

Humani Generis & Evolution: A Report from the Archives

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Abstract. The opening of the archives for the pontificate of Pius XII makes it possible to see the history of the drafting of the encyclical *Humani generis*, the first document in which the universal magisterium of the Catholic Church addressed the question of evolution. Although its acknowledgment that the question of the evolutionary origin of the human body was, provisionally, theologically open generated no controversy at the drafting commission, the definitiveness of its reservations about monophyletic polygenism generated a disagreement resolved only by Pope Pius. An incident in 1955 resolves a long-standing controversy about the proper interpretation of the encyclical.

Keywords: Catholicism, anthropogenesis, monogenism, polygenism, Pius XII.

Introduction

Pope Pius XII's 1950 encyclical *Humani generis* constitutes something of a landmark in the history of the Catholic Church's accommodation of the idea that evolutionary processes had some rôle in the origin of the human race. Until then, although it had sometimes ordered Catholic authors to withdraw from sale books promoting a fully evolutionary account of the

origin of the human body,¹ the universal magisterium had not addressed the issue. The opening of the archives from Pius' pontificate (1939–1958) makes possible an account of the drafting of that encyclical.

1. The Encyclical

Official silence on the question of biological evolution and the origin of man, a silence that the Church had maintained since the ideas were first advanced in the late eighteenth century, ended on 12 August 1950, when Pope Pius XII published his encyclical *Humani generis*. Preparatory work on that letter, a letter on what it called (in its formal title) “some false opinions which threaten to undermine the foundations of Catholic doctrine,” began on 18 March 1949, with the pope's appointment of a Commission on Religious Studies in France. Among the seven commissioners initially appointed were Augustin Bea, Franz Hürth, Pietro Parente (the first to call the tendencies which it was the object of the encyclical to evaluate “la nouvelle théologie” (Parente 1942)), and Sebastiaan Tromp (ADDF 1950a, fol. 1). In June 1950, Édouard Dhanis joined the commissioners in the preparation of the final drafts (ADDF 1950a, N°16, fol. 191).

Those false opinions included Communism, existentialism, and the kind of cosmic evolutionism found in the thought of Édouard Le Roy and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.² Biological evolution as an explanation of the origin of species is mentioned first only late in the encyclical, and only with respect to anthropogenesis. The origin of plant and animal species was not addressed. On human origins, the encyclical made two points.

¹ The clearest cases are Dalmace Leroy's *L'Évolution restreinte aux espèces organiques* (1891) and, though with some complications, John Zahm's *Evolution and Dogma* (1896). St. George Mivart's *On the Genesis of Species* (1871), which advanced the same thesis was not similarly treated. For details, see Artigas 2006.

² Le Roy's *Les Origines humaines et l'évolution de l'intelligence* (1930), along with three of his other books, had been placed on the Index of Prohibited Books in 1931. Although the fullest exposition of Teilhard's cosmic evolutionism, *Le Phénomène humain* (1955), was not published until after his death, his views were already known, having appeared in articles (e.g., 1946) and in widely circulated typescripts; Hürth had seen Teilhard's book manuscript as it went through the Jesuits' process of pre-publication review (Hürth 1947).

1.1. Openness to the Evolutionary Origin of the Body

The encyclical's first point was this: "the Teaching Authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions, on the part of men experienced in both fields, take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution, in as far as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter." It went on to add two important qualifications. First, though the human body might be the product of evolutionary processes, human souls are immediately created by God. Second, discussion must be conducted judiciously, by experts and with moderation. It would be rash to "act as if the origin of the human body from pre-existing and living matter were already completely certain and proved by the facts which have been discovered up to now [...] and as if there were nothing in the sources of divine revelation which demands the greatest moderation and caution in this question" (36). Four features of the drafting history of the passage are worth explicit notice.

First, the question of the origin of the human body is not mentioned in the first three drafts of the document that was to become the encyclical.³ The first possible reference to the topic is in a note penciled into the third draft at the meeting of 30 April: "Fr. Hürth proposed [including] a text on scientific evolutionism" (ADDF 1950a, N^o 11, fol. 86). The issue is addressed explicitly first in the fourth draft (ADDF 1950a, N^o 14, fol. 159, p. 12), in language differing only stylistically from that of the published text.

Second, there is no indication of controversy over this, a thesis that the consultors at the Index had considered rash in the 1890's and that Jesuit coleopterist Felix Rüschkamp's superiors had wanted him not to defend even in 1946 (Schatz 2002). Still, Pope Pius XI's decision not to suppress E. C. Messenger's *Evolution and Theology: The Problem of Man's*

³ The Commission on France was not immediately committed to writing precisely an encyclical, as opposed to an instruction or a syllabus of proscribed theses, and was directed in either case to an audience more limited than is implicit in the concept of an encyclical.

Origin (1931) in the 1930's (ADDF 1933) does suggest that that tolerance of the view was beginning to emerge.

Perhaps the position taken in the encyclical shows the influence of Bea, who had given two lectures on the question of the origin of Adam's body during the Settimane Bibliche conferences held at the Biblicum in 1948 (1950). In the first of those lectures, devoted to the scientific side of the question, he had said the evolutionist account had not yet been incontrovertibly demonstrated. In the second, devoted to exegesis, he had denied that one could draw from the work of the Fathers a decisive argument for the idea that the human body was formed directly from the *limus terrae*: "It is not enough simply to adduce a more or less large number of relevant patristic texts. One has to examine and evaluate them in accordance with the criteria of the treatise [Melchior Cano's] *De Locis theologicis* [1563]. [...] Unfortunately, no such critico-theological study has yet been made, and so the patristic argument remains uncertain" (32–33). He acknowledged that "a calm examination of the text of Gen 2:7 [...] seems to show that the words of the Sacred Author do not *per se* exclude that moderate form of transformism which admits a special intervention of God for the formation of the body of Adam from an already living being [*materia organica*], even though the obvious sense suggests rather that it was formed from the opposite [*materia inorganica*]." (45). In his concluding remarks, Bea wrote: "The possibility [...] authorizes the exegete to reexamine the texts and to see whether they do or do not exclude transformism. If this transformist hypothesis is ever, even in its application to the human body, scientifically proven, then it will certainly become necessary to combine it with Sacred Scripture, since natural knowledge and divine revelation cannot contradict one another" (56). The encyclical agreed that the question was open and that theological considerations were relevant to its resolution. It seems more open to Mivart's version of anthropogenesis (infusion of a created rational soul into a fully evolved body) than did Bea's lecture, which referred rather to "a special intervention of God for the formation of the body of Adam," along the lines earlier suggested by Dominicans Zeferino Cardinal González (1891) and Juan Arintero (1898), as the encyclical did not.

Bea went on, however, to express reservations about whether the evolutionary account of anthropogenesis was correct:

The obvious and most natural sense of the texts of Genesis makes one think rather of a special production of the human body as well, without an immediate physiological connection with the animal kingdom. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to give a satisfactory reply to the objections which arise when one tries to get a concrete idea of how the body of Adam could have been produced by way of descent (55).

The encyclical, although cautious, did not express such reservations. Early drafts of the Commission's document had included, at the end of the paragraph which we are discussing, the remark that "it is very clear that the words of Scripture, if read in their obvious sense, are rather unfavorable to evolution," but that remark was dropped from the published text. An annotation in a printed version of Draft V says that Bea (and Hürth), while agreeing with the idea, thought that it would be inopportune to express it (ADDF 1950a, N° 16, fol. 192, p. 14, n. 13).

It is perhaps also worth noting that, on 2 January 1950, when the commission was still in the early stages of drafting a document, Carlo Brivio (a priest of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, an entomologist and student of theology at the Gregorian University) submitted a dissertation on what post-Tridentine theologians had said about the origin of the human body (1950). Brivio, of course, recognized the relevance of his work to the question of evolution: "it does not seem to be opposed either to the possibility of a successive formation of Adam's body [i.e., gradual formation, with intermediate grades of perfection] or, what is more important, to the possibility of a partial co-operation by created causes. [...] There were even theologians positively open both to successive formation and to angelic co-operation" (31). Although the secondary causes under consideration by the theologians who were the subject of Brivio's study were angels, Brivio thought that their arguments could be extended to secondary causes that were not only created, but natural: "Can we and must we, in light of the statements of the assertions common to all the theologians exclude all forms of evolutionism? We think not. [...] It is not

possible to draw from the doctrines of that period any truly theological argument against the possibility of the co-operation of secondary causes in the formation of man” (30). Perhaps the commissioners, several of whom were Jesuits with connections to the Gregorian University, were aware of Brivio’s work. I have not, however, been able to find any direct evidence on that point.

A third feature of the drafting history is resolution of the degree to which, or at least the tone in which, the Church should express its openness to the idea of an evolutionary origin of the human body. The “definitive text” sent to Antonio Bacci, at the Secretariate of Latin Letters, for editing said “Whereas the doctrine of evolution, insofar as it studies the origin of the human body from previously existing living things [*materia organica*] [...], has until now been left by the ecclesiastical Magisterium, and is now also left [underlining here and below mine], to the investigation of experts in both fields, in conformity with the present state of the positive sciences and of sacred theology [...]” (ADDF 1950a, fol. 454). Drafts IV and V had had only slightly different wording (ADDF 1950a, N° 14, fol. 159, pp. 12–13, & N° 16, fol. 192, p. 13). Bacci thought that the draft sounded generally “too scholastic.” After he had finished polishing it, it read: “For these reasons the Magisterium of the Church permits men experienced in the human sciences and in sacred theology to research and discuss, in conformity with the present state of both fields, the doctrine of evolution, insofar as it inquires into the origin of the human body from pre-existent, living matter” (ADDF 1950a, fol. 504). In the last days before publication of the encyclical, Pope Pius changed the word “permits” to the “does not forbid” of the published text (ADDF 1950a, fol. 289). Successive drafts thus seem to manifest an increasing aversion to the concession.

The final important feature of the drafting history concerns the origin of human souls. Draft IV and V had said that “we are obliged to hold *as a matter of faith* that souls are directly created by God” (emphasis mine; ADDF 1950a, N° 14, fol. 159, p. 12, and N° 16, fol. 192, p. 13). Dhanis objected that “typically, approved authors say only that it is a matter of Catholic doctrine. Of course there are those who are more strict when it comes to the soul of the *first* man, but in the text of the draft, the word is plural,

‘souls’” (emphasis his; ADDF 1950a, fol. 211, p. 8). So he wanted the text to replace “a matter of faith” with the weaker “as a matter of Catholic doctrine.” The published text of the encyclical says that “the Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God” (36). So the plural was deliberate and the stronger ground was retained.

1.2. The Condemnation of Polygenesis

The next paragraph of the encyclical turned to a second point about anthropogenesis – “another conjectural opinion,” namely polygenism, on which it said that “the children of the Church by no means enjoy such liberty” as was conceded with respect to the evolutionary origin of the first human body (37). The word “polygenism” had, to be sure, been used variously over the course of its history. Some authors had used it to mean only that various groups of human beings (e.g., human races) had entirely distinct phylogenetic origins, a concept that, in an effort at disambiguation, Catholic authors were just beginning to call *polyphyletic* polygenism. Others used the term “polygenism” more broadly, to include even multiple original pairs within a single human *group*, i.e., *monophyletic* polygenism. The text of the encyclical on this point is as follows:

The faithful cannot embrace that opinion which maintains that either after Adam there existed on this earth true men who did not take their origin through natural generation from him as from the first parent of all, or that “Adam” signifies [*significare*] a certain number of first parents. Now it is in no way apparent how such an opinion can be reconciled with that which the sources of revealed truth and the documents of the Teaching Authority of the Church propose with regard to original sin, which proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which, through generation, is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own. (37)⁴

⁴ The standard English translation has “represents” for *significare*, which seems to me to be an error and which I have therefore corrected. Ronald Knox (1950, 190), in his translation, put “Adam was the name given to some group.”

Formal discussion of (monophyletic) polygenism was already underway at the Holy Office when work on the encyclical began.⁵ Unlike the evolutionary origin of the human body, the rejection of any form of polygenism (and the corresponding reaffirmation of the Tridentine formulation of the doctrine of Original Sin) was already included in the first draft of the document that became the encyclical (ADDF 1950a, N° 5).

Discussion of the question had been precipitated by French Dominican Louis Dumeste's presentation on how to present the first chapters of Genesis to children, given to priests and lay catechists in Marseilles on 24 June 1948. Among other things, Dumeste had said that if there were more than one original human couple, the original sin would have had to have been the actual sin of each couple (ADDF 1949, N° 2–3).

On 6 October 1948, Massilian parish priest Louis Hemour delated the lecture to the Holy Office (ADDF 1949, N° 1 & N° 4). The Dominicans themselves followed up in a way that generally satisfied the Holy Office with respect to the particular case (ADDF 1949, N° 11, fol. 53), but the consultants at the Holy Office saw the case as an instance of a problem requiring a more general solution (ADDF 1949, N° 7). As Bea later put it in the cover letter to his *votum*: “Dumeste's writing can be considered to be a characteristic expression of an anti-traditional tendency manifest in a number of francophone exegetes.” Bea was assigned to write a *votum*, one which, he hoped, would also be of use to the Commission on France, dealing as it did with a question which, had not yet received much emphasis in the Commission's discussions (ADDF 1949, N° 8).

In his *votum*, Bea said that, even though Dumeste acknowledged the unproven status of polygenism, he took the truth of transformism itself too much for granted, and gave too little attention to the necessity of any particular intervention by God in the formation of the human body. The idea of a single original human couple would be hard to reconcile with purely natural processes (it being unlikely that the sudden mutation would occur only twice, once in a man and once in a woman), but for the Christian transformist, for whom God's intervention transforms an animal into a man, there would be no particular problem (ADDF 1949, N° 9,

⁵ For a historical review of Catholicism and polygenism, see Hofmann (2020; 2021).

p. 11–12). Bea's conclusion was that the ideas expressed by Dumeste were rash. Perhaps they could be allowed as part of a contribution to serious academic discussion, but not, as Dumeste had proposed, as ideas appropriate for schoolroom teaching (ADDF 1949, N^o 9, p. 17).

At the particular congregation of 4 July, the consultors agreed that the matter needed to be addressed at a higher level, possibly by the Commission on France. As it happened, all seven members of that commission were also consultors to the Holy Office and were present at that meeting. They had in hand a draft of two *dubia* that had been prepared by Bea. The cardinal members of the Holy Office, meeting on 13 July, were in general agreement with the consultors on the issue, but were in no hurry about the *dubia*, which they thought could wait for the resolution of more general questions. The Pope approved those decisions on the following day (ADDF 1949, N^o 11, fol. 53). Six months later, on 30 January 1950, the consultors, unhappy with the time it was taking the Commission on France to address the question of polygenism, passed (13–2) a resolution that a separate decree on polygenism should be published without delay. Again (on 15 February) the cardinals decided to wait (ADDF, 1950b, fol. 44–51).

More important than the disagreement about whether the topic should be addressed in an encyclical or in a separate decree was the question of what should be said. Here a review of the deliberations of the drafting commission can add to our understanding of the issue for two reasons. First, it shows something about what respected theologians thought about the matter in question. Second, not only did the drafting of the encyclical include monthly consultations with the Pope from February through May (ADDF 1950b, fol. 44–51), but in one case a choice between two alternatives was made directly by Pope Pius himself. Three issues merit comment.

1.2.1. The Content of the Condemnation

The first issue is the exact content of the opinion which Catholics are not at liberty to hold. The *positive* teaching which forms the basis for the prohibition is twofold – that Adam was one person and that he was the ancestor of all of the rest of us.

The assertion that Adam was one single person was aimed at correcting two views which were beginning to gain some currency in the 1940's – that the word “Adam” named not a single individual, but a certain number of first parents, or even just the human race taken collectively. The various formulations considered by the Commission differ only in how explicitly they make that point – one Adam? one individual, Adam? a physical person? The published text says only that the word “Adam” does not “signify a certain number of first parents.”

The consultors at the Holy Office, considering how to put together a general response to the Dumeste case, and the Commissioners, drafting what should at this point just be called the document on France, had more trouble deciding exactly how to say that Adam was “the protoparent of all.” The problem was specifying the exact extension of the descent from Adam. Whom did it include? The first two versions of the document, drafted by Tromp, just put “the human race” (ADDF 1950a, N° 5, fol. 8, p. 5, and N° 7, fol. 32. p. 5), but perhaps that was not as clear as it at first appears to be. Versions of pre-Adamitism (in its usual Catholic sense, i.e., human beings existing *before* Adam, whether his human ancestors or other populations of men entirely separate from us) had received occasional notice in Catholic theological literature. Jules Fabre d'Enviu, priest and theologian at the University of Paris, for example, had emphasized the possible existence of pre-Adamites not related to us as a possible way of explaining certain scientific data without creating theological problems (1873, XI.50). Dominico Palmieri, of the Jesuits' Collegium Romanum, agreed that such a view would create no theological problems and refused to assign to the idea any note of theological censure (1910, Thesis XXX). Based as it usually was on a restitutionist hermeneutics that left a gap between the creation of the world and the hexaëmeron, it was a view that, by 1950, had few Catholic, and few scientific, defenders.

Nevertheless, the consultors and commissioners differed over what account should be taken of pre-Adamitism. In their meeting of 31 January, the consultors at the Holy Office appointed Hürth, Parente, Tromp, and Bea to draft “a formula which clarifies the version of polygenism to be condemned, in order not to include Pre-Adamites or other forms, per-

haps contemporary to Adam, which have now died out” (ADDF 1950b, fol. 44–51, p. 3). The same concern perhaps underlay the proposal made by Alfredo Ottaviani, Assessor at the Holy Office, at a meeting of the consultants at the Holy Office on 16 February, to put “all men born after Adam” (ADDF 1950a, Nº 9, fol. 60). Despite the universal approval of Ottaviani’s suggestion reported in the minutes of the meeting, there remained some difference of opinion over exactly how the idea of Pre-Adamitism should affect what the final product should say.

Heinrich Lennerz did not want to seem to leave the question open and wrote in March that:

If the formula which explicitly prescind from pre-Adamitism could be understood to mean that the Holy Office countenances pre-Adamitism, then it would seem to me better not to use it; if, however, there is no danger of that, then the wording of the formula, ‘all men living on earth after him’ [rather than merely ‘the human race’] insofar as it is clearer and more distinct would seem to me to be preferable (ADDF 1950a, fol. 91–92).

Parente, by contrast, had argued (in a document circulated just before Ottaviani’s suggestion) in favor of putting “the entire human race, according to its ordinary meaning” (rather than “all men living after him [Adam] on earth” precisely because it *would* leave the door open to pre- or co-Adamitism in case there later turned out to have existed such beings (it being understood that they would not be covered by the ordinary meaning of the term “human race”) (ADDF 1950b, fol. 27).

Bea thought that a distinction between two kinds of non-Adamites was theologically important. The existence of *co*-Adamites, “men in such contact with the descendants of Adam that they could interbreed with them,” he thought, was theologically inadmissible. Although the text of Genesis was not favorable to the idea of pre-Adamites, the exegetical difficulties, he thought, were not insurmountable (ADDF 1950b, fol. 44–51). He was concerned that “the actual state of paleoanthropological science does not exclude the possibility that, before Adam, there were other beings of a human nature not related to Adam’s stock, who disappeared long ago” (ADDF 1950b, fol. 44–51, pp. 3–6). He preferred, therefore, wording

which would “not prejudge the delicate question, scientifically still under discussion, of the relation of fossil humans to *H. sapiens*.” He wanted a formula that would “stay strictly within the field of theology without touching the scientific question, even with respect to the human race” (ADDF 1950a, fol. 94).

Over the course of the deliberations, a number of different ways of describing the descendants of Adam without raising the question of pre-Adamitism, were proposed (ADDF 1950a, N° 20, fol. 344, pp. 5–7):⁶

Tromp: all men existing after Adam here on this earth.

Hürth: the human race with which Sacred Scripture, both Old and New Testament, as well as the doctrine and practice of the Church, is concerned.

Bea: the human race now diffused around the world.

Dhanis: the whole human race.

There were others – “all men living (or born) after Adam,” “the present human race.” Although all formulations agreed in asserting common descent from Adam for everyone now alive, they did not all have the same implications with respect to pre- and co-Adamites. The published version of the text of the encyclical rules out the existence co-Adamites without ruling out the possible existence of pre-Adamites none of whose descendants lived after Adam.

1.2.2. The Grounds of the Condemnation

The second issue was this: What were the grounds for rejecting polygenism? The problem was not primarily Genesis 1–2, but rather the doctrine of original sin. The textual ground is thus Romans 5:12–19, guided by Tradition in general and by the Council of Trent in particular: “original sin, [...] proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and [...], through generation, is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own” (37). Here also there were some differences among the drafters about the proper characterization of the problem with polygenism. The fourth

⁶ The formal context was a condemnation of the idea that there was anyone who fit that description without being descended from Adam.

draft, the first in which is close enough to the published text to allow such direct comparison, had proposed saying that it was contrary to “Catholic dogma” (ADDF 1950a, N°14, fol. 159, p 13). In a memorandum submitted to the Commission on 25 May 1950, Dhanis objected that “some of the best-known theologians do not say that monogenism is exactly a dogma, but say rather that it is a *sententia proxima fidei*.” He cited Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange in defense of his point⁷ and proposed that the weaker term “doctrine” replace the word “dogma” (ADDF 1950a, fol. 211).

What is the significance of this change? Ludwig Ott wrote: “By dogma in the strict sense is understood a truth immediately (formally) revealed by God which has been proposed by the Teaching Authority of the Church to be believed as such” (1952, 5; see also Cartechini 1951, 11).⁸ Sixtus Cartechini offered a particularly illuminating explication of the concept of *sententiae proximae fidei*: propositions which, “although not altogether certain, are nevertheless probable and, as it seems to many, are *de fide*” (1951, 67).⁹ The published version of the encyclical settled on “that which the sources of revealed truth and the documents of the Teaching Authority of the Church propose,” citing both St. Paul and Trent, without assigning any exact theological note.

So was the problem the reconciliation of polygenism with dogmas made explicit at Trent or merely with the (perhaps only apparent or at least less authoritative) presuppositions or consequences of those dogmas? The commissioners differed over how specifically the point of contrast should be identified (ADDF 1950b, fol. 44–51, pp. 4–5). At the particular congregation held at the Holy Office on 6 February, thirteen of the consultants wanted to say that “denying that all men living on earth after Adam derive their origin from him” would “contradict (or be contrary to) what the Church has defined and proposes for belief about the origin and transfusion of original sin.” Of the four others, two wanted to say only

⁷ Garrigou-Lagrange had written that, “according to Scripture, Tradition, and theology, monogenism appears more and more to be a truth *proxima fidei*” (1948, 202).

⁸ The Code of Canon Law of 1917, which was in force in 1950 said, “Nothing can be understood to be dogmatically declared or defined, unless it is manifestly presented as such” (“*Declarata seu definita dogmatice res nulla intelligitur, nisi id manifeste constiterit*”) (Bk. III, Pt. IV, c.1323.3).

⁹ Cartechini used monogenesis as an example of a *sententia proxima fidei*.

that it “could not be reconciled with the doctrine defined at Trent,” while the other two wanted only a bare parenthetical reference to Trent, thinking that further precision would only give rise to further controversy. The published text of the encyclical is non-committal.

No doubt connected to that issue is an omission from the end of the paragraph. The fourth draft had put, immediately after the summary of the teaching in question: “Nor is there any reason to fear that this doctrine, proclaimed by the Council of Trent, will be disturbed by new advances in the sciences. For there cannot be any danger of a true conflict between a scientifically certain conclusion and a divine revelation given by Him who is the Lord of all the sciences” (ADDF 1950a, Nº 14, fol. 149, p. 13). Dhanis proposed, along with the change just mentioned, to replace those last few words with “a proposition so well established in the teaching of the magisterium of the Church” (ADDF 1950a, fol. 211, p. 9). The encyclical omitted the two sentences altogether.

1.2.3. The Definitiveness of the Condemnation

The third issue is the definitiveness of the encyclical’s verdict on polygenism. Commentators on the encyclical have long pointed out that the exact wording of this passage – “it is no way apparent how such an opinion can be reconciled with [...]” (*nequaquam appareat quomodo huiusmodi sententia componi queat [...]*) (37) – is weaker than it could have been, though the significance of this has been minimized by those who thought that the encyclical should be given a more definitively anti-polygenist reading (e.g., Boyer 1950, 533; other examples could be cited).

Bea’s first draft of a *dubium* on polygenism (from July 1949) had asked only “whether polygenism can safely be taught” (ADDF 1950b, fol. 44–51, pp. 2–3). A *votum* written by Hürth some months later offers some clarification:

What was proposed was a decree in which nothing was immediately decided concerning the *truth* of the propositions. The immediate judgment would only be about their *safety*, declaring authoritatively that they included the danger of deviating from *Catholic truth*. That danger is asserted only given

the present state of knowledge of the case. The formula used, “cannot safely be taught,” neither affirms nor denies, but prescinds from the question, whether further scientifico-theological inquiry can be expected to eliminate any serious danger. (ADDF 1950b, fol. 10–11)

On 30 January, however, the consultors changed the wording from “cannot be safely taught” to “cannot be held” (ADDF 1950b, fol. 14v). The idea of issuing a *dubium* on the question separate from the encyclical was eventually dropped, but the new language became part of later drafts of the encyclical (ADDF 1950a, N° 14, fol. 159, & N° 16, fol. 192).

On 3 August, so less than two weeks before the encyclical’s publication, the Secretariate of Briefs to Princes and of Latin Letters, which was responsible for the final stylistic editing of the encyclical, had in hand two versions of the passage in question, one approved by the theologians of the commission and another, proposed by Dhanis. The commission’s draft read: “One cannot hold the view that [...] since it cannot be reconciled with the Catholic dogma according to which [...]” [*Non enim teneri potest sententia iuxta quam, etc. [...]; cum huiusmodi opinio componi nequeat cum dogmate catholico, secundum quod, etc. [...]*] (ADDF 1950a, N° 14, fol. 159, p. 13). Dhanis had proposed a “less rigid” alternative: “[...] since it is not apparent how such an opinion can be reconciled with that which the founts of revealed truth and the acts of the Magisterium of the Church propose [...]” (ADDF 1950a, fol. 511). “Only the Holy Father,” Mario Crovini (deputy notary at the Holy Office) said in an internal memorandum, “will be able to decide which text should be preferred.” He was to find out what was the mind of Pope Pius (Crovini 1950). In the end, the Pope replaced the wording suggesting the impossibility of reconciliation with what it would be best to call a mere *presumption* of inconsistency, though strengthening slightly the formulation proposed by Dhanis: “it is in no way [*nequaquam*] apparent, etc.” (37).

2. A Proposed Clarification (The Holy Office, 1955)

That Pope Pius intended the encyclical to assert merely a presumptive of inconsistency is made clear by what occurred in 1955, when the Holy Office expressed an interest in revisiting the question of polygenism. On 23 March, it proposed to prepare a *monitum* or *dubium* on polygenism, a plan that was approved by Pope Pius on 15 April. Bea was to prepare the *dubium* and a brief *votum* justifying the *responsum* (ADDF 1950b, fol. 44).

Bea's draft asked: "Whether it can be held that: The encyclical *Humani generis* of 12 August 1950 does not definitively establish that the hypothesis of polygenesis as there described cannot be reconciled with that which the founts of revealed truth and the acts of the Magisterium of the Church state about original sin" (ADDF 1950b, fol. 44–5). The draft replied that it could not be held that the question was in any respect open. Bea's justification for the *responsum* was as follows:

A provision in this regard seems to be necessary since the assertion of the reformability of the decrees of the Council of Trent is becoming more and more common. As early as September 1950, some Catholic authors said that the words of the encyclical allow the possibility of interpreting it in the sense that the intent of the decrees of the Council are not yet entirely certain. That interpretation is finding more and more adherents. Fr. Rahner [then dogmatic theologian at the University of Innsbruck] is only one of the representatives of that opinion, and not the only one. Since he has discussed this idea theologically in a highly-respected review, there is a danger that this tendency will only become more emphasized from now on.

There is no doubt that the intent of the Holy Father was to assert that polygenism, as described in the encyclical, *cannot be reconciled* with Catholic doctrine on original sin.

He went on to add that such other questions as that of pre-Adamites or co-Adamites were not addressed in the *dubium*, as they had not been in the encyclical. His proposed formulation of the *dubium* "leaves open the

question of whether the proposition in question was ‘erroneous,’ ‘offensive to pious ears,’ or ‘rash.’”

The *dubium* was subjected to a thorough discussion at the Holy Office on 23 May, after which the consultors present unanimously instructed Bea, Tromp, and Parente to revise the *dubium* (ADDF 1950b, fol. 64–5).

On 1 June, the group met, with Hürth replacing Tromp, and proposed a new draft: “Whether the passage from *Humani generis* which concerns the hypothesis of Polygenism is to be understood to mean that the Christian faithful are prohibited from adhering to it (as there described) inasmuch as it cannot in any way be reconciled [*nequaquam componatur*] with divine revelation and the documents of the Magisterium of the Church. Reply: AFFIRMATIVE.” This, they hoped, would “eliminate the ambiguity inherent in the language of the encyclical (*cum nequaquam appareat, &c.*)” without going any further than the encyclical itself had done.

On 20 June the consultors at the Holy Office approved the new formulation and requested that the Holy Father approve it *in forma specifica* (i.e., in a way that made the formulation his own). The cardinal-members of the Holy Office met on 28 June, but were divided on whether to endorse the proposed *dubium* and *responsum*. Three wanted to do so; the other two would also do so, but wanted the final phrase of the *dubium* (from “inasmuch as [...]”) to be dropped. The three thought that, without that final phrase, the *dubium* would only reinforce the doubts raised by the encyclical (ADDF 1950b, fol. 68). In the papal audience held on 4 July, Pope Pius said:

there was no need for any clarification of the quoted passage from the encyclical, the formulation of which was deliberately cautious and it is good for it to remain as it is, without any further clarifications, except – of course – the absolute “irreformability” of the dogma of original sin in the descendants of Adam. The two cardinals (Ciriaci and Ottaviani) rightly observed that “one needs to be very careful in the matter, as the words of the encyclical are.” (ADDF 1950b, fol. 70v & 72)

Conclusion

There were no further actions by the Holy Office or by Pope Pius until 1958. More recent archives have not yet been opened to researchers. Catholic discussion of both issues have continued in the seventy years following publication of the encyclical, but the details of that history are beyond the scope of this paper.

What the archives show us about the encyclical itself is the following:

- (1) There was no controversy about whether to permit cautious discussion among experts on the question of the evolutionary human body.
- (2) Nor was there any controversy on the direct creation of each individual human soul, and on the rejection of an exclusively evolutionary account of the origin of the human race.
- (3) Pope Pius deliberately chose to make the encyclical's rejection of polygenism presumptive rather than definitive.

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