

Short Notice: Pope acknowledges Genesis is only partly historical already in 1909

In the “Darwin Year” 2009⁶²¹ the relationship between science and religion was a recurring theme. In this context, we would like to draw attention to a text from 1909 that has received little attention 100 years later.⁶²² Here Pope Pius X takes a very moderate stance on the historical truth of the first chapters of the Book of Genesis. The text⁶²³ is formulated as 8 key questions, the first of which takes a skeptical stance towards the new historical-critical method of interpreting the Bible that was spreading among theologians at the time. In particular (question 2), the stance of removing all historical value from the creation story in Genesis is criticized. But the text is very careful and differentiated, saying on the one hand that no doubt may fall upon the facts that form the foundation of the Christian religion (question 3), and on the other hand that different possible answers to specific questions in the theology of creation are possible, and can be discussed openly (question 4). A position that interprets each single statement (in Genesis) literally is rejected as irrelevant (question 5), and an interpretation that reflects the metaphorical character of statements is recommended (question 6). It is emphasized, that neither was it the intention of the biblical authors, nor is it the task of contemporary theologians to interfere with explicitly scientific issues (question 7). Finally, it is pointed out that it is legitimate to discuss different interpretations of the six days scheme of creation in Genesis (Gen 1,1-2,4a). We find it remarkable that this document was not the subject of more public discussion at the time and is now almost forgotten. It might have had a positive effect on the relationship between science and catholicism, and we might not have had to wait until 1996 for a clear acceptance of evolution as “more than a hypothesis”² by the Pope (then John Paul II).

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⁶²¹ “Beyond the Origin” – *Nature* Special issue, 20 November 2008 (Vol. 456, No. 7220; www.nature.com/darwin; Everybody’s Darwin“ - *Nature* special issue, 12 February 2009 (Vol. 457, No. 7231).

⁶²² Allison Abbott, Papal confession: Darwin was right about evolution, *Nature* 383, 1996, p. 753.

⁶²³ Reprinted in H. Denzinger: *Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen*, Freiburg 2005.