



Is Intelligent Design a Scientific Alternative to Evolution? The Catholic Church Teaching about evolution, creation and intelligent design

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When I was invited to speak at this Conference, I was asked to present «the Church’s understanding of the relationship between science and religion generally, as well as its views on evolution and design more specifically». This request was motivated by the following statement: «the wider culture thirsts for a valid and profound understanding of what it means to be a human being, and that includes questions of origin, meaning, and purpose. The time is ripe for this conversation and clarification». So the task would be «to provide the academic community and the wider public with a rich presentation of the Church’s understanding of the timeless questions and contemporary controversies at the intersection of science and faith», for «those who are active participants in the science and religion dialogue—as well as the media and the

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wider public—are concerned with the Church’s views on science and deserve to have as full an understanding as possible about those views».

Of course, I do not intend to represent the official position of the Catholic Church about the topic. I will speak as an individual scholar, even though I will attempt to adjust the exposition as close as possible to the Teachings of the Church on these matters.

Perhaps it would be useful to begin with some general principles as guiding start points of our reflections. To facilitate the exposition, I utilize the modality of a brief series of questions and answers.

First of all, why should the Church be concerned with questions such as the origin of humans that apparently pertain to the exclusive competence of natural sciences? Naturally, the Church does not intend to violate the proper domain of science, as a kind of an invasion of another’s terrain, but rather to accomplish what is specific to its own mission. The Church does not intend to enter into questions which are properly of scientific matter, because these are best left to the study and research of scientists. But the Church feels the duty and the task to intervene in its Magisterium to clarify the implications of ethical and religious nature that these questions can rise. This task is part of its pastoral duties. Pope John Paul II remembered this in his renowned address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on the Galileo Case (October 31 1992):

By virtue of her own mission, the Church has the duty to be attentive to the pastoral consequences of her teaching. Before all else, let it be clear that this teaching must correspond to the truth. But it is a question of knowing how to judge a new scientific datum when it seems to contradict the truths of faith¹.

Indeed, as the Holy Father John Paul II told to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in the Plenary Session about ten years ago (October 25, 1996), in his well know address on Evolution, the question of the origins of life and evolution concerns the Church Teaching, because «in accordance with her specific mission she will be able to offer

¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences*, October 31 1992, n. 7; Cfr. *L’Osservatore Romano* n. 44 (1264) - 4 November 1992.

criteria for discerning the moral conduct required of all human beings in view of their integral salvation». So, these topics «deeply interests the Church, since Revelation, for its part, contains teaching concerning the nature and origins of man». Indeed, «The Church's Magisterium is directly concerned with the question of evolution, for it involves the conception of man: Revelation teaches us that he was created in the image and likeness of God».

There is a tradition in the doctrine of the Church about those questions: «the Magisterium of the Church has already made pronouncements on these matters *within the framework of her own competence*».

The main question here is that there are apparent contradictions between the conclusions reached by the various scientific disciplines and those contained in the message of Revelation². But it is clear that «truth cannot contradict truth». So, it is necessary to determine if «some mistake has been made either in the interpretation of the sacred words», or *elsewhere*³. So, as is told in the Encyclical Letter *Providentissimus Deus* of Pope Leo XIII,

There can never, indeed, be any real discrepancy between the theologian and the physicist, as long as each confines himself within his own lines, and both are careful, as St. Augustine warns us, not to make rash assertions, or to assert what is not known as known (PD 18).

The same principle is presented in some successive interventions of the Church Teachings, as in Vatican Council I, Vatican Council II, and the very recent Catechism of the Catholic Church⁴.

² That was the case in the Galileo Affair, as is remembered in the quoted text of John Paul II above. Indeed «The problem posed by theologians of that age was, therefore, that of the compatibility between heliocentrism and Scripture».

³ The English translation of the original Latin text («or in the polemical discussion itself») seems not to be very good, as it can be seeing here: «quoniam verum vero adversari haudquaquam potest, certum sit aut in sacrorum interpretationem verborum, aut in alteram disputationis partem errorem incurrisse» (DS 3294). The idea is that obviously it is possible that the error is not in the interpretation of the Bible, but in the interpretation of the laws of nature.

⁴ «Though faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason. Since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind. God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth» (Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius*, 4); «Methodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided

Before entering into the very question of this work, it is necessary to clarify the terms of our discussion. So let us examine some key words in our topic:

First of all, it's necessary to specify what we mean by *evolution*. We need to distinguish between the *scientific theory* (or *theories*) of *evolution*, and the *ideology*, or some kind of *philosophy*, of *evolution* (we can call it, from now on, *evolutionism*).

The *scientific theory of evolution* asserts that all living beings have common ancestors; there is a genetic link between them, and the different species appear successively, from a few original and elementary primitive forms to a plentiful variety of more complex and developed forms, over a very large period of time (billions of years).

As a scientific theory, that is, as based on empirical data (from paleontology, embryology, genetics, comparative anatomy, geology and geography – the distribution of fossils and living beings – and other auxiliary sciences), it seems to be well founded and affirmed. However, it is not a complete or perfect theory, because many questions about the mechanisms that regulate evolution, or regarding the origin of life itself, and the origin of man remain open and as yet unresolved. Apparently, *microevolution* is fairly evident and little debated; whereas the mechanisms of *macroevolution* are subject to wide discussion. There are some nagging problems to solve, such as discontinuities in the fossil record, or the so called *biological explosions*. There is the question of the role of the environment, and the possible transmission of some acquired characters. Although *Darwinism* or *Neo-Darwinism* is the dominant theory, it is not the only theory of evolution, so we can also speak about theories of evolution.

At this point it is necessary to insist that *evolution* and *Darwinism* are not the same thing. We can accept the theory of evolution and deny Darwinism or Neo-Darwinism. Then again, we can admit the scientific claims and elements of Darwinism and refute the ideological or philosophical presuppositions it states or implies, such as materialism and atheism. We must distinguish in Darwinism between what is really

it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God» (Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes*, 36); *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 159 (quoting both the texts of *Dei Filius* and *Gaudium et Spes*).

scientific and what is ideological or meta-scientific. Moreover, nowadays there are many scholars that from a strictly scientific point of view rightfully criticize, both Darwinism and Neo-Darwinism, as these theories, like any scientific theory, have many limitations and open questions that with current scientific knowledge remain unanswered. The fact that some supporters ignore these problems reveals the ideological character of some of their position. We can remember the *caveats* of the philosopher of science Karl Popper in this sense. And finally as we will see we must criticize in a philosophical setting their naturalistic and materialistic presuppositions, and their meta-scientific tenets.

On the other hand, the ideology or philosophy of *evolutionism* goes beyond the scientific level of the theory of evolution. It is necessary to distinguish between the scientific tenets of the theory of evolution and the philosophical and ideological framework it can support. Indeed, *evolutionism*, as ideology or a kind of *mentality* or *weltanschauung*, asserts that all in reality is explained only by nature (*naturalism*) or matter (*materialism*); there is no transcendent or extrinsic principle (it is excluded *a priori*) other than nature itself. This thesis, although is legitimate at the methodological level (as science must search the intrinsic principles or laws of nature), is not acceptable at the metaphysical or ontological level.

Consequently, *evolutionism* excludes any kind of finalism or purpose in nature, and claims that all the evolutionary process is due to *chance and necessity*, as appears in the title of the very well known book of the Nobel Prize winner Jacques Monod. In this book, Monod supports explicitly atheistic materialism; but at least he is honest, as he recognizes that he is doing not just science, but philosophy of nature, as it appears in the subtitle of the book: *An essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology*⁵.

The next term to clarify is *creation*. The doctrine of creation is not only religious one, supported by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but also a rational one, not scientific, but philosophical. According to this doctrine, all that exists on heaven and on earth is created by God. Only God can create, and creates out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). God is the only

⁵ Cfr. J. MONOD, *Chance and necessity. An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology*, Collins, London 1970.

cause of being of all things that exist, the *first cause* of everything. In some way this truth is accessible also to natural reason, without need of a supernatural revelation. So to speak, there is a kind of natural revelation of God through the created world, as is claimed both in the Old and the New Testament of the Holy Bible⁶. The same doctrine is explicitly supported by the Teaching of the Church⁷. In this way, the truth of creation is accessible to human reason; it can be proved or demonstrated rationally. Of course, it is not a scientific truth, as is neither empirical nor experimental. But is a philosophical truth, also reached by pagan philosophers, as Plato and Aristotle did in some way, for instance⁸.

There is a very rich and profound theology of creation in the teachings of the Church, as we can see in the synthesis presented in the recent *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and also in its *Compendium*. In them the significance of the doctrine of Creation is emphasized in the catechesis:

Catechesis on creation is of major importance. It concerns the very foundations of human and Christian life: for it makes explicit the response of the Christian faith to the basic question that men of all times have asked themselves: “Where do we come from?” “Where

⁶ Cfr. Wis 13:5 «For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator»; Rom 1:20 « Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made».

⁷ Cfr. Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius*, c. 2: «The same Holy mother Church holds and teaches that God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason : ever *since the creation of the world, his invisible nature has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made* [Rom 1:20]» (DS 3004). Also in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 32-38.

⁸ On this tenet there is a debate between scholars. Of course, the notion of creation of pagan philosophers is not identical to that of believers (Hebrews, Christian, or Muslims), but anyway is present in some way. It is very significant how that Thomas Aquinas, for instance, defends this position against some other contemporary thinkers, as Bonaventure. See *In VI Metaph*, lc. 1, n. 1164: «the science which considers beings of this kind is the first of all the sciences and the one which considers the common causes of all beings. Hence there are causes of beings as beings, which are investigated in first philosophy, as he proposed in Book I (14:C 36). And from this it is quite evident that the opinion of those who claimed that Aristotle thought that God is not the cause of the substance of the heavens, but only of their motion, is false»; also *De substantiis separatis*, c.9, n. 52: «Although Plato and Aristotle did posit that immaterial substances or even heavenly bodies always existed, we must not suppose on that account that they denied to them a cause of their being».

are we going?” “What is our origin?” “What is our end?” “Where does everything that exists come from and where is it going?” The two questions, the first about the origin and the second about the end, are inseparable. They are decisive for the meaning and orientation of our life and actions⁹.

Just in this context there is the only reference to the question of the origins of world, life and man we can find in this document:

The question about the origins of the world and of man has been the object of many scientific studies which have splendidly enriched our knowledge of the age and dimensions of the cosmos, the development of life-forms and the appearance of man. These discoveries invite us to even greater admiration for the greatness of the Creator, prompting us to give him thanks for all his works and for the understanding and wisdom he gives to scholars and researchers¹⁰.

But, apart of the notion of *creation*, as we have just presented, there is another notion, *creationism*, not to be confused with the former. As with the *evolutionism*, we can consider it as a sort of *ideology*. The creationists (at least most of them) have an inadequate theological basis, in the way they interpret the Holy Scripture, with a literalistic sense. So, the creationists sustain *fixism*, that is, there is no way to any type of evolution of species, since all living beings were created immediately, since the beginning, by God, as is presumably said in the Bible, just in the very first verses of the Book of Genesis. Perhaps they can admit *micro-evolution*, but only in the same species, and nothing else. According to them, there is also a scientific truth, and consequently also a scientific teaching, in the Bible, that we must respect and follow. From this starting point, they develop a so called *creation science*, which takes account of the scientific truths from the Bible. This *creation science* is antagonist of all theories of evolution which it sees as atheistic *pseudo-science*, and so, as such, wrong and false. There is no way to any form of compromise between *creationism* and *evolution*. Only *creation science*

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 282.

¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 283.

is valid; any type of evolution theory is necessarily *evolutionism*, that is, *ideology*.

Of course, there are many versions of *creationism*, more or less strong or weak, but the main ideas are not significantly different from those presented here. We can find this *creationism* not only among some fundamentalist forms of Christian evangelicals, but also among some catholic groups, both in America and in Europe. We can also find some similar ideas in several groups of Jewish and Muslim scholars.

It is clear, in this moment, to state that, whereas it is possible, at least in principle, to support the theory of evolution and to admit the doctrine of creation, without falling into a contradiction in terms, it is not possible to follow evolutionism and to be a creationist.

To finish the clarification of terms which we are doing as a first approach, we can finally present the notion of so called *intelligent design*, or better, simply, *design*, as the former seems to be a pleonasm or redundancy. This position is presented as an alternative of the denial of finalism or purpose asserted, as we saw, by *evolutionism*. Also here there are many different forms. Some uphold *intelligent design* as a scientific alternative to evolution, as it appears in the title of a recent article on this topic¹¹. Others see it as a kind of an updated version of the classical *fifth way* of the demonstration of the existence of God, that just from order and purpose in the universe (*ex gubernatione rerum*)¹². Finally, some of them acknowledge that it has not a scientific character, but rather a philosophical one.

The problem is that some supporters of *design* want to present it not only as a scientific theory, but also as an alternative and a serious rival or antagonist to the theory of evolution (without distinguishing between the scientific and the ideological elements). So there is the request

¹¹ Cfr. W.S. HARRIS - J.H. CALVERT, *Intelligent Design. The Scientific Alternative to Evolution*, in «The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly», 3 (2003), pp. 531-561.

¹² Cfr. THOMAS AQUINAS, *S. Th.*, q.2 a.3: «The fifth way is taken from the governance of the world. We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore, some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God».

to ‘teach the controversy’, or to present both as a balance to the teaching of evolution and to offer the possibility of choosing among them.

What can we say about this debate? It’s true that evolution is a special kind of science, a science *sui generis*, and also that, as it was advised, we need to distinguish between the scientific and the philosophical or ideological tenets. Perhaps the solution is not to enlarge the concept of science, as some proponents of the *design* theory ask, but rather to recognize the need to budge the controversy to its proper level: the philosophical one. That is the proposal of Card. Schönborn, in some of his recent addresses on those topics¹³. Also Fr. Stanley Jaki, a well known figure in the Science-Religion dialogue, insists on this course, as illustrated in this text:

Like so many other well intentioned people before him, [Michael] Behe too tried to fight a battle which is philosophical by using scientific tools. The bad philosophizing which is everywhere in Darwinian ideology can only be fought philosophically. This may not please those who in view of the overweening impact of science today recognize only scientific arguments as valid. But if their displeasure on this score makes them doubtful of the value of good philosophy they will merely provide arguments to Darwinists¹⁴.

Finally, we can face the main question of this work: what is the position of the Catholic Church about these questions? Now I will try to summarize the main guide lines, without intending to present an exhaustive exposition.

First of all, the Church acknowledges the *state of art* of the well affirmed scientific theories of its time. This is the meaning of some statements we can find in the documents of the Magisterium with a scientific character. There is no dogmatic value in these statements, and the

¹³ For instance: «My argument was based neither on theology nor modern science nor “intelligent design theory.” [...] In short, my argument was based on careful examination of the evidence of everyday experience; in other words, on philosophy» (*First Things* 159, January 2006).

¹⁴ S. L. JAKI, *Intelligent Design?*, Real View Books, Port Huron, MI, 2005, pp. 22-23. Again, and in a more provocative manner: «Those who try to save purpose through science [...] are barking up the wrong tree» (S.L. JAKI, *ibid.* p. 27).

discussion on them is left to the respective experts. The Vatican has a kind of ‘scientific senate’, or a ‘scientific counseling group’ in the Pontifical Academy of Sciences.

For this reason, as it was remembered in the address of Pope John Paul II to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in 1996, the Church assumes what science says about evolution theory, and so recognizes that it is more than just a mere hypothesis. But this statement, so stressed by the Media, is in no way the most relevant part of this message. The main part was instead to insist again on the uniqueness of man, as existing not by chance, but created in the image of God, as expressly willed by God as *person* with the dignity of who is «the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake»¹⁵, so that «human individual cannot be subordinated as a pure means or a pure instrument, either to the species or to society; he has value per se»¹⁶.

So, for the Catholic Church there is not an essential contradiction between the scientific theory (or theories) of evolution and the rational and revealed doctrine of creation, as is showed in this very clear text of another address of Pope John Paul II:

A rightly understanding faith on the creation and a rightly conceived teaching of evolution does not create obstacles: indeed, evolution presupposes creation; creation is framed in the light of evolution as a fact that is prolonged in the time - a continuous creation - in which God becomes visible to the believer’s eyes as “Creator of the heaven and of the earth”¹⁷.

¹⁵ Cfr. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 24.

¹⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences*, 22 October 1996, n. 5; published in the October 23 English edition of *L’Osservatore Romano*, p. 3.

¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Address to the Symposium “Faith and Evolution”*, April 26, 1985. This translation into English is mine. Unfortunately, I could not find any English edition of this text. This discourse was published in the original German, and in an Italian translation, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, Italian daily edition, April 27, 1985, p. 4. Another text in the same direction could be this one: «Indeed, the theory of natural evolution, understood in a sense that does not exclude divine causality, is not in principle opposed to the truth about the creation of the visible world, as presented in the Book of Genesis» (JOHN PAUL II. *General Audience*, January 29, 1986, n.3).

In a similar mode, Card. Ratzinger expressed the same claim in a meaningful homily he addressed when he was the archbishop of Munich:

We cannot say: creation *or* evolution, inasmuch as these two things respond to two different realities. The story of the dust of the earth and the breath of God, which we just heard, does not in fact explain how human persons come to be but rather what they are. It explains their inmost origin and casts light on the project that they are. And, vice versa, the theory of evolution seeks to understand and describe biological developments. But in so doing it cannot explain where the ‘project’ of human persons comes from, nor their inner origin, nor their particular nature. To that extent we are faced here with two complementary -- rather than mutually exclusive – realities¹⁸.

So, as a conclusion of this first tenet, we can recall that the Church is not, and never really was, against real science, and therefore it is not against the scientific theory of evolution as such. Of course, again, there are some philosophical and ideological positions of various versions of evolutionism that as such are incompatible with the doctrine of the Church about creation and about man:

The truth of faith about creation is radically opposed to the theories of materialistic philosophy, which view the cosmos as the result of an evolution of matter reducible to pure *chance and necessity*¹⁹.

¹⁸ J. RATZINGER, *In the Beginning... A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, Eerdmans, 1995, p. 50.

¹⁹ JOHN PAUL II. *General Audience*, March 5, 1986, n.3. Note the implicit *coincidence*, if not a reference, to the title of Monod’s book. Another similar statement is present in this text: «To all these “indications” of the existence of God the Creator some oppose the power of chance or of proper mechanisms of matter. To speak of chance for a universe which presents such a complex organization in its elements, and such marvellous finality in its life would be equivalent to giving up the search for an explanation of the world as it appears to us. In fact, this would be equivalent to admitting effects without cause. It would be an abdication of human intelligence which would thus refuse to think, to seek a solution for its problems» (JOHN PAUL II. *General Audience*, July 10, 1985, n. 7).

Secondly, the teachings of the Church insist that the Bible does not have a scientific value, because the character and purpose of Revelation was clearly not the communication of some scientific knowledge:

This text [Gen 1] has above all a religious and theological importance. There are not to be sought in it significant elements from the point of view of the natural sciences. Research on the origin and development of the individual species in nature does not find in this description any definitive norm nor positive contributions of substantial interest²⁰.

There is, so, a question of the way we read and interpret the Holy Bible. On this topic, there is a recent document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission which can help clarify the doctrine of the Church. There we find an special section about the *fundamentalist interpretation* of the Bible. We can extract and quote here two main critical assessments:

Fundamentalism is right to insist on the divine inspiration of the Bible, the inerrancy of the Word of God and other biblical truths included in its five fundamental points. But its way of presenting these truths is rooted in an ideology which is not biblical, whatever the proponents of this approach might say. For it demands an unshakable adherence to rigid doctrinal points of view and imposes, as the only source of teaching for Christian life and salvation, a reading of the Bible which rejects all questioning and any kind of critical research. [...]

Fundamentalism also places undue stress upon the inerrancy of certain details in the biblical texts, especially in what concerns historical events *or supposedly scientific truth*. It often historicizes material which from the start never claimed to be historical. It considers historical everything that is reported or recounted with verbs in the

²⁰ JOHN PAUL II. *General Audience*, January 29, 1986, n.3. Another quotation in this sense: «In fact, the Bible does not concern itself with the details of the physical world, the understanding of which is the competence of human experience and reasoning» (JOHN PAUL II, *Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences*, October 31, 1992, n. 12).

past tense, failing to take the necessary account of the possibility of symbolic or figurative meaning²¹.

As a final consideration, we can ask ourselves about the Church's position regarding the *intelligent design* doctrine. I think we can say that the Church is not against it as such, whereas it is against *creationism*, as it was presented before. We can find some recent texts of the teaching of the Church in this direction:

The evolution of living beings, of which science seeks to determine the stages and to discern the mechanism, presents an internal finality which arouses admiration. This finality which directs beings in a direction for which they are not responsible or in charge, obliges one to suppose a Mind which is its inventor, its creator²².

There is another positive allusion to the *design doctrine* in a recent document of the International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship*. In this document we can find a summary of the present controversy on the question of purpose in evolutionary processes:

The current scientific debate about the mechanisms at work in evolution requires theological comment insofar as it sometimes implies a misunderstanding of the nature of divine causality. Many neo-Darwinian scientists, as well as some of their critics, have concluded that, if evolution is a radically contingent materialistic process driven by natural selection and random genetic variation, then there can be no place in it for divine providential causality. A growing body of scientific critics of neo-Darwinism point to evidence of design (e.g., biological structures that exhibit specified complexity) that, in their view, cannot be explained in terms of a purely contingent process and that neo-Darwinians have ignored or misinterpreted.

²¹ THE PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, April 15, 1993; F. Fundamentalist Interpretation.

²² JOHN PAUL II. *General Audience*, July 10, 1985, n. 5.

In the next paragraph of the same document, there is a key principle very appropriate to clarify the issue:

It is important to note that, according to the Catholic understanding of divine causality, true contingency in the created order is not incompatible with a purposeful divine providence. Divine causality and created causality radically differ in kind and not only in degree. Thus, even the outcome of a truly contingent natural process can nonetheless fall within God's providential plan for creation.

Just here there is a reference to a profound reflection of Thomas Aquinas, in which the different way God can cause things is presented:

The effect of divine providence is not only that things should happen somehow, but that they should happen either by necessity or by contingency. Therefore, whatsoever divine providence ordains to happen infallibly and of necessity happens infallibly and of necessity; and that happens from contingency, which the divine providence conceives to happen from contingency²³.

So, divine causality extends not only to necessary events, but also to contingent ones. For this reason, the denial of purpose or the idea of some natural processes out of any kind of control or providence is wrong, as a misunderstanding of what divine causality really is:

In the Catholic perspective, neo-Darwinians who adduce random genetic variation and natural selection as evidence that the process of evolution is absolutely unguided are straying beyond what can be demonstrated by science. Divine causality can be active in a process that is *both* contingent and guided. Any evolutionary mechanism that is contingent can only be contingent because God made it so. An unguided evolutionary process – one that falls outside the bounds of divine providence – simply cannot exist²⁴.

²³ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I, 22,4 ad 1; see also some parallel texts with the same doctrine, as *Summa theologiae*, I-II, 10,4 co.; *In I Periherm.*, lc.14 n. 22.

²⁴ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created In The Image Of God*, November 2004, n. 69.

We can conclude with some statements of the present Pope, Benedict XVI. We can begin with a beautiful quotation, taken from one of a series of homilies that who then still was Card. Ratzinger, Archbishop of Munich, addressed in the Lent period of 1981:

We must have the audacity to say that the great projects of the living creation are not products of *chance and error*. Nor are they the products of a selective process to which divine predicates can be attributed in illogical, unscientific, and even mythic fashion. The great projects of the living creation point to a *creating Reason* and show us a creating Intelligence, and they do so more luminously and radiantly today than ever before. Thus we can say today with a new certitude and joyousness that the human being is indeed a divine project which only the creating Intelligence was strong and great and audacious enough to conceive of. *The human being is not a mistake but something willed*; he is the fruit of love. He can disclose in himself, in the bold project that he is, the language of the creating Intelligence that speaks to him and that moves him to say: ‘Yes, Father you have willed me’²⁵.

It is really significant that at the very beginning of his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI said this:

We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary²⁶.

Finally, in one recent general audience, there was a reference of an *intelligent project* (better than an *intelligent design*, as was translated in the English edition of this text):

I find the words of this fourth-century Father [St Basil the Great] surprisingly up to date when he says: Some people, “deceived by the

²⁵ J. RATZINGER, *In the Beginning...*, p. 56-57.

²⁶ BENEDICT XVI, Homily in the Mass for the inauguration of the Pontificate, April 24, 2005.

atheism they bore within them, imagined that the universe lacked guidance and order, at the mercy as it were of chance". How many these "some people" are today! Deceived by atheism they consider and seek to prove that it is scientific to think that all things lack guidance and order as though they were at the mercy of chance. The Lord through Sacred Scripture reawakens our reason which has fallen asleep and tells us: in the beginning was the creative Word. In the beginning the creative Word - this Word that created all things, that created this *intelligent design* which is the cosmos - is also love²⁷.

Some final philosophical reflections:

The role of the secondary causes in the Divine Design:

- there is a participation not only in being, but also in action. Creatures are capable of operating by themselves. A special and direct intervention of God in each operation is not necessary. We must distinguish between first cause (the absolute cause of being of things, who is just and only God, who creates all things out of nothing) and the secondary causes (the activities of creatures, who can become, change, transform what exist, but cannot create anything from nothing).
- God can create things who act necessarily, or contingently. All belong to the plan, the design and the providence of God.
- the model of a watch and a watchmaker (a bad one, a good one)
- normally God acts in the created world through secondary causes, although He can intervene extraordinarily in some special occasions (miracles, but also the creation of every single human soul, as spiritual); but God, the Lord of the Universe, will not contradict Himself in His action. He, the Lawyer of Nature, operates not against his own laws, but over them.
- the creation is not an event of the beginning, or the past. Properly speaking, God not *created*, but is creating, as He is not in time, but over time, in His eternity. The creation is a continuous action (from our point of view), as in God there is no

²⁷ BENEDICT XVI, *General Audience*, November 9, 2005.

time, but only eternity. We can so speak, rightly, on a “*creatio continua*” (continuing creation), a single act who extend itself in time.

The capability of creatures to act by themselves.

- If the created being were not active, and consequently it could not act by itself, it would have been created in vain, it would not make sense to be, which would be against the wisdom, the goodness and the omnipotence of God (cfr. C.G., III, c. 69).
- «Consequently we do not deny creatures their proper actions, although we ascribe all the effects of creatures to God, as operating in all» (C.G., III, c. 69).

Summary: The aim of this article is to clarify the epistemic status of the Intelligent Design proposal. We can consider it as an updated version of the classical ways of demonstrating the existence of God, in particular of the so-called “fifth way”. As such, it seems to be neither scientific nor properly theological, but rather a proposal at a rational-philosophical level. At the same time, it must also be made clear that the negation of purpose in evolutionary biological processes is similarly a philosophical position, not a scientific one. I propose to acknowledge this state of affairs and to reframe the debate at its proper level. On the argumentative level, it is just as wrong to neglect the controversy as it is to discredit one’s opponent. On the epistemic level, it is a mistake to present Intelligent Design as a scientific replacement for the scientific theory of evolution; it should be considered instead to be a genuine and serious alternative to the quasi-philosophical ideology of *evolutionism*.

Key Words: evolution theory, evolutionism, Intelligent Design, existence of God, philosophy, sciences, theology.

Sommario: Lo scopo di questo articolo è di chiarire lo stato epistemico della proposta dell’*Intelligent Design*. Possiamo considerarlo come una versione aggiornata dei modi classici di dimostrare l’esistenza di Dio, in particolare della cosiddetta “quinta via”. Come tale, non sembra essere né scientifico né propriamente teologico, ma piuttosto una proposta a livello razionale-filosofico. Allo stesso tempo, si deve anche chiarire che la negazione dello scopo nei processi biologici evolutivi è allo stesso modo una posizione filosofica, non scientifica. Propongo di riconoscere questo stato di cose e di riformulare il dibattito al livello adeguato. A livello argomentativo, è altrettanto sbagliato trascurare la controversia quanto screditare il proprio avversario. A livello epistemico, è un errore presentare l’*Intelligent Design* come un sostituto scientifico della teoria scientifica dell’evoluzione; dovrebbe invece essere considerato un’alternativa vera e seria all’ideologia quasi filosofica dell’evoluzionismo.

Parole chiave: teoria dell’evoluzione, evoluzionismo, *Intelligent Design*, esistenza di Dio, filosofia, scienze, teologia.