

# Roman Catholicism and Genesis

A review of  
**The Doctrines of Genesis 1–11: A Compendium and Defense of Traditional Catholic Theology on Origins**  
by Fr Victor P. Warkulwiz  
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The Catholic Church's belief about Genesis 1–11 has been in a muddle for a long time—ever since uniformitarianism and evolution came on the scene. This situation is similar to Protestant churches, sadly for both liberal and conservative ones. Within the 'traditionalist' churches, this book is a welcome addition to the book *Genesis, Creation and Early Man* by the Russian Orthodox heirmonk Seraphim Rose,<sup>1</sup> who documented that the Church fathers of Eastern Orthodoxy from the fourth century until the present almost all taught a young earth, a literal six-day creation, a global Flood, and the origin of languages at the Tower of Babel. Warkulwiz's book focuses on the traditional teachings of the Catholic church from the early and medieval church fathers and comes to the same conclusions. The book was endorsed with a foreword by Bishop Robert Francis Vasa of Baker, Oregon.

### Who is Fr Warkulwiz?

Fr Warkulwiz is well qualified to write such a book. Not only is he a Catholic priest, but also he has a PhD in physics from Temple University and has worked in industry for a number of years. He has taught science, philosophy, history, astronomy, logic, chemistry, physics, mathematics and creationism versus evolution at Magdalen College in the U.K. He entered the priesthood late in life

and received an M.Div. and M.A. in theology and was ordained in 1991. He is also theological reviewer for the Kolbe Center for the Study of Creation,<sup>2</sup> a Catholic young-earth creation organization.

### About the book

Blending this diversity of fields, Fr Warkulwiz has written a 519 page book not only on the scientific arguments for young-earth creationism, but also he has added a lot of history, philosophy, and theology. The book consists of 16 doctrines derived from Genesis 1–11, such as God created the world from nothing, God created each thing in the world immediately, God created each living creature according to its kind, God created the world in six natural days, God created the world several thousand years ago, the whole human species descended from the first man and woman and God destroyed the world that was with a worldwide Flood. He quotes extensively from the early and medieval fathers of the church, especially Augustine, Aquinas and Bonaventure. He drives home the main point that traditional Catholic teaching has *always* been young-earth creationism. It is only under the influence of the so-called Enlightenment that Catholic theologians and scholars have strayed. The influence of evolution culminated in the teachings of Jesuit priest, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who mesmerized numerous Catholics to believe in evolution with his 'theological fiction'.

From his field of physics, Warkulwiz has some good insights into many supposed problems of Genesis 1–11, for instance, he says in regard to the source of light for the first three days:

'A possible source for the light could have been chemical and nuclear reactions in the raw matter of earth itself. But according to modern physics a source really isn't needed. Light is not tethered to a source. Once a photon of light



leaves its source it is free and has an existence of its own. So modern physics has no problem with the idea that God created light without a source ...' (p. 173).

Old-earthers make a huge issue out of the nature of light before the sun was created on Day 4, trying to justify their old-age interpretation. It is as if God were powerless, and there were no other alternatives.

Fr Warkulwiz understands the fallacy of the documentary hypothesis, which assumes evolution, and which the Catholic Church borrowed from liberal Protestants. He sees the problems with the big bang hypothesis for the origin of the universe and that it contradicts the Bible. He strongly believes in the inerrancy of the Bible:

'The principle of inerrancy is all-inclusive; it includes *everything* the Bible says. To deny this and to allow Sacred Scripture to err even in some small matter opens a Pandora's box of skepticism that leads to the total discrediting of God's Word' (pp. 12–13).

### Church Fathers almost universally interpreted Genesis literally

The book adds much information that refutes the idea that the early church fathers were wishy-washy on the subject of origins, suggesting a

variety of possible ‘interpretations’ for Genesis 1–11. This is a point made by a number of modern opponents of biblical creation such as the progressive creationist Hugh Ross<sup>3</sup> and the theistic evolutionist Howard Van Till,<sup>4</sup> who has subsequently apostatized—at no great surprise to anyone who knew him.<sup>5</sup>

It is true that Augustine and Aquinas seemed to have some unorthodox beliefs, but often these Church fathers, as well as others, simply interpreted passages *both* symbolically as well as literally. They were fond of adding a spiritual meaning to events in Genesis 1–11, interpreted both individually and in terms of the Church. They still believed in the literal meaning. Augustine did stray from a literal six-day creation, but instead of believing in long ages, he believed creation took place in only one day! Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini states that Augustine did explain too many things figuratively which he later thought he should have taken more literally (p. 166). Aquinas believed in spontaneous generation, as did most other scholars of his time, but he also believed in created kinds. It is only by superficial analysis of the writings of the Church fathers that some old-earthers and theistic evolutions can claim that some early church fathers left the questions of origins open.

I was favourably impressed by some of the insights that the early Church fathers had in regard to origins. Many of their ideas seemed modern. But at other times it seems like they theologized beyond the state of the evidence. For instance some of the Church fathers believed that Adam and Eve lived in the garden like sexless creatures (p. 304). Most of the time Fr Warkulwiz points out these misinterpretation and mistakes, but other times he does not comment, which leaves the impression that he believes some of these hypotheses.

**Popes, cardinals and councils upheld a literal Genesis—until recently**

Another interesting aspect of the book is that Fr Warkulwiz quotes several Church councils, a few cardinals

and a number of popes who reinforced the traditional Catholic teaching on a literal Genesis. I was favourably impressed with the many statements quoted. For instance, the Pontifical Biblical Commission of 1909 rejected arguments that denied the literal history of Genesis 1–3.

Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini points to the conclusion that Adam must have been specially created because Eve was specially created from Adam’s side:

‘But if it is true, as the transformists are good enough to concede, that the body of woman was formed directly by God and thus does not come by way of evolution, who will be persuaded that man’s body, the virile sex, comes from the brute beast? What an absurdity!’ (p. 269)

However, a few popes of recent times have made statements that seem to support evolution. Warkulwiz states that such pronouncements are *beyond the range of authority* of the popes and are not official church doctrine. Moreover, these popes are *dependent* upon their scientific advisors, who have succumbed to evolution, an old earth and the big bang. So, it is no wonder that some of the recent popes have made unbiblical statements supporting an old earth or evolution. These should be ignored.

**A few questionable statements on origins**

Although strongly young-earth creationist, I did find two questionable statements in regard to origins in the book. Warkulwiz seems to leave open the possibility of animal death before the Fall (p. 331), and that thorns, thistles, and poisonous plants existed before the Fall but were created for a purpose beneficial to man and that God gave Adam and Eve the ability to avoid danger (p. 302). Genesis 3 makes it clear that these came after the Fall.

**The book is geared towards Catholics**

The reader must remember that the intended audience is Catholic, not Protestant, although Warkulwiz uses a lot of sources from the modern

creationist movement, a few of which are outdated. There is a good reason for this. Besides being Catholic himself, there is no well-developed theology of creation in the Catholic Church because a majority of theologians, scholars and scientists have embraced theistic naturalism (p. xxxv). These intellectuals are probably more influenced by the supposed long geological periods of uniformitarian geology than by evolution. The author goes on to say that such long ages have had a numbing effect on the faith of the youth, and God is pushed so far back in time to be barely visible or relevant (p. 9).

Protestant readers will of course find a few aspects of the book questionable, such as his occasional quotes from the Apocrypha. Mariology is inserted in one or two places. And of course, the book upholds Church tradition almost on par with the Bible. But it can be said in his defense that many church traditions do uphold the Scripture, which is usually the source of many traditions.

If the book is widely read and considered by Catholics, it should cause a renaissance in their thinking about origins. I recommend the book also for Protestants who should overlook the few instances where it deviates from strongly held biblical beliefs. The book is overwhelmingly and delightfully a work of young-earth creationism.

**References**

1. Mortenson, T., Orthodoxy and Genesis: what the fathers *really* taught, *Journal of Creation* 16(3):48–53, 2002; <creationonthe web.com/seraphim>.
2. <kolbecenter.org>.
3. Sarfati, J., *Refuting Compromise: A biblical and scientific refutation of ‘progressive Creationism’ (Billions of Years), as popularized by astronomer Hugh Ross*, Master Books, Green Forest, AR, 2004.
4. Van Till, H.J., God and evolution: an exchange, *First Things* 34:32–38, 1993.
5. ‘Over the next two decades, he became the heretic his critics had suspected’, Manier, J., *The New Theology*, *Chicago Tribune*, 20 January 2008; <chicagotribune.com/features/magazine/chi-mxa0120magevolutionjan20,0,2045786.story>.