

## Dialogue with a Catholic Evolutionist

The following is a letter I wrote recently to a Dr. William Selenke who wrote to me on Sept. 30, 2009 requesting that I read and comment on his abstract regarding evolution and Catholic doctrine. His cover letter is inserted below along with the first page of his abstract (which totaled 30 pages). Although I have not included them here, Dr. Selenke's package also included letters of approval for his abstract from Avery Cardinal Dulles, Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, and Ian Tatterstall (of the American Museum of Natural History). Dr. Selenke, assuring me that evolution is "a fact," then proceeded to concoct an amalgamation of evolutionary theory with the Genesis record and Catholic magisterial teaching, the latter, he realizes, requiring the existence of one human couple as the progenitor of the human race. I, of course, tell Dr. Selenke that he started out on the wrong track by believing in the fairy tale of evolution in the first place, much less is he doing the Catholic community a service by suggesting that Genesis and evolution can be combined into a unified understanding of origins. The real sad part about this exchange, however, is watching our modernistic cardinals encourage Dr. Selenke in his endeavor. Similar to Dr. Selenke, they come to the debate already accepting evolution as a "fact," even though none of them have even the slightest scientific proof to support their assertions. As a result, they have many Catholics believing that monkeys are our uncles.

Dr. Selenke's letter:

30 September 2009

Robert Sungenis, President  
Catholic Apologetics International  
P.O. Box 278  
State Line, PA 17236

Dear Dr. Sungenis:

Enclosed is a document, "The Evolution of Adam and Eve," for publication. It is a work of apologetics. It discusses if the Catholic belief in a unique first man and a unique first woman is supported by biological investigations of human evolution.

There is a preponderance of evidence that this is true. If it is indeed true, there is minimal conflict between Christian teaching of Original Sin and human evolution as understood by evolutionary biologists.

As can be seen by the enclosed reviews, Ian Tatterstall of the Department of Human Evolution of The American Museum of Natural History of New York seem to approve the hypothesis. The other documents from Catholic sources need no explanation.

Respectively submitted,



William M. Selenke, Ph.D.  
5 Drummond Street  
Cincinnati, OH 45218  
(513) 835-1872

Patentagentbill@cinci.rr.com

**Abstract**

Perhaps some of the conflict between religion and science may consist of misunderstanding. This is evidenced by the current polemics between creation science with its allies such as intelligent design folk and the various scientists who make a fetish out of Darwinian evolution. Great amounts of argumentative artillery, wasting vast forests and much time, continually pass between these two groups with little effect. Evolution as a biological fact is true, only a religious true believer would deny this fact. The evolutionist scientists do not help the matter by belittling creationists. There is a third view that is virtually ignored. This is the view of the Catholic Church that teaches evolution most probably occurred. However, she teaches that all human beings are descended from a unique first man and a unique first woman. This teaching was first clearly taught in 1950 in the encyclical, *Humani generis*. In a somewhat ambiguous form this teaching is confirmed in the current Catholic catechism. While this is primarily a Roman Catholic teaching it is likely that large segments of Reformed Faith, the Orthodox Faith, and the Jewish Faith can accept this understanding. This essay examines a preponderance of scientific evidence that suggests that, indeed, all current living human beings descended from a first unique man and a first unique woman. If the evidence supports this hypotheses, it follows that the conflict between science and religion concerning human origins may indeed be a minor problem. This article provides the theological reasons for the desirability of a unique first man and a unique first woman. This is presented in a context of a general background on scientific method and the tools that examine human evolution.

October 7, 2009

Dr. William M. Selenke  
5 Drummond Street  
Cincinnati, OH, 45218

Dear Dr. Selenke,

I received your abstract putting forth the thesis that evolution and the Catholic theological requirement of the existence of a one-couple progenitor can be amalgamated into a cogent theory of origins. Thank you for sending the abstract. I read it with some interest.

I regret to inform you, however, that I think your thesis is not credible, and is, in fact, a distraction from the ongoing debate. I can appreciate evolutionists such as Stephen Gould since at least he tells us he has no desire to reinterpret Genesis and tell the Catholic magisterium what to believe about origins. He, if you read his book, *Rocks of Ages*, prefers “non-overlapping magisterium” (NOMA). But I have a much more difficult time showing appreciation to a professed Catholic, especially one such as yourself who admits that he has no expertise in theology, who tries to coalesce the theory of evolution and the book of Genesis. It is like mixing water and oil – it simply cannot be done.

Despite what you may have heard from some more liberal Catholic clerics, Genesis is quite clear that God created the earth first and then the sun and stars. He created man and animals both on the Sixth Day, and there is no evolution between them, at least not according to Holy Writ. Therefore, if we accept a face value interpretation of Genesis as all our Fathers and the Church did prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, then we are obliged to reject the Big Bang theory and any theory that places the cosmos in existence before the earth, and we are also required to reject evolution. If one wants to reject Genesis in favor of modern cosmological theories, one has the right to do so, but let him not attempt to twist and distort God inspired revelation in order to do so. The only time we would be required to reinterpret Genesis is if science had PROVEN its thesis that a literal interpretation of Genesis was impossible. The requirement of scientific proof was made clear by Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* in his citation of St. Augustine's *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis*.

This leads me to a second critique of your abstract. Several times in your piece you assert that evolution is a "fact." Here are some of your statements: "Evolution as a biological fact is true, only a religious true believer would deny this fact" (page 1); "Those who state that evolution does not exist simply are against an enormous amount of evidence...Not to believe the reality of evolution for animals is simply schizophrenic" (page 6); "evolution is a proven biological doctrine. Since evolution is proven, it does create problems for traditional theology" (page 6). I beg to differ with you, Dr. Selenke. There are many scientists of repute who deny that evolution is a fact. I've quoted them extensively in my papers critiquing evolution. Perhaps you have read them. If not, I would be most happy to forward them to you. Stephen Gould is the only one I know of who boasted that evolution is a "fact," but he admits it is not because he can prove evolution scientifically but because he finds it impossible to accept the only other alternative, special creation. Richard Lewontin says much the same:

We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door" ("Billions and Billions of Demons," *The New York Review of Books*, January 9, 1997, pp. 28, 31).

The most important thing missing from your abstract, Dr. Selenke, is any semblance of proof that evolution is a fact. Without that proof, your abstract is, shall we say, quite abstract, since it attempts to develop a whole thesis on a foundation that, in scientific terms, is obviously not a foundation at all. You cannot merely assume that evolution is a fact and then proceed to corral your reader into accepting your novel attempt to inject a one-couple progenitor into the evolutionary theory, believing that you have now solved the controversy.

If you want to convince someone such as myself to your thesis (a person who has spent the last 30 years amassing a plethora of scientific evidence *against* evolution), I would suggest you provide at least one

indisputable scientific proof for your assertion that evolution is a “fact.” That is the least you could do for your audience if you want to promote your novel theory of origins. The burden is on you, not them. Claiming that something is a “fact” is serious business. It means you must have some indisputable information and infallible reasoning process that leads to that conclusion. I could change the whole world with one indisputable fact. But proving that I have a fact is quite another story.

Mind you, I’m not interested in the mechanism of “mutations” that you refer to several times in your abstract as the vehicle for the evolutionary development you seek. If you are not aware of it yet, you should read the literature that shows quite convincingly that most mutations are quite harmful and have never exhibited proof that it could serve as the vehicle for evolution (even as you partially admitted of the FOXP2 gene). If you are depending on mutations as your evidence or proof, then, scientifically speaking, you don’t have a leg to stand on.

Your statement on page 26, “Scientifically and logically the first modern humans came about by great mutations which mutations lead to the use of speech,” is typical of the grandiose claims I’ve seen in the past. What scientific evidence do you have for such “great mutations,” so great that they can produce one of the most complicated functions of the human intellect – language? You yourself admit in the next paragraph that “Language did not evolve from simple to complex. It began as a complex intellectual exercise and stayed complex,” citing Naom Chomski as support. As such, you only increase the burden of proof upon yourself. Science hasn’t even shown that small mutations lead to even the simplest evolutionary plateaus, much less has it shown that “great mutations” lead to complex organisms with complex processes. My estimation is that the only thing that has been “mutated” here is the soul of modern man, since it seems that he has been as deceived by the devil into believing the fairy tale of evolution, the same as he was deceived in the Garden of Eden in believing that he could be greater than God.

Later, on page 29, you change from “great mutations” to the need for “a single massive mutation, *i.e.*, something like punctuated equilibrium,” apparently forging an innovation in science that mutations don’t come in tiny increments any longer (as traditional evolutionary theory has proposed) but now come in large ready-made packages so that you can account for the results that your prior colleagues could not account for with slow mutations. How it is that one who claims to be a scientist could find himself depending on such unscientific presumption for evolution is, well, quite disturbing to me, Dr. Selenke. It seems quite clear to me that you are fishing for answers and simply have no scientific basis for your claims. Moreover, since you make no mention of it in your paper, it appears that you believe mutations produce nothing detrimental to the specimen, but that is simply not dealing with the reality of our scientific evidence to the contrary.

You then say, “Plainly put, evolution was and is a biological reality even if scientists disagree on the mechanisms of evolution” (page 9). This is about as revealing a statement as I can find in your abstract that shows your view is more ideological than scientific. For a person to say that he is not certain of how evolution works, but certain that it does work, is about as unscientific a statement on this issue as I have ever seen. On page 10 you say, “Of course, believing does not make fact,” but it seems by acknowledging the uncertainty of the most crucial factor of evolution (*i.e.*, the mechanism), you have done precisely what page 10 deplors – make belief into fact. Simply put, Dr. Selenke, if you don’t know the mechanism for evolution and cannot explain how it can produce complex organisms, then you don’t know evolution is a

fact, since I can propose a non-evolutionary mechanism and get the same result. If, as you say on page 4, “A great deal of my consideration of reality is through the prism of science. I think like a scientist. I believe in scientist,” then show me the science that convinces us of the evolutionary mechanism behind evolution. I am a man of science, too. I was a chemistry and physics major in college, and have read science journals for the last 30 years. But I know of no science that proves evolution as a fact.

You may claim that “Absolute unambiguous scientific proof...is so rare as to be almost non-existent,” and that “most scientific proof consists of degrees of probability,” but if that is the case then you must stop insisting to your reader that “evolution as a biological fact is true.” All you have are “probabilities,” Dr. Selenke, not proof or facts. You need to be as honest with your reader as possible, especially since the first paragraph of your abstract makes the bold claim that evolution is a fact and only religious fanatics, as it were, would believe otherwise. That is intellectually insulting to both honest scientists and religious theologians.

As far as “probabilities” are concerned, when I look at the scientific evidence against evolution, I don’t see evolution as a probability at all. Time and chance are your enemies, Dr. Selenke, not your friends, since we are all aware of the entropy law and its practical implications. In fact, in regards to probabilities, I see much more of a probability that God created the first couple *ex nihilo*, as he did all the animals before them. It’s very simple. God created man and animals instantaneously. Nothing can go wrong with that system. Since you can’t come up with a more solid mechanism that can give the same result, how is your evolutionary probability greater than *ex nihilo* creation probability, just from a purely scientific basis?

Your attempt to commandeer Punctuated Equilibrium from Stephen Gould as an accelerated mechanism for your quest to the one-couple progenitor belies the fact that Gould invented PE precisely because he and Etheredge admitted they could not find the necessary transitional fossils to serve as evidence of graduated evolution. At their 1971 symposium in Chicago in which many of the renowned evolutionists were gathered, Gould asked if any of them had solid evidence for transitional fossils. Not one raised their hand. But you don’t tell your reader this important fact. The fossil record (or lack thereof) is the single most important issue in this debate, yet the leading evolutionary scientists admit they don’t have the needed evidence. If you yourself admit that “several well accepted medical theories are simply wrong” then you could also admit that evolutionary theory is wrong, or at least present that possibility to your reader as a legitimate option. You need to admit that you could be interpreting the scientific data in a completely biased and incorrect way.

Your treatment of Lucy, Neanderthal Man and Australopithecine is full of presumption. If you are going to use these items as the evidence for evolution then at least interact with the contrary evidence to your interpretation before you come to any fast and hard conclusions. The scientific dishonesty employed by the Leakys in their investigations and conclusions has now been thoroughly exposed (e.g., combining bone fragments that were buried hundreds of feet apart into one specimen), but you make no mention of that, or the forgery that took place with Peking Man, Piltdown Man, and many other such examples too numerous to mention. You include no other scientific interpretations of Australopithecine that are contrary to your evolutionary view. You claim on page 22 that Australopithecine “had a human-like body with an ape-like head,” but you don’t address the immediate anomaly this creates for evolution, since it presumes that evolution is selective on which body part it wants to evolve at a given time. It seems that

evolution can do just about anything that you want it to do. It is also amazing to me how much detailed information you claim from Neanderthal Man simply from a few buried bones of the specimen (e.g., whether Neanderthal Man had the ability to speak, use fire, and was smarter than a chimp). In short, Dr. Selenke, your presentation is very unscientific, the very perspective you so forcefully accuse your opponents of not possessing.

On page 21 you claim that a “second technique is chemical-genetic analysis” for “investigating evolution.” You claim that Neanderthal Man’s DNA indicates he was “distinct from modern humans.” Perhaps he was; perhaps he wasn’t. You offer no scientific studies to support your contention, nor do you tell us in what way he differed. In fact, there isn’t one footnote or endnote in your entire paper. How do you expect scientists to be persuaded by your claims, especially those who are going to be critical of those claims? If I were grading this paper on a collegiate level, I would have given it an F simply for failure to support even one claim you make with primary or secondary sources and authorities.

On page 14 you make quite an audacious claim, saying, “Is the FOXP2 gene the mutation that leads to the immortal soul?” This shows that you lack the necessary understanding, both from a theological and scientific perspective, to handle this topic. Genes cannot produce souls. Only God can create a soul, and I haven’t met or read from any scientist in the world, now or in the past, who has suggested otherwise. The more important issue you should be addressing with regard to genes is how any mechanism of evolution can produce the needed upward progression of genes in the host specimen for the next stage of evolution. I have had a challenge on my website for six years running asking that very question of the world’s evolutionists and no one has come up with an answer. Perhaps you can, since you seem to attribute to genes powers that no one else seems to ascribe.

Your statements on page 15, namely, “There are known to [be] generally different kinds of evolutionary mechanisms acting over time” and “oysters have changed little over a hundred million years,” are rather convenient. First, you don’t mention what these “different kinds” of mechanisms are. Second, you don’t explain how and why there would be a switch from one to another. Third, you don’t show why evolution is selective, that is, why it evolves a chimp but not an oyster. This methodology seems more like throwing spaghetti against the wall to see what sticks. You don’t have the slightest clue how evolution works, but somehow you know it is a “fact.” Did you ever consider the possibility that oysters look the same because there is no evolution, and that because of these anomalies your interpretations about chimp evolution is askew? All in all, I find your numerous presumptions quite hard to tolerate in light of the inordinate amount of times you claim that evolution is a fact in your paper.

Toward the end of your paper you say, “I would like to emphasize that this article combines speculation and fact.” Dr. Selenke, I must be honest. I did not find one “fact” in your article, nor did I find any support from third parties for the particular “speculations” that you make from your presumed facts.

At the very end of your paper you state, “As a scientist I believe that if the facts of evolution as I have studied in current journals and books are true, then I don’t see any great difficulties in accepting the Christian teaching of Adam and Eve and evolution.” Perhaps it is better late than never, but here you seem to be retreating somewhat from your earlier statements that evolution is a fact. The operative word is “IF.” I hope that by using “IF” you are admitting to your reader that everything you believe as “facts” about evolution may, in fact, be no facts at all.

You close with “Perhaps you can teach me.” I hope I have done just that, Dr. Selenke. I consider myself a logical, reasonable, scientific and devout man of God, but, after my 35 years of studying this issue, I can honestly say that the theory of evolution is about as far from these virtuous traits as I can imagine. And today, people like yourself have little excuse, because there is a plethora of anti-evolutionary literature now available, written from a solid scientific perspective. If you have not done so, then please avail yourself to it and interact with it before you publish anything as presumptuous and unsupported as the thesis you present in this paper. The scientific regimen demands this of you. If I can be of any help, please let me know.

If you want to continue this exchange, the only thing I would like to see before it goes any further is for you to give to me what you consider to be the best “proof” for why you believe evolution is a fact. Just one will do. If it is undeniably convincing, I will accept evolution with no reservations. The ball is in your court.

Cordially in Christ,

Robert Sungenis

[Update: Thus far, as of October 27, Dr. Selenke has not responded to my invitation]