

Negotiating Darwin

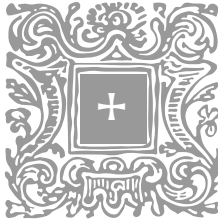
THE VATICAN CONFRONTS EVOLUTION,
1877–1902

Mariano Artigas, Thomas F. Glick,
and Rafael A. Martínez

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Introduction

When on October 22, 1996, Pope John Paul II declared that the theory of evolution was considered today as more than a hypothesis, he was acknowledging the Church's inclusion in the great evolutionary consensus, a step that followed from an open and creative debate over the issue in the years after Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950). The occasion was provided by an address to the members of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, gathered in the Vatican for a meeting on the origins and evolution of life. As the pope recalled, "In his Encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950), my predecessor Pius XII had already stated that there was no opposition between evolution and the doctrine of the faith about man and his vocation, on condition that one did not lose sight of several indisputable points."¹

The "indisputable points" referred mainly, as Pope John Paul II noted in the same address, to the teaching of revelation that the human being has been created in the image and likeness of God, a doctrine qualified by the pope as "pivotal to Christian thought." A large part of the address focused on this point, drawing a distinction between the scientific theory of evolution on the one hand and its philosophical interpretations on the other. A materialist interpretation denying the spiritual dimensions in the human being would not be compatible with the Christian doctrine. The pope clearly stated that the Church does not oppose the scientific theory of evolution, which is now supported by varied and independent proofs coming from diverse branches of the sciences:

Today, almost half a century after the publication of the Encyclical, new knowledge has led to recognize that the theory of evolution is more than a hypothesis. It is indeed remarkable that this theory has been progressively accepted by researchers, following a series of discoveries in various fields of knowledge. The convergence, neither sought nor fabricated, of the results of work that was conducted independently is in itself a significant argument in favour of this theory.²

Of course, the 1996 address should not be considered as an official endorsement of the theory of evolution by the Catholic Church, that is, as saying that a Catholic must accept that theory.

The 1996 address and the 1950 encyclical were two big stepping-stones, but they were not the only interventions of the Vatican authorities regarding evolutionism. Other statements by John Paul II and Pius XII could be added along the same lines. In fact, a quite peaceful accord had already been achieved by the 1930s. In 1931 Ernest Messenger published a long reliable account of the subject, whose main doctrinal point centered on the evolution of the human being.³ According to Messenger, no opposition existed between Christianity and the scientific theory of evolution, although the Vatican's contribution to the debate had not reached the status of authoritative doctrine. Of course, Messenger could quote only from available documents, which at the time were very scarce indeed. A much fuller review is now possible, thanks to the opening of the archives of the Holy Office in Rome in 1998.

The evidence reveals that the Vatican's actions with respect to evolution have been quite moderate. For many years, Catholic theology textbooks criticized evolutionism harshly, but they were able to marshal only a few authoritative arguments. Although it was known that Rome had intervened on some occasions, the exact picture was enveloped in darkness. The limited available data could not even be found in public documents. They almost always originated in a journal published by the Jesuits in Rome, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, which, without being an official publication of the Vatican, has always had a special relationship with the Holy See.

When the Vatican opened the Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which contains the archives of the old Congregation of the Holy Office and the Congregation of the Index, it became possible to gain access to information that, until that moment, had been rigorously guarded. Since 1999, we have worked in these archives with the objective of studying in detail the conduct of the Vatican authorities with respect to evolutionism in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the theory of evolution came to prominence. At some future date, when more recent documentation becomes available for consultation, it will be possible to continue the story.

Although we strive for the most accurate interpretation of these documents and their context, we recognize that other scholars might select materials according to some criteria other than our own, which is to identify both the ideological and operational stance of the Church with respect to the reception of Darwinism. We trust that the resulting narrative will appeal not only to scholars but also to a broader spectrum of readers interested in the interaction of science, culture, and religion.

Thanks to the opening of these two archival collections, we now have the opportunity to examine, with the objectivity that historical distance affords, the conduct of the Vatican authorities and their colleagues. In the archive we found reports prepared by designated experts who were already important figures in the life of the Church, or who became so later on. Thanks to the methodical, bureaucratic administrative style of the Holy See, abundant documentation offers a detailed look into a now remote period, but one that harbors the roots of current problems, many of which were also those of our predecessors, even in the face of vastly changed circumstances.

In the present study we focus on six cases that featured Catholics who tried to integrate (“harmonize” was the word of the epoch) evolution and Christianity. These same cases have been continuously mentioned whenever the relationship of the Catholic Church and evolution is discussed. But information about these cases has been fragmentary, giving rise to confusion that persists to the present, even in studies published since the opening of the archives of the Holy Office and with access to its documents.

These six authors all asserted the compatibility of evolution and Christianity. Others shared their views, but their cases had particular resonance. Based on new archival data, the present study reconstructs what really happened: who acted and for what reasons; how the events unfolded; what decisions were made, and how they were put into practice. As often happens with historical reconstructions, reality is sometime very simple, other times complex, and on occasion so extraordinarily complex that the web of decisions made for or against each of our six protagonists proves impossible to follow all the way to its conclusion.

The length of the chapters is unequal owing to the peculiar characteristics of the six cases. That of Bonomelli constitutes at best a small anecdote in the tumultuous life of this bishop. The case of Mivart is important but, contrary to what is sometimes said, evolutionism did not occupy center stage in the unfolding of his drama. Caverni’s case is what we might call of regular dimensions, without complications. By contrast, those of Leroy and Zahm are by far the most complex. Leroy provides a unique opportunity to contemplate the work of the Congregation of the Index in detail, and it also had important external repercussions. Zahm’s case was not initially so complex; only after the Congregation made its decision did complications arise. These are amply documented in the correspondence of Zahm and his friends and permit us to establish the tight relationship between this case and other factors that have nothing to do with evolution. The case of Hedley is very instructive, because it helps to reveal the origin of misconceptions that have persisted to the present.

We have adopted a vantage point that places our book entirely within the perspective of Catholicism, because our purpose is to provide a reliable account of

the documents of the Vatican archives that are now available for the first time. We analyze the six cases placing their protagonists and the documents in their historical context. In the first chapter we provide the context and data that are necessary to capture the meaning of the Vatican documents. An interesting but quite different work would be to place these cases in a wider context, including other Christian denominations, and to examine the relationship between science and religion in general. The reader interested in these issues can easily find books covering an ample range of fields, from historical introductions on science and religion,⁴ to more specialized studies on evolution and Protestantism.⁵

We have tried to avoid preconceptions and thus allow the documents to speak for themselves. When we began our research, we did not know what we might find in the archives. Of course, we knew that no official condemnation of evolution had ever been issued by the Vatican, in spite of the fact that evolutionism provoked severe tensions. We also knew something about the actions of the Vatican authorities, but very little indeed—only those few details that had already come to the public's attention. The research led us to an unexpected conclusion. Although from the outside one might well think that the Vatican adopted a careful policy toward evolutionism, to our surprise there was, in a sense, no policy at all. The actions of the authorities responded to particular circumstances, not to any carefully designed plan.

The Vatican authorities were aware of the fact that no condemnation of evolutionism had been issued, and apparently they were not anxious to provide one. They examined the writings of our protagonists when a work was denounced, analyzing each on the basis of the existing doctrine but without the guidance of any official doctrine regarding evolutionism. This explains why the reports of the experts followed no uniform pattern. Nor was there any fixed pattern that could predict the decision of the cardinals, or even of the pope. We will see that in one of the major cases the pope prevented the publication of a prohibition decided by the cardinals.

There is an obvious difference between the actions of the Vatican authorities and the fate of evolutionism within other Christian denominations. The exercise of a centralized government in the Vatican, following precise rules and procedures and saving the corresponding documents in carefully preserved archives, enables an orderly examination of the facts, reconstructing the proceedings from the first step until the last. Studies on Protestantism usually have to decide which protagonists can be taken as representative. In our case, that choice is determined by the structure of the government of the Catholic Church. We concentrate on those cases that provoked the intervention of Vatican authorities.

The decisions of the Vatican were used in textbooks and other theological studies as the authoritative reference for judging the acceptability of evolution. But they were poorly known, because only a few details were ever made public.

The prudence of the Vatican authorities when dealing with evolution can be interpreted as an effect of the Galileo affair. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Vatican documents on the proceedings against Galileo were published for the first time, and the behavior of the authorities of the Church was submitted to close scrutiny. Comparing their case with Galileo's, the supporters of evolution argued that they would also triumph in the long run. Most likely, Vatican authorities sought to avoid another conflict with the natural sciences if possible.

A major factor in the Roman responses to evolutionism was the complete opposition showed by *La Civiltà Cattolica*, a journal that was not an official publication of the Vatican but had a close relationship with Church authorities. It is difficult to overestimate the influence of this journal in the Catholic world. References made in *La Civiltà* to the attitude of the Vatican authorities about evolutionism, even though few and at times inaccurate, provided the basis on which Catholic theologians represented the issue for decades, even till the present day. The documents of the archives enable us to clarify this important issue. They show that the attitude of the Vatican authorities was not determined by the influence of any particular group, and also that their silence cannot be interpreted as a continuing condemnation that, due to mysterious reasons, was not given the publicity it deserved. Both interpretations have been suggested after the opening of the archives, as if they were a consequence of what the archives reveal. The reality, however, was much more complex and cannot be reduced to any simple scheme.

Until recently the relationship between science and religion has been considered as an ongoing, perpetual conflict. In our times, the "complexity thesis" has gained ground, the result of an increasing awareness that particular conflicts must be placed in their historical context. Two noteworthy books in this line are *God and Nature*, a collection of essays edited by David Lindberg and Ronald Numbers,⁶ and *Science and Religion* by John Hedley Brooke.⁷ According to Brooke, "Serious scholarship in the history of science has revealed so extraordinarily rich and complex a relationship between science and religion in the past that general theses are difficult to sustain. The real lesson turns out to be the complexity."⁸ We think that our study provides a major illustration of the complexity thesis.

The case of John Zahm can be considered paradigmatic, as it shows how theological reasons merge with motives that were in the final analysis religious but were also closely related to social and national problems in the United States and Europe. We are surprised to find that biological evolution played no role at all in the problems of Mivart, the champion of evolutionism in the Catholic orbit. Paradoxically, the only case that reached the ultimate conclusion, namely, public condemnation, was that of Raffaello Caverni, who nevertheless did not include in his defense of evolution the origin of the human being, which was the main point in contention. Therefore, our conclusions cannot be reduced to any single

simple thesis. In fact, if any thesis should be highlighted, we would emphasize that the Vatican authorities did not follow any fixed agenda, a conclusion very much in accord with the complexity thesis.

Even though the concept of evolution took shape in the second half of the nineteenth century, after the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, its reception by the Roman Catholic Church bore some relation to the condemnation of Galileo in 1633. The Catholic authorities regarded evolutionism with suspicion but were afraid to condemn it. In Galileo's time, modern science was almost nonexistent, and the motion of the Earth was seen as absurd and contrary to "common sense." In Darwin's time, however, modern science was already one of the main components of Western civilization. Theologians liked to say that, although evolution was not scientifically proven, the Roman authorities did not want to get involved in a second "Galileo affair." When Catholic authors attempted to harmonize evolutionism with Christianity, the authorities preferred not to condemn them by a public act but rather to persuade them to retract their ideas. A short letter published in a newspaper was enough. Galileo's shadow was always present.



The New Documents

January 22, 1998, was a historic day for the Vatican and for cultural history. In the seat of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, successor of the famous academy founded by Prince Federico Cesi in 1603, there took place a symposium titled “The Opening of the Archives of the Roman Holy Office.” Although the whole archive has not been preserved, the collection is still ample. For the first time in history, scholars can analyze the actions of the Vatican with respect to evolution with complete freedom.

The cases of Galileo and of evolution have become emblematic of the problems between science and religion, and both have been the subject of much debate. Although there are many studies on the relationship between evolution and Christianity, until now little was known about conflicts with Vatican authorities, and the facts were frequently distorted owing to the lack of trustworthy information. The recent declassification of documents in the Vatican archives makes it possible to clarify numerous issues and to know in detail how the Vatican reacted in the face of the problems posed by the concept of evolution.

On April 24, 1585, the Franciscan cardinal Felice Peretti had been elected pope, taking the name Sixtus V. It is said that he entered the conclave in the fullness of his sixty-four years with a sickly cast, leaning on a cane, but that at the moment of his election, he threw the cane down, ruling with great authority from that day forward. Although the story of the cane may be apocryphal, it is a fact that within two years Sixtus had done away with thousands of bandits who had scourged the Papal States, which then became the safest territory on European soil. He also reorganized the Vatican’s finances and set in motion a distinctive phase in the urbanization of Rome, including a series of public works that remain an important part of the city’s urban landscape. In the five years of his pontificate, he also reorganized the central administration of the Church, creating, with a bull dated February 11, 1588, the system that continues in force in our own times: the central administration, whose head is the pope, is organized

around a series of “congregations,” which came to function like the ministries of modern nations.

Each congregation is directed by a cardinal, and has as members several other cardinals, assisted by consultants and an administrative staff. Although several congregations have disappeared and others have been created or modified, the same administrative organization still exists today. In particular we need to know how two of them, the Holy Office and the Index, functioned, because those were the congregations that took part in the cases that we will examine here. The documents just declassified belong to the archives of these two congregations.¹

The Holy Office

Since 1965 the Holy Office has been called the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It has a tutelary role over matters of faith and morality throughout the Catholic world. Until 1908 it was also called the Holy Roman Inquisition, because it was the tribunal in which acts held to be crimes against faith or morality were adjudicated.

The antecedents of this congregation stretch back to the Middle Ages. Permanent inquisitors were created in Europe in 1231. They were charged with converting heretics and to sentencing them in cases of obstinacy, although bishops had the same function in each diocese. The Roman Tribunal was presided over by the pope, assisted by the assessor (the master of the Sacred Palace) and the commissioner. In 1542 Pope Paul III created the modern Roman Inquisition, with the objective of slowing the tide of Protestantism as it spread through Europe and began to make inroads into Italy. The new organism, consisting of six cardinals, extended its authority to all of Christendom. It was highly centralized—a necessity in view of the dispersion of the various tribunals of the Inquisition and of its absorption by the state in Spain (in the Spanish Inquisition, created in 1478, religious and political competencies were intermixed). In the general reform of the Roman Curia in 1588, Sixtus V placed it first among all the congregations, whence it acquired the qualifier “The Supreme,” which is how it was known. The current Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is presided over by a cardinal, just like the other congregations, but in the period that interests us here the Holy Office was chaired directly by the pope, who participated in its weekly meetings, always held on Thursday, or *feria quinta*.

One of the competencies of the Holy Office was the examination and prohibition of books. This was also the purview of the Congregation of the Index. It was not unusual for the Holy Office to decide to prohibit a book, in which case it would communicate its decision to the Congregation of the Index to have it put into practice. The cases we consider were transacted and decided almost in total-

ity by the Congregation of the Index, although we also find some participation by the Holy Office.

‘The Index of Prohibited Books’

The *Index of Prohibited Books* was a publication that listed the books whose reading, possession, or publication was prohibited for Catholics.² We have records of lists of books from antiquity on that Church authorities considered dangerous for faith and customs, for example, a list produced by a Roman Council in A.D. 494. This activity continued in later centuries and acquired new importance with the rise of Protestantism in the sixteenth century. Moreover, when this period coincided with the spread of printing, an avalanche of Protestant books and pamphlets provoked a reaction by the Catholic Church aimed at impeding their printing, sale, possession, and reading. The Council of Trent took up this problem, which finally was entrusted to the new Congregation of the Index.

The first *Index of Prohibited Books* was published in 1544 by the Faculty of Theology of the University of Paris. New books were then added to this *Index*, as to others published in subsequent years by civil and ecclesiastical authorities in different places: Venice (1549), Venice and Milan (1549, 1554), Anvers (1569, 1570, 1571), Louvain (1546, 1550, 1558), Spain (1551, 1554, 1559), Portugal (1547, 1551, 1561). In 1557 the first Roman *Index* was published.³ The decisions of the Council of Trent led to the publication of a new *Index* in 1564 and to the formulation of ten general rules that remained in force for more than 300 years.

In 1571 Pope Pius V, mindful of the numerous matters that occupied the Holy Office, created the Congregation of the Index as a permanent institution in the Vatican to scrutinize publications and whose operations would later be more precisely defined by successive popes. It occupied seventh place among the congregations established in Sixtus V’s 1588 reform of the Roman Curia. The Congregation published a new *Index of Prohibited Books* in 1596, and it continued to publish new editions in which books prohibited since the preceding edition were added and other emendations introduced.

In 1753 Benedict XIV established with greater precision the procedures to be followed in the examination and censorship of books and set the very norms that continued in force during the period here examined. When he received a charge against a book, the secretary of the Congregation was obliged to examine it and to name referees, called “consultors,” to do likewise. Then a written report was prepared for presentation at a meeting with the consultors and, afterward, at another meeting of the full Congregation of the member cardinals, who composed a definitive resolution submitted for the pope’s approval.

In 1897 Leo XIII initiated a comprehensive reform of the *Index*, simplifying the

body of rules that had accumulated over the centuries and revising their content. In 1917 Benedict XV abolished the Congregation of the Index and assigned its jurisdiction to the Holy Office, which, from that time forward, assumed the tasks related to the *Index of Prohibited Books*, just as it had had in its early years. Finally, in 1965 Paul VI left the *Index* with no status in ecclesiastical law, while preserving its spirit.⁴ The final edition of the *Index* was published in 1948.

The Congregation of the Index

The Congregation of the Index examined publications that had been reported to it because they presumably contained doctrines contrary to the faith and morality, although it could also carry out such an inquiry on its own initiative. If the result of the inquiry was negative, a decree was published whereby the book was added to the *Index*, whose contents were brought up to date whenever a new edition was issued, something that did not happen with any regularity.

As was the case with the other congregations, that of the Index was headed by a cardinal prefect, aided by the master of the Sacred Palace (*maestro di Sacro Palazzo*) as his permanent assistant, an official equivalent to the current theologian of the pontifical household. The Congregation had a secretary; with the exception of the first, who was a Franciscan, the rest were always Dominicans. In the period that interests us here, the secretary directed the business of the Congregation. In addition, there was a group of cardinal members, a team of expert consultants who drew up the reports on the books examined, and various subalterns.

The Congregation of the Index reached its decisions in three phases. In the first place, the prefect, assisted by the secretary, charged one or more consultants with the examination of the work denounced. The consultant submitted his report in writing. In the period under consideration, these verdicts, with a few exceptions, were printed for distribution in the meetings of the Congregation.

The second step was a meeting called the Preparatory or Particular Congregation, in which the consultants of the Congregation of the Index met, chaired by the secretary of the Congregation and assisted by the master of the Sacred Palace.⁵ This Preparatory Congregation had no power to make decisions. Its function was to prepare the cardinals for their deliberations, examining and discussing the reports that the same consultants had prepared. After their discussion, the consultants were to draw up a recommendation for each work examined, usually including a vote tally. The secretary then wrote a summary giving the result of the vote, and that proposal was transmitted to the cardinals, together with the reports of each consultant.

Several days later, the General Congregation would meet, in which the cardi-

nals who were members of the Congregation of the Index participated. The task of the cardinals was to judge the works submitted for examination, taking into account the reports of the consultors and the deliberations of the Preparatory Congregation, and to decide what kind of punishment should be accorded to each one of them. The secretary of the Congregation and the master of the Sacred Palace also attended the meetings of the General Congregation.

The Particular Congregation and General Congregation were convened with varying frequency, generally twice or three times yearly. Attendance was not very regular. The number of cardinal members of the Index, although the total varied, was always quite high: between 1894 and 1900, it varied from around twenty to thirty. A total of forty-six different cardinals were members of the Index in those years. Many resided outside of Rome and only appeared infrequently at the General Congregation, if it coincided with their presence in Rome for other reasons. This was the case of the cardinals of Rhodes, Ferrara, and Naples, who attended the Congregation only once. Moreover, many of the Curia cardinals who resided in Rome were members of several congregations, and so could not always attend every meeting. If, as happened in some cases, they were also prefects of another congregation, it could occur that they might never participate in the sessions of the Index. Such, for example, was the case of Cardinal Miecislav Ledóchowski (1822–1902), prefect of the Holy Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.⁶ In the years mentioned, only seventeen cardinals took part in the meetings (including the three just mentioned, who participated in one meeting only), with attendance varying between five and ten cardinals at each meeting.

Attendance at the Preparatory Congregation was not much more regular. A total of forty-five consultors are mentioned in the annual Pontifical volumes (*Annuario Pontificio*) for the period 1893–1900, but only twenty-eight of these actually participated. The number of consultors present, including the master of the Sacred Palace, varied between seven and fourteen on each occasion.

We have used principally two sources to follow developments in the Preparatory Congregation. First are the printed folios of convocation for the General Congregation, indicating the place, day, and time of the meeting (habitually they took place in the Apostolic Palace of the Vatican, Wednesdays, at 9:30 in the morning), the works that were to be examined, and the names of the consultors who had prepared the respective recommendations and those who would expound them at the meeting. The recommendations of the consultors were included as well. The second page contained an extract of the meeting of the Preparatory Congregation: its date, where the meeting had taken place, who had attended, and, in schematic form, what were the recommendations of the consultors for each of the books examined. The summary concluded with an expression of submission to the decision of the cardinals and of the pope.

The second source comprises the summaries of the Congregations, both particular and general, that the secretary of the Index wrote in the Diary of the Congregation. These generally provide the same data as the informative sheets but sometimes with greater detail.

The habitual practice of the Congregation of the Index was that, after the General Congregation, the secretary was received in audience by the pope, for him to confirm the decisions taken. The secretary would explain the cases studied and the decisions taken and the pope would then order the publication of the decree that converted such decisions into Church law. After being informed of the decisions, the pope customarily gave his approval. But this was not a simple bureaucratic action, because the pope, with some frequency, ordered other works added to the decree, or otherwise bypassed the regular Index procedure. As we will see in one of the cases that interest us, the pope intervened personally, more than once, to stop the publication of a decree of prohibition and to give other instructions.

The decree was then printed in large format and posted in the appropriate places in Rome, including the Vatican and the Palace of the Chancery. All decrees had the same structure. At the top of the page was the pope's escutcheon, flanked on either side by the figures of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. The text began with a formulaic paragraph, always the same, stipulating that the cardinal members of the Congregation had met on a specific date; nothing ever changed in this opening paragraph except for the date. Next came the list of books that the decree prohibited. Only the author and publication data of the book were given, and nothing more. This is extraordinarily important, because nothing was ever said about the reason for prohibiting the book, which is why some cases have been unexplained until the present. When the author was a Catholic and had accepted the Congregation's decision, the following sentence was added: "The author, in a praiseworthy manner, has submitted [to the decree] and has repudiated his book." At the end of the document came the date the decree was ordered and its publication date in Rome, together with the signatures of the cardinal prefect and the secretary of the Congregation.

Such a procedure meant that the decisions of the Congregation of the Index were based on already existing doctrine. The Congregation could not, of its own accord, decide whether a doctrine was acceptable or not: it could only apply already existing doctrine to specific books. Clearly, when the consultors examined books, they used their own arguments, but the decisions themselves had to be based on already existing decisions of popes, Church councils, or of the Congregation of the Holy Office: although theological arguments might be adduced, these did not have the value of public doctrinal authority, because they were never published and were only known to those who participated in the activities

of the Congregation. Still they are a valuable source of information. The reports preserved in the archive reveal the arguments used in each case.

In the specific case of evolutionism, the Congregation of the Index continually found itself in an area where no doctrinal judgment had been clearly defined by the relevant authorities, and it therefore had to base its decisions on the arguments that surfaced within the Congregation itself. Perhaps this explains why the decisions of the Congregation of the Index, although on several occasions contrary to evolutionism, were always put forth moderately. As we will see, such moderation also is explained by the considerate way in which Catholic authors were treated, as well as the orders or religious congregations to which certain authors belonged: on some occasions the public condemnation of the book was replaced by a brief retraction by the author or by some phrasing that fell short of a retraction.

The Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

The archives of the present-day Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, opened to scholars in 1998, includes the archives of the two congregations mentioned: the Holy Office and the Index.⁷ Each of the two archives has different sections: for example, in the Index archive, there is a series of volumes called *Protocolli*, which contains all the material produced during the examination of a book from the letter of the accuser to the final decree prohibiting the book, including the reports of the consultors, the summaries of the meetings of the consultors and cardinals, and the report prepared by the secretary for his audience with the pope. There are other volumes called *Diarii*, which are the diaries or calendars in which the different events and decisions are noted, with the relevant dates.

Even though this material is clear, ordered, and informative, that does not mean that everything that happened was written down. For example, of the two standard meetings where the books were discussed (that of the consultors and that of the cardinals), only a brief summary was recorded. At times it is stated in such summaries that the debate was long and heated, and, although the final result is always indicated, we still want to know in detail what was said and who said it. In some cases it is possible to fill in these gaps; for example, when some consultor or cardinal published his thoughts about evolutionism separately, one can infer the tenor of his remarks from the public record.

Owing to various historical circumstances, the complete archive has not been preserved. The greatest losses are owing to fires and to Napoleon's transfer of the Vatican archives to Paris. That mission was entrusted to the French army, but when—years later—the French authorities decided to return the archive to its

legitimate owner, the Vatican did not have the means to carry out the mission, and its representative in Paris, using the authority given him, disposed of a great portion of the archive, which was either destroyed or sold as paper (one such lot is preserved in Dublin).

While these losses are irreparable, they still do not affect our story. Although evolutionism has ancient roots, its modern scientific formulation dates to the nineteenth century, especially after 1859, when Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*. Most of evolutionism's problems with the Roman authorities date to the second half of the nineteenth century. Many of the original documents have been preserved, having escaped the particular scourges mentioned.

None of Darwin's works were placed on the *Index*. His grandfather Erasmus Darwin's didactic poem *Zoonomia*, which contained a certain formulation of evolution along with doctrines held to be materialist, was indeed listed.⁸ This fact should suggest that there was no systematic investigation of publications. Whether a book was examined by the Congregation or not depended, in great part, on someone formally denouncing it.

The second rule decreed by the Council of Trent prohibited all books on religious matters written by heretics. When Pope Leo XIII introduced his revision of the *Index's* rules in 1897, the same criterion remained in force: "Books written by non-Catholics that treat religion *ex profeso* are prohibited, unless it is ascertained that there is nothing in them contrary to the Catholic faith."⁹ It is unsurprising, therefore, that some of the evolutionist authors who led the confrontation between evolution and religion were not placed on the *Index*: Darwin was not listed and neither were Thomas H. Huxley, Herbert Spencer, or Ernst Haeckel.

The Holy See granted special importance to books written by Catholic authors and in Catholic countries, because they were more likely to disturb the life of the Church. When Catholic theology books mentioned interventions by the Holy See, they were referring to books written by Catholics. For this reason, we here consider the cases of six Catholic authors whose publications were the object of Vatican scrutiny. These authors were mentioned in theology textbooks for several decades after 1859, and they continue to be cited whenever the history of the relationship between evolutionism and the Catholic Church is discussed.

Evolutionism and Christianity: Six Cases

The six cases are quite different and display the range of the Vatican's reactions to evolutionism in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Of the six authors, two came from Italy, two from England, one from France, and one from the United States. They held different ranks in the Church: two were bishops, two were members of religious orders (a Dominican and a priest of the Congregation of Holy Cross), one a diocesan priest, and the last, a layman.¹⁰

The first case is that of Raffaello Caverni (1837–1900), an Italian priest from Florence interested in science and its history. Toward the end of his life he wrote a monumental history of the experimental method in Italy. In an 1877 book, he proposed the reconciliation of evolution with Catholic doctrine. This book was immediately denounced to the Congregation of the Index by his own archbishop, was condemned by the Congregation in 1878, and was listed in all the later editions of the *Index*. Nevertheless, the case has been practically ignored because the decrees of the Index never explained the reasons for the censure, and evolution is not mentioned in the title of Caverni's book. But the archive contains an ample report written by a consultor of the Congregation, one of the most important Catholic theologians of the period who later became a cardinal.

The second figure is Dalmace Leroy (1828–1905), a French Dominican. The second edition of *The Evolution of Organic Species*, his book favorable to the reconciliation of evolution and Catholicism was published in 1891. Four years later, a Parisian newspaper published a letter written by Leroy from Rome, in which he retracted his position, explaining that his hypothesis had been judged untenable, having been examined in Rome by the relevant authority. This case has been mentioned frequently but on the basis of virtually no information. The archive permits us to reconstruct the case in its full complexity and to describe exactly what happened. We discovered that the Congregation of the Index decided to condemn Leroy's book, but the corresponding decree was never published out of consideration for both Leroy and the Dominicans. Instead, it asked Leroy for a public retraction, and he complied with the letter to the press. The archival documentation is abundant, containing six reports on Leroy's book, some of them very extensive.

The accompanying figure depicts the first page of a report on the work of Dalmace Leroy, drawn up by Teofilo Domenichelli, concluding that no further action should be taken against the book. This copy was used by the prefect of the Index, Cardinal Serafino Vannutelli, during the second General Congregation in which Leroy's work was discussed. The annotation on top is by the secretary of the Index, Marcolino Cicognani, indicating that on the last page of the report he had included a brief summary of the decisions of the first General Congregation. The sideways annotation on the left is an adumbration by Cardinal Vannutelli of the final decision to condemn the book, but without making the decree public, and to ask Leroy to make a public retraction. It appears to have been penned during the discussion. On the right is a reference, also in Vannutelli's hand, to a comment on Raffaello Caverni's sentence made by the consultor Tripepi in his report on Leroy's book.¹¹ The archive also contains Leroy's correspondence with the Congregation of the Index after 1895, including his proposal for a revised edition of his book and the responses he received.

The protagonist of the third case is John Zahm (1851–1921), an American

priest of the Congregation of Holy Cross, professor of physics at the order's University of Notre Dame. Zahm published a number of volumes on science and religion, one of which, published in 1896, was condemned by the Congregation of the Index in 1898. But, again, the corresponding decree was never published. In this instance, there was no retraction, but we know that the Holy See opposed the diffusion of the book because Zahm himself said so in a private letter to his Italian publisher, which was reproduced in the press. Here is another complex case, with much maneuvering in the Vatican both against Zahm and on his behalf. Zahm's case is intimately related to the issue of "Americanism," a movement in Catholicism that involved some outstanding American clerics. Much was already known of this case based on abundant correspondence of the principals, but the archive provides new data that resolve some problematic issues.

The Italian bishop Geremia Bonomelli (1831–1914), an important and controversial public figure in the last part of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, is the protagonist of the fourth case. A book in which Bonomelli promoted a solution to the conflict between the new Italian state and the papacy was listed in the *Index of Prohibited Books*; the solution he proposed was quite close to the present arrangement, but it was highly controversial then. In an appendix to one of his books, Bonomelli praised Zahm's views on evolution. Then, without any official act by the Holy See, he found out from a friend—a cardinal—that his stance was viewed negatively in the Vatican; he then published a letter of retraction on his own initiative. There were no further repercussions.

Another bishop, the Benedictine John Hedley (1837–1915), bishop of Newport, Wales, is the subject of the fifth case. He praised several of Zahm's books, including the one on evolution, in an article and was himself favorable to evolutionism, although he was more reserved when it was applied to the origin of the human body. The Holy See took no action. Rather, Hedley became entangled in a polemic with *La Civiltà Cattolica* and published a letter that many interpreted as a retraction, although it really wasn't. An analysis of this case permits us to identify the origin of misconceptions about it that have persisted till the present and to clarify important aspects of some of the other cases.

St. George Mivart (1827–1900), protagonist of the sixth case, was an important English biologist who accepted evolution and published, in 1871, a book in which he held that biological evolution was compatible with Christian doctrine. Although the volume aroused some opposition, it was never condemned by the Vatican. Years later, however, the *Index* listed three of his articles on hell that bore no relation to evolution. Toward the end of his public life, Mivart wrote several articles that were quite critical of Catholic doctrine and the authority of the Church. Cardinal Vaughan, Mivart's bishop, after an exchange of letters containing three formal, explicit warnings, forbade him to receive the sacraments. Mivart died shortly thereafter. His confrontation with Church authorities is fre-

quently attributed to evolution. In this case, an ample Holy Office dossier invites a reconsideration of documents known previously and permits clarifications of confused interpretations of Mivart's case.

The Catholic Reception of Evolution

The atmosphere surrounding these six cases was shaped by the tension between science and Christianity prevailing during the second half of the nineteenth century. The enormous advances of the natural sciences, together with archaeological discoveries that permitted greater understanding of ancient cultures, were perceived as a threat to Christianity and the privileged position it had held in European culture for many centuries. Theological positions were attacked in the name of science, although in many instances points of conflict were not owing to science per se but rather to doctrines (such as agnosticism and materialism) that appealed to scientific findings for support. Publications hostile to Christianity in general and the Catholic Church in particular multiplied precipitously. John William Draper's *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874) and Andrew Dickson White's more ambitious work, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896), held that there was a permanent and inevitable conflict between science and theology. Both books enjoyed great success, and not only in the United States, where they were originally published.

In France, Louis Jaccoliot argued that Christianity lacked any historical basis and was no more than a variant of Indian myths. From the first page of any one of his books, he presented his ideas as a consequence of scientific rigor that undermines all such baseless myths: "A new world is emerging. Science, with its rigorous methods, has dealt a mortal blow to religious poetry and historical legends, and the day is approaching when only sensate, rational, and human phenomena will be believed."¹²

Evolution was widely seen, by friend and foe alike, as threatening the status quo.¹³ The Vatican thus responded to a whole series of books assaulting Catholicism and Christianity that were prejudiced and filled with exaggerations. The literal interpretation of the Bible was attacked everywhere. In such an environment, the enthusiasm that evolutionism sparked, particularly with the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, was frequently mixed with attacks on religion and, in the name of evolution, an equally vigorous defense of agnosticism, atheism, materialism, and free thought. Furthermore, these arguments promoting evolution often overlooked the theory's many lacunae. All this helps to understand why Catholics frequently assumed a stance hostile to evolutionism, which they could picture as an instrument used by materialists to attack religion. The ideological baggage that evolution had acquired made it an obvious target for believers.

In the epoch of Mivart, Caverni, Leroy, Zahm, Bonomelli, and Hedley, Catholic theologians applied a severe critique to evolutionism, especially as it treated the origin of Adam's body. Nevertheless, only a few asserted that the direct divine creation of Adam's body was Catholic doctrine. One of these was Matthias Joseph Scheeben (1835–88), one of the most important Catholic theologians of his time. Scheeben was a kind of theological mystic who acquired great fame after his death and whose books are published to this day. On human evolution, he wrote: "It is heresy to pretend that man, insofar as concerns his body, 'is descended from monkeys' as a consequence of a progressive change registered in forms, including the supposition that in the complete evolution of man's form, God has simultaneously created a soul."¹⁴

Advancing a somewhat softer line but one still strongly critical of evolutionism was the important Jesuit theologian Camillo Mazzella (1833–1900). He was professor of theology in the United States (first at Georgetown University, then at College of the Sacred Heart in Woodstock, Maryland) from 1867 until 1878, a period in which he published several books, including a treatise on God the Creator that went through a number of editions into the twentieth century. In 1878 Mazzella was appointed professor at the Gregorian University in Rome and was named a cardinal in 1886. He was cardinal prefect of the Congregation of the Index from 1889 until 1893, when he was named prefect of the Congregation of Studies.

Mazzella plays a key role in our story because, after his service as prefect of the Congregation of the Index, he was still serving as a cardinal member when Leroy's book was examined in 1894–95. He not only participated in the two meetings of cardinals that examined the book but was also the most qualified theologian among the cardinals present. One of the arguments of the experts used in those meetings was strongly rooted in Mazzella's book on God the creator.

In this book, Mazzella criticized evolutionism and, in response to those who claimed that Adam's body could have evolved, he invoked the positions of two important theologians, one "classical," the other modern. The classical theologian was his Jesuit predecessor, Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), who held that the direct production of Adam's body by God was a Catholic doctrine. According to a third Jesuit, Giovanni Perrone (1794–1876), the proposition was likewise doctrinal. Mazzella added that, even though the statement might not officially be a Church doctrine, no Catholic could deny it, inasmuch as it constituted a "rash" doctrine lacking a solid basis. Mazzella defended his thesis on the basis of both revelation (Scripture as well as tradition) and arguments based on reason, which included extensive critiques of evolution.¹⁵

The Eclipse of Darwinism

Charles Darwin had proposed in the *Origin of Species* that the primary mechanism of evolutionary change was natural selection. The logic of the hypothesis was simple. In spite of the tendency for organisms to increase at a geometrical rate, populations of plants and animals in a given habitat tend to remain stable from year to year. Malthusian checks keep the numbers down. Out of the ensuing struggle for existence, “favourable variations would tend to be preserved and unfavourable ones to be destroyed. The result of this,” Darwin continues, “would be the formation of a new species.”¹⁶ That is, small and relatively insignificant variations of character would confer an adaptive advantage to certain individuals in a given population, so that those with favorable variations would tend to survive in greater numbers than those without. Over many generations such adaptive changes would produce new varieties, subspecies, and, eventually, species.

Even such a stalwart defender of Darwin as Thomas H. Huxley was not willing to sign off on natural selection, as persuasive as Darwin’s argument was, until it could be proved under laboratory conditions, something that was not in fact possible until the rediscovery of Mendel’s laws of genetics in 1900 opened a way to the development of statistical tests of selection.

Because there was no agreement on the mechanisms of evolution among naturalists who were convinced that evolution was a fact and because Darwin himself, in successive editions of *Origin* (in particular the fifth and sixth), retreated on his claim that natural selection was the sole mechanism of evolution, the debate produced a plethora of competing mechanisms, including the neo-Lamarckism of American disciples of Louis Agassiz and orthogenesis or straight-line evolution.¹⁷

This situation prevailed in biology throughout the 1890s when all but one of our cases transpired, a period that Julian Huxley later characterized as the “eclipse of Darwinism” because of the uncertainty surrounding natural selection. According to Huxley, the reaction against natural selection set in during the 1890s as Darwinism became more and more theoretical, with no apparent support from experimentation—“merely case books of real or supposed adaptations.”¹⁸ In 1894 William Bateson published his *Materials for the Study of Variation*, which stressed evidence for discontinuous, large variations, rather than the continuous small ones that lay at the core of Darwin’s theory. Bateson’s approach was fortified by the mutation theory popularized by Hugo de Vries, one of the rediscoverers of Mendel’s laws, after 1900. Bateson was then to conclude, in a famous address at the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1914, that all evolutionary change is owing to mutation. “Selection and adaptation were relegated to an unconsidered background,” and the death knell of Darwinism was sounded at the highest levels of British biology.¹⁹ Of course, the patient had plenty of life remaining.

Three outcomes of the eclipse of Darwinism are important to our story. First, the abstract quality of evolutionary discourse in the 1890s made it an obvious target for the kind of Catholic apologetics that we observe in the six cases before us. Second, the absence of consensus on how competing hypotheses might be tested created a climate propitious for Catholics to advance their own hypotheses, such as Dalmace Leroy's "mitigated evolution" or St. George Mivart's "specific genesis." As a scientist himself, Mivart was immediately attacked, but he was not the only biologist to be so treated. Third, the lack of agreement among scientists on evolutionary mechanisms gave rise to one of the great shibboleths of religiously based anti-evolutionism, both among Catholics and Protestants: the disagreement of scientists was interpreted as proof of an inherent weakness of the general theory of evolution.

The Council of Cologne

In 1860 a provincial council held in Cologne had debated evolutionism. Its conclusions must be introduced in any discussion of the Catholic Church's stance with respect to evolution in the nineteenth century, because it is the most explicit statement on the subject made by any official Catholic authority.²⁰

The council in question was not even a gathering of all German bishops but rather a provincial council that only affected the ecclesiastical province of Cologne. The archbishop of Cologne, Cardinal Ioannes von Geissel, sought the Holy See's authorization to hold the council on June 6, 1859. Pope Pius IX authorized it on July 30. Geissel convoked the council on February 25, 1860, and it was in session between April 29 and May 17. Following the norms regulating provincial councils, bishops of three other dioceses that made up the ecclesiastical province of Cologne—those of Trier, Münster, and Paderborn—participated along with the cardinal archbishop of Cologne, plus three more bishops, four auxiliary bishops, twelve canons, three representatives of Catholic faculties and universities, and some seminary rectors and superiors of religious orders.²¹

The Council of Cologne met in five general sessions. On June 15, 1860, Geissel sent the acts and decrees and of the council to the Holy See for official review. Pius IX replied on July 19 to say that he would transmit all the material to the Congregation of the Council, which was the competent authority in the Vatican. Cardinal Prospero Caterini, prefect of the Congregation of the Council replied a year and a half later, on December 19, 1861, praising the work of the council and forwarding a few notes.²² Pius IX also replied, on April 7, 1862, adding his words of praise. Finally, the acts and decrees of the council were promulgated by the cardinal archbishop of Cologne on July 23, 1862.²³

The Holy See's approval did not affect the outcome of the council's pronouncements. It was still a provincial council whose writ ran only in the dio-

ceses of the ecclesiastical province of Cologne, and its decrees, though recognized by the Holy See, were promulgated by the authority of the archbishop of Cologne. In the document of promulgation of the acts and decrees of the council, addressed to the Catholics of the ecclesiastical province of Cologne, Cardinal Geissel wrote:

Therefore, we have submitted to the supreme authority of the Holy See, so that it might recognize [*recognoscenda*] all the decrees which were approved in the Council by us and our venerable brother bishops of this province by unanimous vote, and which now through these letters we present these same decrees scrutinized and recognized [*revisa et recognita*] by the same Holy See, and we promulgate them by our metropolitan authority [*auctoritate nostra metropolitana promulgamus*: the authority proper to the archbishop, head of the ecclesiastical province].²⁴

The Holy See's approval of provincial councils was known by the technical term, *recognitio* (recognition). Franz Xaver Wernz, who appears in the Mivart case as a consultor of the Congregation of the Index, wrote an extensive textbook of canon law that went through several reeditions and updates over several decades. On the question of provincial councils, he says that according to the rules in force it is not necessary that the pope confirm them and that, in any case, the pope does not generally give any *specific* assent. He adds that the metropolitan archbishop, before promulgating the acts and decrees, should transmit them to the Holy See, where they are normally reviewed (recognized) by the Congregation of the Council. This review, even when it includes corrections,

does not cause the decrees of the Council to be transformed thereby into *pontifical* decrees extending to the *universal* Church, or that each and all of the matters mentioned in the *acts* and established in the decrees are themselves thereby approved or seen as *valid*, supposing that they may [also include] false or invalid measures; still, one must not underrate [the review] as if it *added no authority* to the acts and decrees of the provincial Council. In effect, it is an authentic *witness* of the higher authority that the Council was *legally convoked and held*, and that nothing *worthy of censure* was found in the correction of the decrees. Whence such decrees, although *still decrees of the Council*, are nevertheless easier to execute and better defended in the face of impugnations.²⁵

This process describes exactly what occurred with the Council of Cologne, as we have just seen. Cardinal Geissel sent the acts and documents to be *recognized*. The pope responded, confirming that he had transmitted the documents to the Congregation of the Council to be *recognized* by it and, after informing the pope, to respond to Geissel. The prefect of the Congregation of the Council sent a letter of *recognition* of the acts and decrees. The pope then dispatched a letter in which

he praised the council in a generic way. And the cardinal of Cologne promulgated the decrees on his own authority, noting that they had been sent to Rome for their *recognition* and that they had been *reviewed* and *recognized* by the Holy See (the italicized expressions appear in the original documents). It is clear that the process followed is exactly that described by the canon lawyer Wernz.

The Council of Cologne deals with evolution in part I of its decrees (“On Catholic Doctrine”), title IV (“On Mankind”), chapter XIV (“On the Origin of the Human Species and the Nature of Man”). The first paragraph states: “The first parents were created [*conditi*] directly by God. Therefore, we declare as contrary to Sacred Scripture and to the faith the opinion of those who are not ashamed to assert that man, insofar as his body is concerned, came to be by a spontaneous change [*spontanea immutatione*] from imperfect nature to the most perfect and, in a continuous process, finally [became] human.”²⁶ After asserting that all humankind descends from Adam, the chapter continues with extensive considerations of the human soul, confirming its spiritual quality and its immortality.

The strong tones of the conciliar document can give the impression of a dogmatic declaration of faith. But the council lacked such authority, not even when armed with Rome’s “recognition.” Without doubt, rejection of evolution was quite general among theologians, but there existed no such general consensus to the effect that the direct creation of the body of the first man was an article of faith: many preferred to consider the divine creation of Adam’s body, without intermediaries, as a “certain” or “common” doctrine, holding the contrary thesis to be a “rash” opinion that should be avoided, even though it did not reach the level of heresy. The position of the Council of Cologne reflects the opinion of the German theologian Matthias Joseph Scheeben and his Italian counterpart Giovanni Perrone, but, as we have seen, Camillo Mazzella admitted that perhaps it was not a matter of faith, adding that, in any case, no Catholic could deny it, since to accept the opposite was, at the very least, a rash or uncertain doctrine.

Those who supported the compatibility of evolution and Christianity found an easy solution. The Council of Cologne denied that the body of Adam arose from lower beings by means of a *spontaneous* transformation. This meant that the council did not condemn an evolutionary origin outright, but only opposed those who asserted that this evolutionary process had taken place *without the assistance of divine action*. On the contrary, there would be no problem in accepting evolution so long as one recognized simultaneously the necessity of divine participation for the process to take place, in such a way that the secondary causes might join with continuous divine action in giving being and activity to all organisms. All Catholics, moreover, agreed that a special divine act was required for the infusion of the soul: only the origin of the body was in play.

Theology Textbooks

After the actions of the Holy See against Leroy and Zahm had run their course, as well as the presumed action against Bonomelli, for forty years thereafter generations of seminarians, priests, and professors the world over studied Catholic theology textbooks in which it was explained that the Holy See had acted against evolutionism in these cases of Leroy, Zahm, Bonomelli, and Hedley, based almost exclusively on information gleaned from *La Civiltà Cattolica*, a journal directed by a group of Jesuits in Rome, whose contents were scrutinized in the Vatican. Such references were always brief, because not much information was provided. The textbooks customarily proposed the simple thesis that God formed the body of Adam directly and immediately, without any evolutionary process. The principal proof adduced was a very literal interpretation of the narrative of the creation of man found in Genesis. This interpretation of Genesis was confirmed by that offered by the majority of the Church fathers. They also stressed the lack of proofs in favor of evolution. And, in a section devoted to decisions of the Church, the cases of Leroy, Zahm, Bonomelli, and Hedley were cited to show that the position of the Holy See was contrary to evolution. The majority of the authors characterized the divine creation of Adam's body as a "certain" or "common" doctrine, and the contrary position was considered a "rash" opinion that, even though it did not constitute heresy, ought to be avoided.

These references to Leroy, Zahm, Bonomelli, and Hedley usually contained errors of fact. The principal one was to attribute the Holy See's intervention in these cases to the Holy Office, and to conclude that the Holy Office, which was the principal doctrinal organism of the Church, opposed evolution. The source of this confusion was a series of commentaries by the Jesuit Salvatore Brandi in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, which were taken as true owing to the peculiar prestige of *La Civiltà*. Some authors simply referred to earlier textbooks, so that these imprecisions were transmitted uncritically from generation to generation. The authors of these textbooks were unable to obtain better data, because such data could only be found in the inaccessible archives of the Vatican.

A typical case is that of the Jesuit Christian Pesch who, in the 1908 edition of a textbook that had many editions, wrote:

The opinion rejected here had already been repudiated several times by the Roman authorities. In 1891 Leroy published a book in which he defended the opinion of Doctor Mivart. But he went to Rome in 1895 "to receive a warning" [*ad audiendum verbum*], was ordered to retract his views, and he did so. Some years later Zahm wrote a book in which again he defended Doctor Mivart's opinion as probable. But in 1899 he too was ordered by the Congregation of the Holy Office to withhold his book from sale. Therefore, it is clear that the Congregation of the Holy Office opposes this opinion.²⁷

Another author of widely read theology textbooks, Adolphe Tanquerey, in a work published in 1913, devoted a section to Mivart, Leroy, and Zahm. According to Tanquerey, Mivart's views were not heretical because the Church, up to that time, had reached no conclusion about it. But, Tanquerey continues, the traditional meaning of the Bible should be maintained if there is no prudent reason to abandon it. He adds that the Roman congregations had on various occasions criticized the evolutionary origin of the human body, and in a footnote he says that Leroy and Zahm, both of whom held this opinion as probable, were ordered to withdraw their books from sale. As the source of this information he refers the reader to Christian Pesch's textbook. This information, while not wrong, is imprecise.²⁸

Our examination of other textbooks widely used in seminaries and universities revealed a similar pattern. We found that the sources usually lead back to *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the information is scant and not very precise, and there are at times patent errors of fact. For example, the Jesuit Blas Beraza stated that the ordinary teaching (Magisterium) of the Church on this issue is clear, because the Holy Office ordered Zahm to withdraw his book, while Bonomelli and Leroy had retracted; but his only sources are *La Civiltà* and older textbooks by Pesch and Hurter.²⁹ In 1940 the Jesuit Charles Boyer, professor of the Gregorian University of Rome and author of philosophy and theology textbooks, warned that over the past twenty years a way to the acceptance of evolution had been opened. When he alluded to the history of the problem, he included the inevitable reference to Leroy, Zahm, and Mivart: "According to what was written in *La Civiltà Cattolica* in 1902 (vol. 6, p. 77), on the occasion of a letter from Monsignor Hedley, bishop of Newport, we learned that the orders, to which fathers Leroy and Zahm submitted in a manner worthy of praise, came from the Holy Office."³⁰

In 1953 Karl Rahner was still attributing to the Holy Office a decision that never existed.³¹ The same occurs in the 1959 edition of Pietro Parente's well-known textbook.³² Brandi's mistake, whereby he gives the actions of the Holy See greater significance and authority than they really had, has been repeated to the present time. For example, in the third edition (1996) of a book by the theologian Juan Luis Ruiz de la Peña it is stated that "in February 1895, P. Leroy was required by the Holy Office to correct his stance. The identical requirement was asked of Dr. Zahm four years later, just as in the case of two bishops, the Italian Bonomelli and the American Hedley. Still, the Holy See did not hold it necessary to publicize the matter, which was aired in a purely private setting, without the intervention of doctrinal teachings."³³

But the Holy Office had not ordered Leroy or Zahm to do anything, and in the cases of Bonomelli and Hedley (who, besides, was English, not American, the bishop of Newport, Wales) there was no official intervention at all by the Holy See. Ruiz de la Peña provides two sources: a 1967 article by Z. Alszegey in the

journal *Concilium*, which repeats the habitual errors about the Holy Office and then refers the reader to *La Civiltà Cattolica*,³⁴ and another article by R. Juste, which has better data,³⁵ because he cites Ernest Messenger's 1931 book. There, in a brief but dense section, Messenger provides the most accurate summary of the issues available until the opening of the archives.³⁶ Nevertheless, a good part of Messenger's account is based on data and commentary published by *La Civiltà Cattolica*.

'La Civiltà Cattolica' and Evolution

Even though *La Civiltà Cattolica* was not the only source of information on the six cases (some private letters were also known), it was the principal one. In less than eight months, the Jesuit journal published three retractions: those of Bonomelli (November 5, 1898), Leroy (January 7, 1899), and Zahm (July 1, 1899). Even though only Zahm mentioned the Holy See, and despite the absence of published official documents or public statements, the reportage gave the impression that the Vatican had intervened in the three cases.

In 1902 the *Dublin Review* published a letter by John Hedley, bishop of Newport, that cast doubt on the veracity of *La Civiltà Cattolica*'s information, while asserting that the Holy See had never intervened in any case concerning evolution. Salvatore Brandi responded in *La Civiltà Cattolica* on March 24, 1902, in a brief article titled "Evolution and Dogma: The Erroneous Information of an Englishman."³⁷ Although Brandi exhibited some respect for the veteran bishop, he clearly stated that Hedley was wrong. The information provided by *La Civiltà*, Brandi said, was correct, and Hedley could confirm this himself because, as a bishop, if he officially queried the Vatican, he would surely be supplied (though perhaps confidentially) with information at present unknown to him.

Brandi added a significant observation. He said that *La Civiltà* had not cited any concrete decision of the Vatican because "the Holy See, for the best of reasons, had not thought it opportune to condemn *in a public act* a theory which, in any case, was continually losing credit among true scientists."³⁸ The "theory" to which Brandi alluded was not evolution in general (although it also played a role in the dispute), but rather a highly specific aspect of evolutionism, namely the evolution of the human body from a lower animal—the central axis of these debates. Brandi clearly gave the impression that the Holy See had intervened against evolution in the cases of Leroy and Zahm, although it had not done so publicly. But he did not specify what the "good reasons" that had led the Holy See not to condemn evolution publicly were, although he did provide a clue, inasmuch as he alluded to the prudent norms that regulated the operation of the various congregations and to their habit of acting benevolently in cases involving works written by Catholics of some fame.

La Civiltà Cattolica had published articles that were very critical of evolutionism, and in the decade of the 1890s there arose a certain sense of alarm because the theory kept attracting more and more followers, including among Catholics. As we will see in greater detail when considering our case histories, between 1897 and 1902 *La Civiltà* published a highly critical review of Zahm's book by F. Salis Seewis; an article by Salvatore Brandi attacking Zahm's book, in which Brandi reproduced Leroy's retraction; Bonomelli's retraction; Zahm's presumed retraction; Hedley's reply; and several articles more—for example, one titled "The Dissolution of Evolution,"³⁹ which argued that evolution was a failed theory according to the judgment of science itself.

The Authority of 'La Civiltà Cattolica'

No one considered *La Civiltà Cattolica* the official organ of the Vatican, because it clearly was not. Nevertheless, it enjoyed a singular level of authority, owing to certain features that dated back to the origin of the journal in the mid-nineteenth century. In that epoch, different revolutionary movements affected various European countries, including the Papal States, obliging Pius IX to leave Rome for the Kingdom of Naples, where he enjoyed the protection of King Frederick II. There, Pius IX gave his unconditional support to the founding by the Jesuits of a general cultural journal of Catholic orientation, aimed at a broad readership. The original idea was that of the Jesuit Carlo Maria Curci, and the journal was named *La Civiltà Cattolica*. The first number was published in Naples on April 6, 1850. Later it moved to Rome, and then was published in Florence from 1871 to 1887, the year in which it returned definitively to Rome. It is the oldest journal currently published in Italy. It has always appeared on the first and third Saturday of each month, except for the three months following the occupation of Rome by the new Italian state on September 20, 1870, when the journal moved to Florence.⁴⁰

Conceived and published with the complete support of the papacy, *La Civiltà Cattolica* has had a singularly idiosyncratic relationship with the Holy See. While it was still in proofs, each number of the journal was sent to the Vatican Secretariat of State for its approval. This official scrutiny of the contents was to ensure they were in accordance with the teachings of the Church on faith and morality and to see that nothing was published that could create difficulties in the Vatican's relations with the Italian state, given that political topics were also discussed in its pages. Each Monday prior to the first and third Saturday of each month, the editor is received in the Secretariat of State and is advised of the Vatican's observations (indeed, until Pius XII, the pope himself received the editor).

Therefore, although the journal is not an official organ of the Vatican, it has a special relationship with the Holy See that gives it a certain authority, however

hard to define. This explains the self-assuredness with which the articles just mentioned were written. The journal is run by a tightly knit team of Jesuits, sometimes referred to as a Jesuit “college.” For many years the articles were not signed (we can identify the authors we cite because many years later the journal itself published some indexes that provide authors’ names). It is evident that the journal’s editorial board was hardly trembling in fear when it responded to Bishop Hedley with the title “Erroneous Information of an Englishman,” nor when it harshly attacked the work of Zahm, a man with great prestige among American Catholics.

But *La Civiltà Cattolica* could well make mistakes, even in matters pertaining to the Vatican. Although the journal’s board may perhaps have had privileged information, and the Holy See’s review helped to eliminate gross errors, the editors’ scope was quite limited and not privy to the intimate workings of the Vatican, whose internal activities are subject to a reserve that, in some cases, is very strict. It is no surprise that some of the articles mentioned might not be completely free of mistakes.

For example, there are imprecisions in Brandi’s response to Bishop Hedley. According to Brandi, a Catholic should act reasonably and not accept as scientific a theory that, as “Zahm himself says, is not demonstrated nor is there expectation it may be.” To back up this claim, Brandi provides a direct quotation from Zahm’s book: “We have already learned that, as a matter of fact, no positive evidence has been adduced in support of the simian origin of man, and that there is little, if any, reason to believe that such evidence will be forthcoming.” The citation is correct, but it is taken out of context. In his book, Zahm goes on to ask: “may we not, nevertheless, believe, as a matter of theory, that there has been such a link, and that, corporeally, man is genetically descended from some unknown species of ape or monkey? Analogy and scientific consistency, we are told, require us to admit that man’s bodily frame has been subject to the same law of Evolution, if an Evolution there has been, as has obtained for the inferior animals. There is nothing in biological science that would necessarily exempt man’s corporeal structure from the action of this law. Is there, then, anything in Dogma or sound metaphysics, which would make it impossible for us, *salva fide*, to hold a view which has found such favor with the great majority of contemporary evolutionists?” Zahm mentions several Catholics who have supported the compatibility between evolutionism and Christianity (the English scientist Mivart, the Spanish cardinal Zeferino González, and the French Dominican Leroy), and he says that, even though improbable, it is possible that with the passage of time the origin of the body of Adam by evolution may be accepted, in the same way that those who come after us might accept as scientific truth that which we now only hold to be an unproved hypothesis.⁴¹ It is easy to see that, in this case, Zahm said something quite different from that which Brandi makes him say.

Other imprecisions have to do with the activities of the Vatican. In the same article, Brandi responds to Bishop Hedley, who had complained that *La Civiltà* had not specified which Vatican authority had intervened in the cases under consideration. Brandi wrote:

Zahm's work met the same fate that had befallen, four years before, another work with the same argument, written by Father Leroy. He had also defended the theory of the origin of man's body out of that of a brute animal; his work was also denounced to the Holy Office and he too, in order to avoid public censure, made a public declaration, "unauthorizing, retracting and condemning the work in question" and making clear his desire "to withdraw the copies of the book from circulation, insofar as that were possible." In both instances, the "competent authority" that examined and judged the works and whose orders Leroy and Zahm obeyed in a praiseworthy way, was the Supreme Tribunal of the Holy See.⁴²

But these words of Brandi, designed to clarify the situation, only confused it more, because they embody serious mistakes that, from then on, were transmitted from generation to generation.

In fact, neither Leroy's book nor that of Zahm was denounced to the Holy Office but rather to the Congregation of the Index. There is a notable difference between them. The Holy Office, the highest among all the congregations of the Vatican, was presided over directly by the pope, concerned itself with all kinds of doctrinal problems, and gave orders to other congregations: for example, it could order the Congregation of the Index to include concrete works on the *Index of Prohibited Books*. By contrast, the jurisdiction of the Congregation of the Index was much more limited. It only examined published works and decided whether they were to be put on the *Index*. In the decrees of the Index the motives for the prohibition were not even mentioned. Sometimes the reason simply was that it was deemed to be inopportune to circulate the book in particular circumstances. Therefore, a decree of the Index generally carried much less weight than did a doctrinal declaration of the Holy Office.

But there is more. Brandi said that both Leroy and Zahm made public declarations unauthorizing their books and stopping their further diffusion. This is true in Leroy's case but false in that of Zahm. Zahm's letter to his Italian translator was a private document. *La Civiltà Cattolica* converted it into a public retraction that never happened (as we will see, Zahm wanted to avoid a public retraction at all cost, and he did so).

Finally, Brandi said that the "competent authority" that examined the books and whose orders Leroy and Zahm obeyed was that of the "Supreme Tribunal of the Holy See," a confusing identification, to say the least. A benign interpretation would be to think that he used the expression "Supreme Tribunal of the Holy See" to mean simply the Holy See. But that interpretation cannot be sus-

tained, because Bishop Hedley had publicly raised doubts about which concrete congregation of the Holy See had acted. In this context, Brandi's "Supreme Tribunal of the Holy See" was the Holy Office, or Congregation of the Inquisition. We have seen that Brandi had mistakenly said that the works were denounced to the Holy Office, and now he increased the confusion by having us believe that the actions were indeed taken by the Holy Office and that it too made the final decision, which we will see was not so. Brandi's confusion can be partly explained by the fact that the members of the Holy Office were held to a strict rule of secrecy. On the basis of information from his Vatican friends, Brandi must have guessed that the actions were those of the Holy Office, but the archival documents show that was wrong—a mistake transmitted to many generations of Catholic priests and professors across the world.

To sum up, *La Civiltà Cattolica* published, between November 1898 and July 1899, Bonomelli's and Leroy's letters of retraction and the letter intended by Zahm to halt the distribution of his book. None of these letters was a Vatican document, and only in one of them is the Holy See even mentioned. *La Civiltà's* information was basically correct but included significant imprecisions, especially when it attributed to Zahm a nonexistent public retraction, and to the Holy Office some activities that in reality were those of the Congregation of the Index. Despite these shortcomings, *La Civiltà Cattolica* served for many years as the principal source of what was written about these issues in the standard theology textbooks.

More Confusion

Whoever might think that the opening of the archives of the Holy Office and the Index has cleared up all of the confusion would be wrong. The author of an article published in 2001 on the activities of the Congregation of the Index in the cases of Leroy, Zahm, Bonomelli, and Hedley argues that evolutionism and the possibility of reconciling it with Christianity had been subjects of free debate among Catholics throughout the nineteenth century when suddenly, toward the end of the century, the Roman authorities hardened their position, thus producing the various retractions of theologians favorable to evolution.⁴³ The reality is quite different. The cases we have been discussing all took place in the decade of the 1890s but quite a bit before the Roman authorities had intervened against evolutionism. Our first case, that of Raffaello Caverni, ended with the condemnation of his book in 1878. The book was placed on the *Index of Prohibited Books*, which did not happen in the cases heard toward the end of the century.

Besides, in the case of Leroy, which is the one we present here in greatest detail, there were harsh polemics between Leroy and the Jesuits of the journal

Études of Paris, whose stance on evolutionism was just as hard as that of the Roman Jesuits. Indeed, one of them had to defend himself from the suspicion that it was he who had provoked the condemnation of Leroy's book.

Another study, also published in 2001, using documents of the Archives of the Congregation of the Index as if they were from the Holy Office, wrongly asserts that Leroy's book was placed on the *Index of Prohibited Books*, and it contains other imprecisions too.⁴⁴ These examples demonstrate the need to present the new archival data objectively. Only in this way is it possible to get beyond erroneous ideas that have held sway for more than a century and to prevent the emergence of new myths.