

3

HUMAN BEINGS

INTRODUCTION

Catholics and evangelicals share a common view of the origin, nature, and fall of human beings. Both believe God is the creator, human beings are made in his image and likeness, and human beings are immortal. From this common heritage many other things follow, including our duty to God our creator and to our fellow creatures and to God's creation. The Roman Catholic Church teaches: "As to man, it is the sacred duty of the Church throughout the ages to defend his [humanity's] spiritual nature and his destiny reaching beyond the material processes of nature."¹

THE DEFINITION OF HUMANITY

Classically, the term "man" meant humanity in general, females as well as males. The etymology of the term "man" in various languages is interesting. The Sanskrit root means "to think." The Greek understanding of the word applies "to one that looks up (i.e., to the gods) from below; if so, this would express both a distinction and a certain kinship between man and God."² The Latin *homo* is derived from *humus*, which seems to indicate a certain kinship with the earth. These concepts, stemming from various language groups, give us insights into the basic "stuff" of humanity. Humans have an essential connection to the earth but also, by virtue of their minds, possess a transcendency that marks them as different from the nature that surrounds them and orients them toward God.

THE ORIGIN OF HUMANITY

¹ Neuner and Dupuis, *Christian Faith*, p. 126.

² *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 9:125.

Catholic dogma teaches that “the First Man was created by God (*De fide*).”³ The Fourth Lateran and Vatican I Councils made this statement forcefully. In 1968 Pope Paul VI stated: “We believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, creator of things visible . . . and things invisible . . . and creator in each man of his spiritual and immortal soul.”⁴ (The question of humanity’s connection to the materialistic theory of evolution will be considered below.) The Book of Genesis (which literally means “in the beginning”) contains two complimentary accounts of the creation of the first human being. The first account relates human creation to creation in general: “Then God said: ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground’ ” (Gen. 1:26). Further, “The first man was not only created good, but was also established in friendship with his Creator and in harmony with himself and with the creation around him, in a state that would be surpassed only by the glory of the new creation in Christ.”⁵

The *New American Bible* says, “Man is here presented as the climax of God’s creative activity; he resembles God primarily because of the dominion God gives him over the rest of creation.”⁶ Another Catholic authority comments: “According to the immediate, literal sense, God created the body of the first man immediately out of inorganic material (‘from the slime of the earth’) and vivified it by breathing into it a spiritual soul.”⁷

Lastly, concerning the origin of man, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that there is a basic unity of the human race: “The whole human race stems from one single human pair.”⁸ This, of course, is based in the New Testament teaching about the origin of the human race in one man, Adam. Paul, addressing the Greek philosophers at the Areopagus, argued that God “made from one the whole human race to dwell on the entire surface of the earth” (Acts 17:26). Furthermore, since all people die and inherit original sin because of Adam’s sin, all must be organically connected with Adam, their head (cf. Rom. 5:12).

THE NATURE OF HUMANITY

We human beings, upon reflection, understand ourselves as dualities. We have bodies and physical characteristics that resemble creatures around us, but the transcendent element in our nature indicates a duality in our being. The early Greek thinkers drew their idea of humanity from mythology (activity on the part of gods) and also from a rational examination of the existing world.

3 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 94.

4 Neuner and Dupuis, *Christian Faith*, p. 22.

5 *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Libreria Editrice Vaticana* (Boston: St. Paul Books and Media, 1994), no. 374, p. 95.

6 Study note on Gen. 1:26 .

7 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* , p. 95.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Aristotle held that humans were supreme in the creation and consisted of two parts, a material body and a “spiritual soul” that constitutes the driving force within the whole person. Plato stressed humanity’s spiritual nature, asserting that we essentially are souls who merely have bodies. “This explains why the Platonic view appealed more than that of Aristotle to thinkers with a spiritualist orientation, particularly among the early Christians.”⁹ Augustine, taking his philosophical direction from Plato, tended to elevate the spiritual and down play the physical side of humanity.

In the Middle Ages, scholastic philosophy in general and Aquinas in particular developed a more complete view of humanity. Relying on special revelation and drawing from Aristotelian principles, Aquinas fashioned a more balanced view of human nature as a unity of soul and body but, nonetheless, with a belief that the soul consciously survived death awaiting the resurrection in its body. Thus, Catholics believe that “the body is an essential part of man, and has a positive value. Yet the body exists, not in its own right, but by virtue of the spiritual soul, which is a form in the most real sense and the unique substantial form of the body.”¹⁰ That is, “Man consists of two essential parts—material body and a spiritual soul (*De fide*).”¹¹ Further, “the rational soul is per se the essential form of the body (*De fide*).”¹² Personal immortality presupposes the individuality of the soul. Jesus warned, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna” (Matt. 10:28).

Concerning the creation of the soul, Roman Catholicism teaches that this occurs at the moment of its unification with the body. In spite of some question on the part of some of the church fathers concerning just when the fetus becomes human, “Modern Christian philosophy generally holds that the creation and infusion of the spiritual soul coincides with the moment of conception.”¹³ (This position of course has serious implications regarding the Christian attitude toward issues like abortion.)

Summing up the Roman Catholic understanding of the nature of humans, Vatican II stated: “Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. Through his very bodily condition, he sums up in himself the elements of the material world. Through him they are thus brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voice in praise freely given to the creator.”¹⁴

BIBLICAL DATA

9 *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 9:125.

10 *Ibid.*

11 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 96.

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*, p. 100; cf. Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, no. 1185.

14 Austin Flannery, O.P., *Vatican Collection: Vatican Council II*, vol. 2 (North Port: Costello Publishing, 1982), pp. 914–15.

Like evangelicals, the basic Catholic view of human beings is rooted in Scripture, both Old and New Testaments. From the earliest chapters of the Bible there is a clear picture of the origin, nature, and fall of the human race. There is also a sense of the unity of the human race: “All peoples form a single community; their origin is one, for God made the whole human race to dwell over the entire face of the earth (cf. Acts 17:26).”¹⁵

OLD TESTAMENT

At first glance (and at first glance only), the two accounts of humanity’s origin in Genesis might seem to some to be in conflict. The first declares that humans are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). The second account says they are made from “the clay of the ground” into which God breathed life: “the LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). Upon closer analysis, however, we discover that this second account is a fuller and more developed description of human creation. First, humanity, although the product of a special creation (“made in God’s image”), retains a connection with the general creation by virtue of being formed from “the clay of the ground.” Second, this account (the whole of chap. 2) indicates that the Garden of Eden was prepared for human habitation and was a literal physical place where they could enjoy fellowship with God and each other.

The second account also details the emergence of the first woman, who was formed from the body of the first man. “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” (Gen. 2:21–22). Ott notes that “this account, which is starkly anthropomorphic, was understood by the generality of the Fathers in the literal sense. . . . According to a decision of the Bible commission, the literal historical sense is to be adhered to in regard to the formation of the first woman out of the first man.”¹⁶

Men and women alone are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27). Adam alone was given the task of naming the animals around him. Human beings, not animals, enjoy fellowship with God and, in short, are the center of creation. The Old Testament further comments that the creation of humanity was a marvelous event. Job confessed to God: “Your hands have formed me and fashioned me; will you then turn and destroy me?” (Job 10:8–9). As the psalmist said, “Yet you have made them [humans] a little less than a god, crowned them with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:6).

God also set up rules of conduct for his special creation. From the very beginning he was enjoined to obey God’s command (Gen. 2:16–17). Later, God’s people were given the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20). The Lord told Moses to command the Israelite community: “You shall be holy, because I am holy” (Lev. 11:45). The prophet Micah summed up our duty to God, saying, “You have been told, O man, what is good, and

¹⁵ Neuner and Dupuis, *Declaration Nostra Aetate* (1965), 424, p. 138.

¹⁶ Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 95.

what the LORD requires of you: Only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8).

NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament reaffirms the Old Testament teaching on the origin, nature, and fall of human beings. There are general references to the creation of “all things,” including human beings (John 1:3 ; Col. 1:16 ; Rev. 4:11). But Jesus referred specifically to the creation of Adam and Eve when he reminded them, “Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female?’ ” (Matt. 19:4). Likewise, Paul said, “Adam was first formed, then Eve” (1 Tim. 2:13) and “man did not come from woman, but woman from man” (1 Cor. 11:8).

As to the spiritual nature of human beings, called “soul” or “spirit,” the New Testament is clear that there is conscious existence after death. The dying thief was told that his soul would be in paradise that very day (Luke 23:43). Paul said, “We would rather leave the body and go home to the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8), and “I long to depart this life and be with Christ, [for] that is far better” (Phil. 1:23). John speaks of “the souls of those who had been slaughtered” being in heaven in conscious bliss (Rev. 6:9–11). The word “immortality,” as used of human beings, is reserved in the New Testament for humans in their final resurrected state (cf. 1 Cor. 15:53). Nevertheless, the Scriptures are clear that there is a spiritual dimension to human beings that survives death and goes eventually either into the blessing of God’s presence or into the conscious suffering of the place called hell (cf. Matt. 25:41 ; Luke 16:22–31) to await the resurrection of their bodies when Jesus returns (cf. John 5:29 ; 1 Cor. 15:22–23 ; Rev. 20:4–5).

Catholics and evangelicals also agree that human beings are fallen. Not only does the New Testament teach the origin and nature of human beings from God; it also affirms that they fell and are in a state of original sin, as Paul declared: “through one person sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all, inasmuch as all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). Thus we are “by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3) and must be born again, since “what is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit” (John 3:6).

THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY

The common Catholic-evangelical doctrine of human beings is not only rooted in Scripture; it also finds similar theological expression. Both, for example, believe in original sin.

ORIGINAL SIN

The official Roman Catholic position on original sin is evangelical at the core. It asserts: “If anyone does not confess that the first man, Adam, when he transgressed the commandment of God in paradise, immediately lost the holiness and justice in which he had been constituted, and through the offence of that prevarication incurred the wrath and indignation of God, . . . and that the entire Adam through that offence of prevarication was changed in body and soul for the worse, let him be anathema.”¹⁷

Likewise, the final remedy for this woeful situation is the same as the common evangelical view: “If anyone asserts that this sin of Adam, which in its origin is one, and by propagation, not by imitation, transfused into all, which is in each one something that is his own, is taken away either by the forces of human nature or by a remedy other than the merit of the one mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ . . . let him be anathema.”¹⁸

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that our first parents in the Garden of Eden lost sanctity by their disobedience. God’s commandment to them was probationary in nature, and the entire sorry scenario happened in space/time and must not be relegated to the realm of myth or saga. “Since Adam’s sin is the basis of the dogma of Original Sin and Redemption the historical accuracy of the account as regards the essential facts may not be impugned.”¹⁹ Also, original sin is not to be understood as having been sexual in nature. It was a sin of disobedience. “The theory that original sin was a sexual sin (Clement of Alexandria, Ambrose) cannot be accepted.”²⁰

The transgression of Adam and Eve resulted in the loss of sanctifying grace (i.e., the spiritual life of the soul). Further, they became subject to death and the tyranny of the devil. The Catholic church also teaches that Adam’s sin and its consequences are transmitted to his descendants by inheritance, not by example, as David lamented, “Indeed, in guilt was I born, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:7).

The central question in the debate between Catholics and Protestants is this: Does grace *perfect* nature (the Roman Catholic position) or does it *change* nature (the Reformed view)? Richard John Neuhaus touches on this issue in his important and provocative book, *The Catholic Movement*, written before he became a Roman Catholic. Drawing the insights of Fr. Carl Peter, a theologian at Catholic University, Neuhaus states: “Protestantism, so insistent upon the worship owed to God alone, tends to neglect or despise the holy that is less than Absolute.” On the other hand, “Roman Catholicism, so sensitive to the myriad manifestations of the sacred, tends to worship the holy that is less than God” (p. 14).

In the New Testament, Ott notes that “The passage which contains the classical proof is Rom. 5:12–21 , in which the Apostle draws a parallel between the first Adam, from

17 *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. Rev. H. J. Schroeder, O.P. (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books, 1978), p. 21.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

19 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 106.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 107.

whom sin and death are transmitted to all humanity, and Christ, the second Adam, from whom justice and life are transmitted to all men.”²¹

While Catholics and evangelicals share belief in the *fact* of original sin there are differences concerning the remedy for Adam and Eve’s transgression. Although based in Christ’s atoning death, the Catholic understanding of original sin is that it is remedied by the sacrament of baptism and what remains is *concupiscence*, which is not sin proper but a tendency toward sin. “Thus although concupiscence is not itself, strictly speaking, sinful, it is as it were, a weight dragging even the regenerate downwards into sin.”²² Although the Catholic view on the extent of depravity is not significantly different from that of most Arminian Protestants, it does differ from a strongly Reformed position. The latter, in contrast to Catholicism, places a stronger emphasis on people’s total inability to even cooperate with God’s grace by their free will in the process of their salvation. Even here, however, the differences are often exaggerated, since Catholicism has its own “Calvinists” (called Thomists) in contrast to its “Arminians” (called Molinists) who differ strongly on the relationship between free will and predestination.

THE IMAGE OF GOD

Although there are some differences between Catholics and many evangelicals as to the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, or “image of God,” nevertheless, there are essential similarities. Speaking to humanity’s creation, Pope John Paul II states: “The primordial affirmation of this anthropology is that man is God’s image and cannot be reduced to a mere portion of nature or a nameless element in the human city.”²³ Catholic scholars following several church fathers (notably Tertullian and Irenaeus) developed the distinction between the likeness of God (*similitudo*) and the image of God (*imago*). Sin has caused us to lose communion with God and our state of righteousness. This formed the basis of the distinction between *pura naturalia* and a *donum supernaturale*, a special gift in addition to his natural endowment. Catholics believe that “original righteousness” has been lost in the fall, but a natural justice remains. Human beings still retain some freedom and some sense of moral law. The Reformers took issue with this view on the grounds that it did not indicate the extent of the damage humanity has suffered as a result of sin. Luther goes beyond Aquinas and even Augustine in his understanding of people as *totus depravatus*, “totally depraved.” Luther says: “Not only is he, as Augustine held, *curvatus*, ‘bent’ (toward the things of the world) but *curvatus in se*, ‘bent in upon himself,’ enclosed in a vicious circle of egocentricity.”²⁴ This developed into what the

21 Ibid., p. 109.

22 Bernard M. G. Reardon, “Counter-Reformation: The Council of Trent,” in *Religious Thought in the Reformation* (London and New York: Longman, 1981), p. 307.

23 Neuner and Dupuis, *Christian Faith*, p. 138.

24 WA, LVI, 356, 4; quoted in Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Reformation*, p. 84.

Reformers would call “total depravity,” according to which the effects of sin are felt in all areas: spiritual, physical, social, and intellectual.²⁵

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

However, both Roman Catholics and evangelicals realize the far-reaching effects of sin, not only on individual human beings, but on the creation as a whole. The psalmist lamented the state of humanity: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ . . . All alike have gone astray; they have become perverse; there is not one who does good, not even one” (Ps. 53:2–4). Thus, human beings are totally unredeemable apart from the grace of God. As Ott notes, “Internal supernatural grace is absolutely necessary for the beginning of faith and of salvation.”²⁶ In fact, it is a matter of Catholic dogma that “in adults the beginning of that justification must be derived from the predisposing grace of God through Jesus Christ . . . whereby without any existing merits on their part they are called.” Indeed, a person cannot “of his own free will without the grace of God move himself to justice before Him [God].”²⁷ And, “By his sin Adam, as the first man, lost the original holiness and justice he had received from God, not only for himself but for all human beings.”²⁸ That is, grace is absolutely necessary for salvation.

In addition to sins committed by individuals, the blight of original corruption extends to sins performed by groups in society. In the Old Testament God tells Israel: “Wash yourselves clean! Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes; cease doing evil; learn to do good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan’s plea, defend the widow” (Isa. 1:16–17). In short, there is corporate guilt as well as individual guilt. History has revealed countless examples of group sin: oppression by the strong over the weak, wars, and the like. Unfortunately, the church, as it manifests itself in various jurisdictions, has not been without blame. We all need to confess and repent in this matter. Current social aberrations such as abortion, euthanasia, and passivity toward homosexuality are clear examples of complete depravity.²⁹

HUMANITY AND GOD’S CREATED WORLD

25 Total depravity has, in our opinion, been misunderstood and frequently caricatured in Roman Catholic literature. See chap. 12, pp. 246, 247.

26 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 229.

27 From the Council of Trent, “On the Necessity of Preparation for Justification of Adults, and Whence It Proceeds”; quoted in Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, no. 797, p. 250.

28 *Catechism 1994*, no. 416, p. 105.

29 Of course there are other disagreements between Roman Catholics and many evangelicals (viz. Calvinists), such as the traditional Catholic distinction between venial and mortal sin. Mortal sin is defined as that which “kills” grace in the soul. For Catholics, this grace may be renewed by the sacrament of penance. Venial sin is less serious and does not destroy grace (see chap. 12).

Throughout recorded history we find people pondering their connection to the rest of creation that surrounds them. In fact, “in every conception of man from primitive Greek thought to the present, man’s special relation to the cosmos has been stressed.”³⁰

Relationship with Creation. Earlier in this chapter we discussed the notion that while we are the result of a special creative act on the part of God, we nevertheless also have a kinship with the cosmos around us. The first creation account in Genesis (1:26–27) stresses the spiritual aspect and the second (2:7) records humanity’s ties with the rest of creation.

Science has discovered that human bodies are composed of the same chemical elements as the rest of the material universe. However, an examination of man’s relationship with the rest of creation reveals “a hierarchical cosmic structure with man at the top, possessing in his own being the various levels or grades of other beings, yet transcending all of them by his humanity.”³¹ Human beings enjoyed the status of being considered at the top of the hierarchical ladder by the Greeks and also the ancient and medieval Fathers. Thus Aquinas could write, “the highest grade of the whole order of generation is the human soul, to which matter tends as toward an ultimate form.”³² He goes on to say that “summarizing the whole of reality in his mind, accepting and using it by his will, transforming and so spiritualizing it through his activity, man is not only the ontological achievement but also the dynamic fulfillment of the entire cosmos.”³³

The great Christian thinkers understood that men and women, by virtue of their special position within creation, have unique gifts which can be brought to bear on the world around them. “Through his work, his technology, his art, and his moral activity man can actualize virtualities of the material world that otherwise would never be realized. This too is part of the task imposed on man by his place in the cosmos: he has to humanize the material world, to fill it with his spirit.”³⁴ Vatican Council II also speaks of the value of human activity: “Considered in itself, human activity, individual and collective—all that tremendous effort which man has made through the centuries to better his living conditions—is in keeping with God’s design.”³⁵ For God said to Adam, “Fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28).

The apostle Paul, in his theological *tour de force*, includes these intriguing verses:

For the creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now (Rom. 8:19–22).

30 *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 9:127.

31 *Ibid.*

32 Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.22.

33 *Ibid.*, 3.78.

34 *Ibid.*

35 Neuner and Dupuis, *Christian Faith*, p. 137.

Concerning this passage, the Roman Catholic *New American Bible* says, “Paul considers the destiny of the created world to be linked with the future that belongs to the believers. As it shares in the penalty of corruption brought about by sin, so also will it share in the benefits of redemption and future glory that comprise the ultimate liberation of God’s people.”³⁶

In addition to Paul, the writer of Hebrews addresses both the insignificance and the greatness of humanity by quoting Psalm 8:4–6 : “What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor, subjecting all things under his feet” (Heb. 2:6–8). Thus the author identifies our position and responsibility in and to the creation in general. We are not the product of a mindless and purposeless force in the universe. This brings us to the subject of evolution and how its tenets affect a Christian understanding of humanity.

EVOLUTION

The concepts surrounding the modern notion of evolution began to take shape toward the end of the eighteenth century. After Charles Darwin (1809–82) published his *Origin of Species* (1859), the theory of evolution became a cornerstone of modern science. Since humans were now believed to be the product of this naturalistic process, it was inevitable that the church would be forced to examine this theory and judge its compatibility, or the lack thereof, with Holy Writ. Catholic scholars have offered a way to reconcile the apparent conflicts of evolution and the biblical account of creation. Catholics are permitted to believe in evolution (in both the micro and macro senses). But all Catholics must agree that “the first three Chapters of Genesis contain narratives of real events . . . no myths, no mere allegories or symbols of religious truths, no legends (*D. 2122*).”³⁷ Further, they must believe in the creation of the human soul.

Catholics are also given freedom in their interpretation of the days of Genesis. The theories which have been put forward to explain the biblical hexahemeron (the six days of creation) have been of two sorts: those who held a “literal” (realistic) approach and those who preferred a more “symbolic” (idealistic) understanding. Early and medieval church fathers can be found on both sides of the issue, with Origen being the father of those in the symbolic camp.

Concerning biological evolution, Augustine allowed for a certain development of living creatures. However, as Ott says about the creation of humanity, “a special creation by God is demanded, which must extend at least to the spiritual soul (*creato hominis peculiaris, D. 2123*).”³⁸ According to some modern Catholic sources, “the inspired writers of Genesis did not intend to produce a scientific cosmology, nor did they intend to indicate *how* God accomplished His creation. That God is the author, creator, and

³⁶ *New American Bible*, notes on Rom. 8:19–22 .

³⁷ *Ibid.* See Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, no. 2123.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

governor of the universe is the religious truth imported; it remains for science to discover, if possible, the times, the places, and the modes of origins.”³⁹

However, even these broad criteria have been disregarded by certain avant-garde Catholic thinkers. The name of Teilhard de Chardin comes to mind. Many anti-Christian philosophies of evolution, existentialism, and historicism—which tended to alter orthodox theological precepts—came to the attention of Pope Pius XII. In 1950 he issued an encyclical, *Humani Generis*, to address the situation. The purpose was twofold—to combat certain heterodox opinions and to restate traditional Catholic teachings that had been put in jeopardy by the innovators. Concerning the Scripture he wrote: “the encyclical condemned as specific errors the exegesis of Scripture that ignores or is opposed to the analogy of faith . . . and that which is marked by either ignorance or contempt for the literal meaning of the text in favor of a purely spiritual interpretation.”⁴⁰ Finally, concerning historical speculations, “the encyclical condemns those who empty the Genesis accounts in the Old Testament of any historical sense.”⁴¹ The above quoted statements sound as if they could have been taken from a number of contemporary evangelical treatments concerning the inerrancy of Scripture.⁴²

CONCLUSION

Despite some differences on the extent of sin and the possible use of evolutionary processes by God in producing the human body, there are essential similarities in the Roman Catholic and evangelical understanding of human beings. We find significant overlap on the views of humanity’s origin, nature, fall, and destiny. Some differences exist, at least with Reformed Protestants, on such issues as the extent to which sin has corrupted the human condition. Also, the distinction between mortal and venial sins is a problem for most evangelicals. In spite of this, the early and medieval Fathers would agree that, as concerns salvation, God must take the initiative. Certainly that troika of theological giants, Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, would stand fast on the proposition that God’s grace to humanity is absolutely necessary for salvation (see chap. 5).

In short, concerning the spiritual understanding of our beginning, the Roman Catholic Church teaches, and evangelicals agree, that “We believe that in Adam all have sinned. From this it follows that on account of the original offence committed by him human nature, which is common to all men, is reduced to that condition in which it must suffer the consequences of that fall.”⁴³ As to the dignity of human beings because of being made in the image of God, “God did not create man a solitary being. From the beginning ‘male and female he created them’ (Genesis 1:27). This partnership of man and woman

39 *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 5:694.

40 *Ibid.*, 7:215.

41 *Ibid.*

42 See Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979).

43 Flannery, *Vatican Collection: Vatican Council II*, p. 391.

constitutes the first form of communion between persons. For by his innermost nature man is a social being; and if he does not enter into relations with others he can neither live nor develop his gifts.”⁴⁴

Finally, both Catholics and evangelicals agree that the doctrine of God as creator cannot be ignored in a discussion about human beings. “Without a creator there can be no creature. . . . Besides, once God is forgotten, the creature is lost sight of as well.”⁴⁵ Sin has had its baleful effect on human beings. “Although set by God in a state of rectitude, man, enticed by the evil one, abused his freedom at the very start of history. He lifted himself up against God, and sought to attain his goal apart from him.”⁴⁶

44 Ibid., pp. 913–14.

45 Ibid., p. 935.

46 Ibid., p. 914.