this point “is clear in tradition from St. Paul down to the Encyclical *Arcanum* of Leo XIII” (264). Messenger strongly defended the evolution of Adam, but recognized that it would be unorthodox to extend such a theory to the origin of Eve.

²⁷§5 begins as follows: “*Constat inter omnes, Venerabiles Fratres, quae vera sit matrimonii origo.—Quamvis enim fidei christianae vituperatores perpetuam hac de re doctrinam Ecclesiae fugiant agnoscere, et memoriam omnium gentium, omnium saeculorum delere iamdiu contendant, vim tamen lucemque veritatis nec extinguere nec debilitare potuerunt. Nota omnibus et nemini dubia commemoramus; posteaquam sexto creationis die formavit Deus hominem de limo terra, et inspiravit in faciem eius spiraculum vitae, sociam illi voluit adiungere, quam de latere viri ipsius dormientis mirabiliter eduxit. Qua in re hoc voluit providentissimus Deus, ut illud par coniugum esset cunctorum hominum naturale principium, ex quo scilicet propagari humanum genus, et, numquam intermissis procreationibus conservari in omne tempus oporteret. Atque illa viri et mulieris coniunctio, quo sapientissimis Dei consiliis responderet aptius, vel ex eo tempore duas potissimum, easque in primis nobiles, quasi alte impressas et insculptas prae se tulit proprietates, nimirum unitatem et perpetuitatem*”

(*Acta Sanctae Sedis* 12 [1879-1880], 386, emphasis added). The above English translation is that of the present writer.

²⁸Those words can also refer to male animals, but the context makes it clear when they refer to humans. Cf., for example: the reference to Gen. 17:23 in the preceding footnote (some infants would probably have been among the *mares* whom Abraham circumcised); the Vulgate version of I Kings 11:15: “*cum . . . occidisset omne masculinum in Idumea*” (“. . . had killed every male in Idumea”); and of Exodus 1:16-17, where the infant Hebrew boys ordered to be killed by Pharaoh are referred to as *masculus* and *mares*.

²⁹Cf. under *vir* in Lewis & Short’s standard *Latin Dictionary*. Even though *vir* is initially defined here as meaning “a male person, a man,” the many examples given to show the different usages of this word in classical Latin indicate that it practically always means an *adult* “male person.” At the very end of their lengthy treatment (subdivision ‘G’), Lewis & Short quote a couple of rare poetic usages of the plural (*virī*) in which the word means the same as *homines*, that is, human beings in general, prescinding from sex. This seems to be the case in one unusual expression found in the Latin Vulgate, where we read in Gen. 17:23 that Abraham circumcised *cunctos mares ex omnibus viris domus suae*, literally, “all the males among the men of his house.” Since there could be no *females* among “the men” of his house, the expression would be tautological unless *viris* here means “people” in general. Apart from this, my computer-assisted search of the Vulgate text does not unearth any instance in which *vir* would clearly be meant broadly enough to include a male infant or embryo as well as an adult. It has been drawn to my attention that John Paul II, in *Mulieris Dignitatem* §7, arguably uses *vir* in the more comprehensive sense; but this example is far from clear-cut. What the Holy Father says here is: “*Homo—sive vir sive mulier—unica est creaturarum mundi visibilis, quam Deus Creator ‘propter seipsam voluit’*” (“Man—whether man or woman—is the only being among the creatures of the visible world that God the Creator ‘has willed for its own sake’”). It is clear, indeed, that the Pope is talking about human beings of any age; but the principal subject of the main verb here is “*Homo*,” which of course very frequently means “man” in the broader sense. The Pope adds “*sive vir sive mulier*” merely as a parenthetical after-thought, just to clarify that he does not mean “*Homo*” in the narrower, exclusively masculine sense.

³⁰DS 3514 (= D 2123), emphasis added.

³¹As far as the present writer can discover, the first Catholic who suggested that Adam and Eve may have been twins was J. Paquier, in his book *La Création et l’Evolution, la Révélation et la Science* (Paris: Gabalda, 1932), 132. Paquier is cited to this effect by J. Gross (“The Problem of Origins in Recent Theology”) in the post-war sequel to Messenger’s *Evolution and Theology*. Cf. E.C. Messenger (ed.), *Theology and Evolution* (London & Glasgow: Sands & Co., 1950), 144.

³²Teilhard (*The Phenomenon of Man*, tr. B. Wall (New York: Harper & Bros., 1959, 185, note) is paraphrased in these words by D. Bonnette in *Origin of the Human Species* (Amsterdam & Atlanta, Rodopi, 2001, 114).

³³“*Sin tamen dissenserint, quemadmodum se gerat theologus, summatim est regula ab eodem oblata: Quidquid, inquit, ipsi de natura rerum veracibus documentis demonstrare potuerint, ostendamus nostris Litteris non esse contrarium; quidquid autem de quibuslibet suis voluminibus his nostris Litteris, idest catholicae fidei, contrarium protulerint, aut aliqua etiam facultate ostendamus, aut nulla dubitatione credamus esse falsissimum*” (EB 121, referenced in note 5 to *Dei Verbum* §11).

³⁴“*. . . communionis nexum inter se et cum Successore Petri servantes.*”

³⁵“*. . . authentice res fidei et morum docentes.*” Following the usage of St. Thomas and mediaeval Latin, *authentice* could also be translated as “authoritatively” (cf. M.-D. Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* [Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1964] 129-132).

³⁶Cf. above, section III.1.

³⁷Cf. DS 900, and section III.2 above.

³⁸Indeed, so strong is the similarity between the wording Pope Leo uses about the first male and female human bodies and that of the draft statement of Vatican I cited above that one suspects he was intending to finish off the incomplete work of the Council on this point by the exercise of his own personal authority.

³⁹Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §88 and §2035, with the latter's footnote references.

⁴⁰“*Fidei catholicae fundamento, praeter quod, teste Apostolo, nemo potest aliud ponere, firmiter inhaerentes, aperte cum sancta matre Ecclesia confitemur . . .*” (DS 900, = D 480).

⁴¹Cf. DS 901 (= D 480).

⁴²Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano* [daily Italian ed.], 30 June/1 July 1998, 5, present writer's translation.

⁴³Cf. Luke 22:32.

⁴⁴This was reasserted by Pius XII in *Humani Generis* and confirmed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in its treatment of original sin: cf. DS 3897, referenced in CCC §390.

⁴⁵Cf. Heb. 6:1.

⁴⁶Cf. AAS 87 (1995), §57 (P. 465); §62 (P. 472); §65 (P. 477).

⁴⁷Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Nota doctrinalis Professionis fidei formulam extremam enucleans* (29 June 1998): “*Idcirco, cum de aliqua doctrina nullum in forma sollemni definitionis exstet iudicium, sed eadem a Magisterio ordinario et universali in cuius numerum Papa necessarie confertur doceatur quippe quae ad patrimonium **depositi fidei** respiciat, intellegenda est tunc tamquam infallibiliter proposita. Ergo Romani Pontificis **declaratio confirmandi seu iterum affirmandi actus dogmatizationis novus non est, sed confirmatio formalis veritatis ab Ecclesia iam obtentae atque infallibiliter traditae**” (*L'Osservatore Romano* [daily Italian ed.], 30 June/1 July 1998, p. 5, emphasis in original).*

⁴⁸As well as direct evidence regarding what, specifically, the world's Catholic bishops teach as “to be held definitively,” indirect evidence can be found in the teaching which Catholic bishops officially approve and authorize in their dioceses, especially in the form of theological textbooks widely approved around the world in seminaries and faculties of theology under episcopal control. Ford and Grisez, in their classic essay demonstrating the infallibility of the ordinary magisterial teaching against contraception, also appeal to this source. Cf. John C. Ford, S.J. & Germain Grisez, “Contraception and the Infallibility of the Ordinary Magisterium” (*Theological Studies* 39 [June 1978] 258-312). In this sense, theologians of renown actually share in the Church's magisterial function even if they are not bishops. Blessed Pope Pius IX makes this clear in his 1863 epistle *Tuas libenter*, insisting that the faithful must assent not only to papal and conciliar decrees but also to those doctrines which the universal Church's ordinary magisterium proposes as divinely revealed, “and which are therefore regarded as belonging to the faith by a universal and constant consensus of Catholic theologians” (“ . . . quae . . . universali et constanti consensu a catholicis theologis ad fidem pertinere retinentur” [DS 2879, = D 1683]). The Pope clearly means that this kind of theological consensus is a good guide as to what the universal and ordinary magisterium of popes and bishops does *in fact* propose, since a certain professional expertise is often necessary in order to evaluate difficult questions of that sort.

⁴⁹Cf. note 2 above.

⁵⁰*De Opere Sex Dierum*, 1, 3. ch. 1, nos. 4 and 6.

⁵¹*De Deo Creatore*, part 3, ch. 1, p. 1. This and the preceding reference are furnished by Cardinal Camillo Mazzella, *De Deo Creante*, 4th ed. (Rome: Forzani, 1896), 353. Mazzella had been a theology professor at the Roman diocesan seminary.

⁵²*De Deo Trino et Creatore* (Turin & Paris: Marietti & Desclée, 1944), 413.

⁵³Boyer justifies this theological note simply by stating that the teaching is “clearly contained in Scripture and the Church's magisterium.” Cf. *De Deo Creante et Elevante* (Rome: Gregorian, 1940), 209.

⁵⁴“ . . . ut excludens omnem transformismum” (J.M. Dalmau & J.F. Sagüés, *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, Vol. II [Madrid: B.A.C., 1952], p. 645).

⁵⁵One remembers, for example, how in the fourth century, Arianism still permeated the thinking of many bishops in communion with Rome long after the Council of Nicaea, and even touched Peter's See in the wavering of Pope Liberius. As is well-known, Pope John XXII in the fourteenth century repeatedly preached an unorthodox doctrine about the beatific vision. Even though the doctrine of infallibility had not yet been developed to the explicit form in which Vatican Council II expounds it, numerous theologians at that time were so clearly aware of the force and certainty with which the

orthodox doctrine had been handed down in Tradition that they respectfully protested, and finally persuaded John XXII to retract his error. Perhaps most shamefully of all (as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* now acknowledges with “regret” in §2298), Pope Innocent IV, in the Bull *Ad Extirpanda* of 1252, authorized the use of torture—stopping short only of mutilation or inducing danger of death—in order to force confessions from persons suspected of heresy (cf. *Lex 25* [§26] of the Bull [*Bullarium Romanum*, Vol. III {Turin: Franco, Fory & Dalmazzo, 1858}, 556]). So gross a papal error was committed even though this barbarous practice of ancient Roman law had been constantly eschewed by the Church throughout the first thousand years (or more) of her history, and had already been condemned as contrary to divine as well as human law by Innocent’s predecessor Pope St. Nicholas I in the ninth century (cf. the Response *Ad Consulta Vestra* [13 November 866] to the newly-evangelized Bulgarians, §86 [DS 648]). The continued endorsement of this cruel error, sad to say, stained the See of Peter for approximately five centuries after Innocent IV’s Bull.

⁵⁶Cf. B.W. Harrison, “The Encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus* in its Historical Context,” Part I, *Living Tradition*, No. 60, September 1995, 1-11; Part II, *Living Tradition*, No. 61, November 1995, 1-18. This article was reprinted in *Faith & Reason*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Spring 1997, 23-88. What Pius XII really did in *Divino Afflante Spiritu* was basically to recognize with magisterial authority certain sound and very moderate advances in Catholic biblical scholarship, the results of which had already been frequently published in the preceding decades without any censure from the Church’s magisterium. The Pope did not ‘open’ any doors which had been ‘closed’ until 1943, and in fact insists explicitly that the teaching of his predecessors Leo XIII and Benedict XV on biblical interpretation and inerrancy are permanently valid and must always be adhered to.

⁵⁷“ . . . Dio plasmò uomo e gli coronò la fronte del diadema della sua immagine e somiglianza. . . . Dall'uomo soltanto poteva venire un altro uomo che lo chiamasse padre e genitore; e l'aiuto dato da Dio al primo uomo viene pure da lui ed è carne della sua carne . . . che ha nome dell'uomo, perché da lui è stata tratta” (AAS 33 [1941] 506, emphasis added).

⁵⁸Details about this consultation between the Pope and Father (later Cardinal) Augustin Bea can be found in S. Schmidt, *Agostino Bea: il cardinale dell'unità* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1987). Bea was the scholar whose advice several Popes (Pius XII, John XXIII and Paul VI) most relied on in biblical matters.

⁵⁹“ . . . la Commission Biblique ne croit pas qu'il y a lieu de promulguer, du moins pour le moment, de nouveaux décrets à propos de ces questions” (DS 3862). In regard to the phrase “at least for the time being,” it is worth noting that more than half a century has since passed without any further magisterial decrees on the precise interpretation of Genesis 1-3.

⁶⁰Cf. *ibid.* In regard to the 1909 Response which interests us here, the PBC in 1948 clearly had in mind especially DS 3516 and 3518, in which the Commission had already acknowledged four decades earlier that not everything in Genesis 1-3 is to be taken literally, and that we should not expect modern or scientifically exact terminology in the popular style of these ancient narratives.

⁶¹“ . . . dans les limites de l'enseignement traditionnel de l'Eglise” (*ibid.*).

⁶²Cf. DS 3514 (= D 2123).

⁶³Pius XII himself was to “deplore,” only two years later in *Humani Generis*, the diffusion of unduly ‘liberal’ interpretations of this 1948 Letter which were undermining confidence in the historical books of the Old Testament. Cf. DS 3898 (= D 2329).

⁶⁴See preceding note.

⁶⁵“ . . . suae genti tradere notitiam popularem, prout communis sermo per ea ferebat tempora, sensibus et captui hominum accommodatam” (DS 3518).

⁶⁶“La donna è plasmata ‘con la costola’ che Dio-Jahvé aveva tolto all'uomo. Considerando il modo arcaico, metaforico e immaginoso di esprimere il pensiero, possiamo stabilire che si tratta qui di omogeneità di tutto l'essere di entrambi” (*L'Osservatore Romano* [daily Italian ed.], 8 November 1979, p. 1).

⁶⁷So clearly was this “homogeneity” the general theme of this series of discourses that the entire collection was subsequently published in English translation by the American Daughters of St. Paul in a small volume entitled *Original Unity of Man and Woman: Catechesis on the Book of Genesis* (advertised

on the back cover of a volume containing a subsequent series of John Paul II's allocutions, *Reflections on Humanae Vitae: Conjugal Morality and Spirituality* [Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1984]).

⁶⁸Some non-Catholic Bible-believers actually do interpret them thus. This writer has seen an article published recently by a Seventh-Day Adventist writer with a commentary on Genesis that clearly takes its anthropomorphisms literally. And, as is well-known, the standard doctrine of the Mormons (Latter-Day Saints) presents God the Father as a physical being of flesh and bone, largely on the basis of the Creation accounts and their reference to man as the "image and likeness of God."

⁶⁹"*In altera creationis descriptione (cf. Gn. 2, 18-25) dicendi genus, quo veritas exprimitur creationis viri, et praesertim mulieris, dissimile est, quasi minus pressum; est—dicere licet—potius narrativum et translatum: similis mythorum tunc cognitorum sermoni*" (AAS 80 [1988] 1663). The English translation above is from the Vatican website.

⁷⁰Some examples will be appropriate here. Even though public Revelation was completed by the end of the apostolic age (cf. §66), the *Catechism* repeatedly uses the present tense in recording the different historic periods of God's plan of revelation, as the following citations (with emphasis added) exemplify. The heading preceding §51 reads, "God Reveals His 'Plan of Loving Goodness.'" In §53 we read that "The divine plan of Revelation *is* realized simultaneously 'by deeds and words' . . . God *communicates* himself to man gradually. He *prepares* him to welcome by stages the supernatural Revelation." In §58 the *Catechism* tells us that "The Covenant with Noah *remains* in force during the times of the Gentiles, until the universal proclamation of the Gospel." In §59, after the sub-heading "God *chooses* Abraham," we read that "God *calls* Abram from his country, . . . and *makes* him Abraham, that is, 'the father of a multitude of nations.'" Many other examples of this 'historic present' usage could be cited. For instance, in §762, speaking of the Old Testament antecedents of the Church, the *Catechism* says that "This remote preparation for this gathering together of the People of God *begins* when he *calls* Abraham and *promises* that he *will become* the father of a great people." Even in a matter such as the apparitions of the risen Christ, the historicity of which is fundamental to our faith, the *Catechism* does not hesitate to use the 'historic present,' affirming in §645 that "By means of touch and the sharing of a meal, the risen Jesus *establishes* direct contact with his disciples. He *invites* them in this way to recognize that he *is* not a ghost . . . the risen body in which he *appears* to them *is* the same body that had been tortured and crucified."

⁷¹Although the *Catechism* refrains here and in §345 from placing the words "six days" in quotation marks, it does so in §339 and §342. This apparent ambivalence suggests the intention to leave open to scholarly discussion, as did the 1909 PBC decision, the precise interpretation of the word *yom* (day) in Genesis 1. This is of particular relevance now that science, after a 150-year consensus to the effect that the earth took billions of years to reach its present state, has recently found evidence which radically undermines the accepted geological time-scale, and is compatible with the hypothesis that the earth's age is to be measured in only thousands—not millions, and much less billions—of years. I refer to (for instance) the demonstrated incoherence of many radiometric dating results, and the studies of the American Dr. Robert Gentry on the common presence of polonium 'halos' in granite rocks — a phenomenon which, given the known half-life of polonium, can only be explained by postulating that these primordial 'building blocks' of the earth were formed, not over millions of years, but in less than three minutes. Gentry's studies on this phenomenon have been published since the 1970s in respected scientific journals, where they have been generally ignored, but never rebutted, by his peers. Of particular importance are recent studies in sedimentology carried out and published by Dr. Guy Berthault, a highly qualified French geologist who has demonstrated experimentally that, in moving currents of water, strata consisting of different sediments are laid down not very slowly, one after the other in vertical succession (as geologists have assumed for centuries), but rather, simultaneously. Again, these empirically observable results—which effectively demolish the long-accepted geological time-scale—have been published during the last decade in respected French scientific journals without any serious attempt at rebuttal. They are now appearing also in highly respected and specialized geological journals published in Russia and China. See the following articles by Berthault: "Analysis of Main Principles of Stratigraphy on the Basis of Experimental Data," *Lithology and Mineral Resources (Litologiya i Poleznye*

Iskopaemye), vol. 37, no. 5, September-October 2002, 442-446; “Geological Dating Principles Questioned: Paleohydraulics: a new approach,” *Journal of Geodesy and Geodynamics* [English version of a journal originally published in Chinese], vol. 22, no. 3, August 2002, 19-26.

⁷²Cf. above, section III. 4.

⁷³As is well known, a minority of Fathers and Doctors, including Augustine and Aquinas, favored a non-historical interpretation of Genesis 1, while at the same time recognizing the legitimacy of the opposite opinion.

⁷⁴Since Adam is clearly presented as an adult here, and since his “rib” is specified as the material from which the woman is formed, the *Catechism* scarcely leaves room for the ‘twin-embryo’ hypothesis.

⁷⁵Cf. our comment above in note 2, section I.