**Passages from Catholic Church documents on evolution, issued since the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* in 1859**

**Synod of Cologne (1860)**:

Our first parents were created immediately by God. Therefore we declare that the opinion of those who do not fear to assert that this human being, man as regards his body, emerged finally from the spontaneous continuous change of imperfect nature to the more perfect, is clearly opposed to Sacred Scripture and to the faith.

**First Vatican Council, *Dei Filius* (1870)**:

This sole true God by His goodness and "omnipotent power," not to increase His own beatitude, and not to add to, but to manifest His perfection by the blessings which He bestows on creatures, with most free volition, "immediately from the beginning of time fashioned each creature out of nothing, spiritual and corporeal, namely angelic and mundane; and then the human creation, common as it were, composed of both spirit and body" [Lateran Council IV, can. 2 and 5]

**Pope Leo XIII, *Arcanum divinae sapientiae* (1880)**:

The true origin of marriage, venerable brothers, is well known to all. Though revilers of the Christian faith refuse to acknowledge the never-interrupted doctrine of the Church on this subject, and have long striven to destroy the testimony of all nations and of all times, they have nevertheless failed not only to quench the powerful light of truth, but even to lessen it. We record what is to all known, and cannot be doubted by any, that God, on the sixth day of creation, having made man from the slime of the earth, and having breathed into his face the breath of life, gave him a companion, whom He miraculously took from the side of Adam when he was locked in sleep. God thus, in His most far-reaching foresight, decreed that this husband and wife should be the natural beginning of the human race, from whom it might be propagated and preserved by an unfailing fruitfulness throughout all futurity of time.

**Response of the [Pontifical Biblical Commission](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_index.htm" \t "_blank) on Genesis (June 30, 1909)**

Concerning the Historical Character of the First Three Chapters of Genesis

I: Do the various exegetical systems excogitated and defended under the guise of science to exclude the literal historical sense of the first three chapters of Genesis rest on a solid foundation?  
Answer: In the negative.

II: Notwithstanding the historical character and form of Genesis, the special connection of the first three chapters with one another and with the following chapters, the manifold testimonies of the Scriptures both of the Old and of the New Testaments, the almost unanimous opinion of the holy Fathers and the traditional view which the people of Israel also has handed on and the Church has always held, may it be taught that: the aforesaid three chapters of Genesis Contain not accounts of actual events, accounts, that is, which correspond to objective reality and historical truth, but, either fables derived from the mythologies and cosmogonies of ancient peoples and accommodated by the sacred writer to monotheistic doctrine after the expurgation of any polytheistic error; or allegories and symbols without any foundation in objective reality proposed under the form of history to inculcate religious and philosophical truths; or finally legends in part historical and in part fictitious freely composed with a view to instruction and edification?   
Answer: In the negative to both parts.

III: In particular may the literal historical sense be called in doubt in the case of facts narrated in the same chapters which touch the foundations of the Christian religion: as are, among others, the creation of all things by God in the beginning of time; the special creation of man; the formation of the first woman from the first man; the unity of the human race; the original felicity of our first parents in the state of justice, integrity, and immortality; the command given by God to man to test his obedience; the transgression of the divine command at the instigation of the devil under the form of a serpent; the degradation of our first parents from that primeval state of innocence; and the promise of a future Redeemer?   
Answer: In the negative.

IV: In the interpretation of those passages in these chapters which the Fathers and Doctors understood in different manners without proposing anything certain and definite, is it lawful, without prejudice to the judgement of the Church and with attention to the analogy of faith, to follow and defend the opinion that commends itself to each one?   
Answer: In the affirmative.

V: Must each and every word and phrase occurring in the aforesaid chapters always and necessarily be understood in its literal sense, so that it is never lawful to deviate from it, even when it appears obvious that the diction is employed in an applied sense, either metaphorical or anthropomorphical, and either reason forbids the retention or necessity imposes the abandonment of the literal sense?   
Answer: In the negative.

VI: Provided that the literal and historical sense is presupposed, may certain passages in the same chapters, in the light of the example of the holy Fathers and of the Church itself, be wisely and profitably interpreted in an allegorical and prophetic sense?   
Answer: In the affirmative.

VII: As it was not the mind of the sacred author in the composition of the first chapter of Genesis to give scientific teaching about the internal Constitution of visible things and the entire order of creation, but rather to communicate to his people a popular notion in accord with the current speech of the time and suited to the understanding and capacity of men, must the exactness of scientific language be always meticulously sought for in the interpretation of these matters?   
Answer: In the negative.

VIII : In the designation and distinction of the six days mentioned in the first chapter of Genesis may the word *Yom* (day) be taken either in the literal sense for the natural day or in an applied sense for a certain space of time, and may this question be the subject of free discussion among exegetes?   
Answer: In the affirmative.

**Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis* (1950)**

5. If anyone examines the state of affairs outside the Christian fold, he will easily discover the principle trends that not a few learned men are following. Some imprudently and indiscreetly hold that evolution, which has not been fully proved even in the domain of natural sciences, explains the origin of all things, and audaciously support the monistic and pantheistic opinion that the world is in continual evolution. Communists gladly subscribe to this opinion so that, when the souls of men have been deprived of every idea of a personal God, they may the more efficaciously defend and propagate their dialectical materialism.

35. It remains for Us now to speak about those questions which, although they pertain to the positive sciences, are nevertheless more or less connected with the truths of the Christian faith. In fact, not a few insistently demand that the Catholic religion take these sciences into account as much as possible. This certainly would be praiseworthy in the case of clearly proved facts; but caution must be used when there is rather question of hypotheses, having some sort of scientific foundation, in which the doctrine contained in Sacred Scripture or in Tradition is involved. If such conjectural opinions are directly or indirectly opposed to the doctrine revealed by God, then the demand that they be recognized can in no way be admitted.

36. For these reasons the Teaching Authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions, on the part of men experienced in both fields, take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution, in as far as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter - for the Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God. However, this must be done in such a way that the reasons for both opinions, that is, those favorable and those unfavorable to evolution, be weighed and judged with the necessary seriousness, moderation and measure, and provided that all are prepared to submit to the judgment of the Church, to whom Christ has given the mission of interpreting authentically the Sacred Scriptures and of defending the dogmas of faith.[11] Some however, rashly transgress this liberty of discussion, when they act as if the origin of the human body from pre-existing and living matter were already completely certain and proved by the facts which have been discovered up to now and by reasoning on those facts, and as if there were nothing in the sources of divine revelation which demands the greatest moderation and caution in this question.

37. When, however, there is question of another conjectural opinion, namely polygenism, the children of the Church by no means enjoy such liberty. For the faithful cannot embrace that opinion which maintains that either after Adam there existed on this earth true men who did not take their origin through natural generation from him as from the first parent of all, or that Adam represents a certain number of first parents. Now it is in no way apparent how such an opinion can be reconciled with that which the sources of revealed truth and the documents of the Teaching Authority of the Church propose with regard to original sin, which proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which, through generation, is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own.[12]

**Pope John Paul II, Message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on Evolution (Oct. 22, 1996)**

To the members of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, in plenary assembly:

It is with great pleasure that I send my cordial greetings to you, Mr. President, and to all of you who constitute the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, on the occasion of your plenary assembly. I send my particular best wishes to the new members of the Academy, who come to take part in your work for the first time. I also wish to recall the members who have died in the course of the past year; I entrust them to the Maker of all life.

1. In celebrating the 60th anniversary of the re-foundation of the Academy, it gives me pleasure to recall the intentions of my predecessor, Pius XI, who wished to bring together around him a chosen group of scholars who could, working with complete freedom, inform the Holy See about the developments in scientific research and thus provide aid for reflections.

To those whom he enjoyed calling the Scientific Senate of the Church, he asked simply this: that they serve the truth. That is the same invitation which I renew today, with the certainty that we can all draw profit from "the fruitfulness of frank dialogue between the Church and science." (Discourse to the Academy of Sciences, October 28, 1986, #1)

2. I am delighted with the first theme which you have chosen: the origin of life and evolution—an essential theme of lively interest to the Church, since Revelation contains some of its own teachings concerning the nature and origins of man. How should the conclusions reached by the diverse scientific disciplines be brought together with those contained in the message of Revelation? And if at first glance these views seem to clash with each other, where should we look for a solution? We know that the truth cannot contradict the truth. (Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*) However, in order better to understand historical reality, your research into the relationships between the Church and the scientific community between the 16th and 18th centuries will have a great deal of importance.

In the course of this plenary session, you will be undertaking a "reflection on science in the shadow of the third millennium," and beginning to determine the principal problems which the sciences face, which have an influence on the future of humanity. By your efforts, you will mark out the path toward solutions which will benefit all of the human community. In the domain of nature, both living and inanimate, the evolution of science and its applications gives rise to new inquiries. The Church will be better able to expand her work insofar as we understand the essential aspects of these new developments. Thus, following her specific mission, the Church will be able to offer the criteria by which we may discern the moral behavior to which all men are called, in view of their integral salvation.

3. Before offering a few more specific reflections on the theme of the origin of life and evolution, I would remind you that the magisterium of the Church has already made some pronouncements on these matters, within her own proper sphere of competence. I will cite two such interventions here.

In his encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950), my predecessor Pius XII has already affirmed that there is no conflict between evolution and the doctrine of the faith regarding man and his vocation, provided that we do not lose sight of certain fixed points.

For my part, when I received the participants in the plenary assembly of your Academy on October 31, 1992, I used the occasion—and the example of Gallileo—to draw attention to the necessity of using a rigorous hermeneutical approach in seeking a concrete interpretation of the inspired texts. It is important to set proper limits to the understanding of Scripture, excluding any unseasonable interpretations which would make it mean something which it is not intended to mean. In order to mark out the limits of their own proper fields, theologians and those working on the exegesis of the Scripture need to be well informed regarding the results of the latest scientific research.

4. Taking into account the scientific research of the era, and also the proper requirements of theology, the encyclical Humani Generis treated the doctrine of "evolutionism" as a serious hypothesis, worthy of investigation and serious study, alongside the opposite hypothesis. Pius XII added two methodological conditions for this study: one could not adopt this opinion as if it were a certain and demonstrable doctrine, and one could not totally set aside the teaching Revelation on the relevant questions. He also set out the conditions on which this opinion would be compatible with the Christian faith—a point to which I shall return.

Today, more than a half-century after the appearance of that encyclical, some new findings lead us toward the recognition of evolution as more than an hypothesis.[\*](https://www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/jp961022.htm#note)  In fact it is remarkable that this theory has had progressively greater influence on the spirit of researchers, following a series of discoveries in different scholarly disciplines. The convergence in the results of these independent studies—which was neither planned nor sought—constitutes in itself a significant argument in favor of the theory.

What is the significance of a theory such as this one? To open this question is to enter into the field of epistemology. A theory is a meta-scientific elaboration, which is distinct from, but in harmony with, the results of observation. With the help of such a theory a group of data and independent facts can be related to one another and interpreted in one comprehensive explanation. The theory proves its validity by the measure to which it can be verified. It is constantly being tested against the facts; when it can no longer explain these facts, it shows its limits and its lack of usefulness, and it must be revised.

Moreover, the elaboration of a theory such as that of evolution, while obedient to the need for consistency with the observed data, must also involve importing some ideas from the philosophy of nature.

And to tell the truth, rather than speaking about the theory of evolution, it is more accurate to speak of the theories of evolution. The use of the plural is required here—in part because of the diversity of explanations regarding the mechanism of evolution, and in part because of the diversity of philosophies involved. There are materialist and reductionist theories, as well as spiritualist theories. Here the final judgment is within the competence of philosophy and, beyond that, of theology.

5. The magisterium of the Church takes a direct interest in the question of evolution, because it touches on the conception of man, whom Revelation tells us is created in the image and likeness of God. The conciliar constitution Gaudium et Spes has given us a magnificent exposition of this doctrine, which is one of the essential elements of Christian thought. The Council recalled that "man is the only creature on earth that God wanted for its own sake." In other words, the human person cannot be subordinated as a means to an end, or as an instrument of either the species or the society; he has a value of his own. He is a person. By this intelligence and his will, he is capable of entering into relationship, of communion, of solidarity, of the gift of himself to others like himself. St. Thomas observed that man's resemblance to God resides especially in his speculative intellect, because his relationship with the object of his knowledge is like God's relationship with his creation. (*Summa Theologica* I-II, q 3, a 5, ad 1) But even beyond that, man is called to enter into a loving relationship with God himself, a relationship which will find its full expression at the end of time, in eternity. Within the mystery of the risen Christ the full grandeur of this vocation is revealed to us. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22) It is by virtue of his eternal soul that the whole person, including his body, possesses such great dignity. Pius XII underlined the essential point: if the origin of the human body comes through living matter which existed previously, the spiritual soul is created directly by God ("animas enim a Deo immediate creari catholica fides non retimere iubet"). (*Humani Generis*)

As a result, the theories of evolution which, because of the philosophies which inspire them, regard the spirit either as emerging from the forces of living matter, or as a simple epiphenomenon of that matter, are incompatible with the truth about man. They are therefore unable to serve as the basis for the dignity of the human person.

6. With man, we find ourselves facing a different ontological order—an ontological leap, we could say. But in posing such a great ontological discontinuity, are we not breaking up the physical continuity which seems to be the main line of research about evolution in the fields of physics and chemistry? An appreciation for the different methods used in different fields of scholarship allows us to bring together two points of view which at first might seem irreconcilable. The sciences of observation describe and measure, with ever greater precision, the many manifestations of life, and write them down along the time-line. The moment of passage into the spiritual realm is not something that can be observed in this way—although we can nevertheless discern, through experimental research, a series of very valuable signs of what is specifically human life. But the experience of metaphysical knowledge, of self-consciousness and self-awareness, of moral conscience, of liberty, or of aesthetic and religious experience—these must be analyzed through philosophical reflection, while theology seeks to clarify the ultimate meaning of the Creator's designs.

7. In closing, I would like to call to mind the Gospel truth which can shed a greater light on your researches into the origins and the development of living matter. The Bible, in fact, bears an extraordinary message about life. It shows us life, as it characterizes the highest forms of existence, with a vision of wisdom. That vision guided me in writing the encyclical which I have consecrated to the respect for human life and which I have entitled precisely The Gospel of Life.

It is significant that in the Gospel of St. John, life refers to that divine light which Christ brings to us. We are called to enter into eternal life, which is to say the eternity of divine beatitude.

To set us on guard against the grave temptations which face us, our Lord cites the great words of Deuteronomy: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Deut 8:3; Mt 4:4)

Even more, life is one of the most beautiful titles which the Bible gives to God; he is the living God.

With a full heart, I invoke upon all of you, and all to whom you are close, an abundance of divine blessings.

From the Vatican, October 22, 1996, John Paul II

EWTN Note on translation:  
The English edition at first translated the French original as: "Today, more than a half-century after the appearance of that encyclical, some new findings lead us toward the recognition of more than one hypothesis within the theory of evolution." The L'Osservatore Romano English Edition subsequently amended the text to that given in the body of the message above, citing the translation of the other language editions as its reason. It should be noted that an hypothesis is the preliminary stage of the scientific method and the Pope's statement suggests nothing more than that science has progressed beyond that stage. This is certainly true with respect to cosmological evolution (the physical universe), whose science both Pius XII and John Paul II  have praised, but not true in biology, about which the popes have generally issued cautions (as above and [Humani Generis](https://www.ewtn.com/library/ENCYC/P12HUMAN.HTM)). [CBD] [Return](https://www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/jp961022.htm#return)

**Pope Benedict XVI, Homily on Easter Eve (April 23, 2011)**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

The liturgical celebration of the Easter Vigil makes use of two eloquent signs. First there is the fire that becomes light. As the procession makes its way through the church, shrouded in the darkness of the night, the light of the Paschal Candle becomes a wave of lights, and it speaks to us of Christ as the true morning star that never sets – the Risen Lord in whom light has conquered darkness. The second sign is water. On the one hand, it recalls the waters of the Red Sea, decline and death, the mystery of the Cross. But now it is presented to us as spring water, a life-giving element amid the dryness. Thus it becomes the image of the sacrament of baptism, through which we become sharers in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Yet these great signs of creation, light and water, are not the only constituent elements of the liturgy of the Easter Vigil. Another essential feature is the ample encounter with the words of sacred Scripture that it provides. Before the liturgical reform there were twelve Old Testament readings and two from the New Testament. The New Testament readings have been retained. The number of Old Testament readings has been fixed at seven, but depending upon the local situation, they may be reduced to three. The Church wishes to offer us a panoramic view of whole trajectory of salvation history, starting with creation, passing through the election and the liberation of Israel to the testimony of the prophets by which this entire history is directed ever more clearly towards Jesus Christ. In the liturgical tradition all these readings were called prophecies. Even when they are not directly foretelling future events, they have a prophetic character, they show us the inner foundation and orientation of history. They cause creation and history to become transparent to what is essential. In this way they take us by the hand and lead us towards Christ, they show us the true Light.

At the Easter Vigil, the journey along the paths of sacred Scripture begins with the account of creation. This is the liturgy’s way of telling us that the creation story is itself a prophecy. It is not information about the external processes by which the cosmos and man himself came into being. The Fathers of the Church were well aware of this. They did not interpret the story as an account of the process of the origins of things, but rather as a pointer towards the essential, towards the true beginning and end of our being. Now, one might ask: is it really important to speak also of creation during the Easter Vigil? Could we not begin with the events in which God calls man, forms a people for himself and creates his history with men upon the earth? The answer has to be: no. To omit the creation would be to misunderstand the very history of God with men, to diminish it, to lose sight of its true order of greatness. The sweep of history established by God reaches back to the origins, back to creation. Our profession of faith begins with the words: “We believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth”. If we omit the beginning of the *Credo*, the whole history of salvation becomes too limited and too small. The Church is not some kind of association that concerns itself with man’s religious needs but is limited to that objective. No, she brings man into contact with God and thus with the source of all things. Therefore we relate to God as Creator, and so we have a responsibility for creation. Our responsibility extends as far as creation because it comes from the Creator. Only because God created everything can he give us life and direct our lives. Life in the Church’s faith involves more than a set of feelings and sentiments and perhaps moral obligations. It embraces man in his entirety, from his origins to his eternal destiny. Only because creation belongs to God can we place ourselves completely in his hands. And only because he is the Creator can he give us life for ever. Joy over creation, thanksgiving for creation and responsibility for it all belong together.

The central message of the creation account can be defined more precisely still. In the opening words of his Gospel, Saint John sums up the essential meaning of that account in this single statement: “In the beginning was the Word”. In effect, the creation account that we listened to earlier is characterized by the regularly recurring phrase: “And God said ...” The world is a product of the Word, of the *Logos*, as Saint John expresses it, using a key term from the Greek language. “*Logos*” means “reason”, “sense”, “word”. It is not reason pure and simple, but creative Reason, that speaks and communicates itself. It is Reason that both is and creates sense. The creation account tells us, then, that the world is a product of creative Reason. Hence it tells us that, far from there being an absence of reason and freedom at the origin of all things, the source of everything is creative Reason, love, and freedom. Here we are faced with the ultimate alternative that is at stake in the dispute between faith and unbelief: are irrationality, lack of freedom and pure chance the origin of everything, or are reason, freedom and love at the origin of being? Does the primacy belong to unreason or to reason? This is what everything hinges upon in the final analysis. As believers we answer, with the creation account and with Saint John, that in the beginning is reason. In the beginning is freedom. Hence it is good to be a human person. It is not the case that in the expanding universe, at a late stage, in some tiny corner of the cosmos, there evolved randomly some species of living being capable of reasoning and of trying to find rationality within creation, or to bring rationality into it. If man were merely a random product of evolution in some place on the margins of the universe, then his life would make no sense or might even be a chance of nature. But no, Reason is there at the beginning: creative, divine Reason. And because it is Reason, it also created freedom; and because freedom can be abused, there also exist forces harmful to creation. Hence a thick black line, so to speak, has been drawn across the structure of the universe and across the nature of man. But despite this contradiction, creation itself remains good, life remains good, because at the beginning is good Reason, God’s creative love. Hence the world can be saved. Hence we can and must place ourselves on the side of reason, freedom and love – on the side of God who loves us so much that he suffered for us, that from his death there might emerge a new, definitive and healed life.

The Old Testament account of creation that we listened to clearly indicates this order of realities. But it leads us a further step forward. It has structured the process of creation within the framework of a week leading up to the Sabbath, in which it finds its completion. For Israel, the Sabbath was the day on which all could participate in God’s rest, in which man and animal, master and slave, great and small were united in God’s freedom. Thus the Sabbath was an expression of the Covenant between God and man and creation. In this way, communion between God and man does not appear as something extra, something added later to a world already fully created. The Covenant, communion between God and man, is inbuilt at the deepest level of creation. Yes, the Covenant is the inner ground of creation, just as creation is the external presupposition of the Covenant. God made the world so that there could be a space where he might communicate his love, and from which the response of love might come back to him. From God’s perspective, the heart of the man who responds to him is greater and more important than the whole immense material cosmos, for all that the latter allows us to glimpse something of God’s grandeur.

Easter and the paschal experience of Christians, however, now require us to take a further step. The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week. After six days in which man in some sense participates in God’s work of creation, the Sabbath is the day of rest. But something quite unprecedented happened in the nascent Church: the place of the Sabbath, the seventh day, was taken by the first day. As the day of the liturgical assembly, it is the day for encounter with God through Jesus Christ who as the Risen Lord encountered his followers on the first day, Sunday, after they had found the tomb empty. The structure of the week is overturned. No longer does it point towards the seventh day, as the time to participate in God’s rest. It sets out from the first day as the day of encounter with the Risen Lord. This encounter happens afresh at every celebration of the Eucharist, when the Lord enters anew into the midst of his disciples and gives himself to them, allows himself, so to speak, to be touched by them, sits down at table with them. This change is utterly extraordinary, considering that the Sabbath, the seventh day seen as the day of encounter with God, is so profoundly rooted in the Old Testament. If we also bear in mind how much the movement from work towards the rest-day corresponds to a natural rhythm, the dramatic nature of this change is even more striking. This revolutionary development that occurred at the very the beginning of the Church’s history can be explained only by the fact that something utterly new happened that day. The first day of the week was the third day after Jesus’ death. It was the day when he showed himself to his disciples as the Risen Lord. In truth, this encounter had something unsettling about it. The world had changed. This man who had died was now living with a life that was no longer threatened by any death. A new form of life had been inaugurated, a new dimension of creation. The first day, according to the Genesis account, is the day on which creation begins. Now it was the day of creation in a new way, it had become the day of the new creation. We celebrate the first day. And in so doing we celebrate God the Creator and his creation. Yes, we believe in God, the Creator of heaven and earth. And we celebrate the God who was made man, who suffered, died, was buried and rose again. We celebrate the definitive victory of the Creator and of his creation. We celebrate this day as the origin and the goal of our existence. We celebrate it because now, thanks to the risen Lord, it is definitively established that reason is stronger than unreason, truth stronger than lies, love stronger than death. We celebrate the first day because we know that the black line drawn across creation does not last for ever. We celebrate it because we know that those words from the end of the creation account have now been definitively fulfilled: “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (*Gen* 1:31). Amen.