

## TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, ORIGINAL SIN, AND THE SIX PROPOSITIONS

*by David Grumett and Paul Bentley*

*Abstract.* In 1925, the French Jesuit geologist, paleontologist, and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was removed from his teaching position at the Institut Catholique in Paris. He spent most of the next twenty years in China and his major theological writings were not published during his lifetime. We have uncovered major new archival sources on the investigation of Teilhard by the Jesuit curia and the Holy Office of the Roman Catholic Church. These include the Six Propositions to which he was required to subscribe, which are here published and analyzed for the first time, along with his subscription. Associated correspondence, including a letter written by Teilhard to the Jesuit superior general Włodimir Ledóchowski, enables a fuller understanding of Teilhard's response to the investigation of him. Moreover, comparison with similar investigations into other theologians in the first half of the 1920s allows an assessment of how the complex power dynamics between the Jesuit curia, the Holy Office, and Pope Pius XI shaped the outcome.

*Keywords:* Christianity; creation; evolution; natural evil; original sin; origin of life; Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

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In 1922, the French Jesuit geologist, paleontologist, and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin produced a seven-page typescript paper discussing how the Roman Catholic Church's traditional dogma of original sin might be understood in the light of modern evolutionary theory. He highlighted two key difficulties with the traditional dogma. The first was the descent of all human beings from a single couple rather than through several lineages. The second was an earthly paradise from which suffering and death were absent. Regarding both as insurmountable, he rejected the notions of an individual Adam and an initial Fall, presenting sin as a condition for all

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human existence, and suffering and death as conditions for biological life as a whole.

Teilhard circulated copies of his paper for private discussion. He also left them in his desk at the Institut Catholique in Paris (Speaight 1967, 136), where he taught geology. Copies were dispatched by an unknown person to the Jesuit curia in Rome and to the Holy Office. The events from this point onward have until now been unclear. However, in 2006 the Vatican secret archive and associated archives for the pontificate of Pope Pius XI (1922–1939) were opened to researchers, primarily in order to furnish historians with evidence of the Roman Catholic Church's resistance to the fascist persecution of Jews in this period. Research in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu has allowed a full and accurate picture of the subsequent investigation, and of the content of the Six Propositions to which Teilhard was required to subscribe. This article draws on very important new material, including correspondence between Teilhard, his provincial superior, and the Jesuit superior general, as well as the text of the Six Propositions itself. In this article we present this material, including a full text of the Six Propositions in their original Latin and in English translation. We also present, in the original French and in English translation, Teilhard's subscription to the propositions, and the full text of a letter that he wrote directly to the Jesuit superior general in Rome.

We begin by briefly introducing Teilhard and surveying the current state of knowledge of the Six Propositions, and the events surrounding them, in biographies and published correspondence. We next summarize the content of Teilhard's paper on original sin and identify the critical issues it raised. We then draw on both published and previously unpublished correspondence to narrate the events that led to Teilhard subscribing to the Six Propositions on July 1, 1925, and to departing from France the following April. We examine the critical issues raised by the propositions and consider Teilhard's response to them, before comparing the investigation of him with similar investigations during the first half of the 1920s. Finally, we show how Teilhard's own view of the critical issues remained essentially unchanged through the rest of his life. Teilhard has sometimes been presented, by both his advocates and his critics, as the prophet of a New Age theology. However, the new material now available confirms a picture of him as a scientist and theologian who, through his whole adult life, consistently sought to be obedient both to his Church and to his experience of the world as modern science revealed it to him.

#### RESEARCH CONTEXT

Teilhard was born in the Auvergne region of France in 1881. He grew up amidst a volcanic landscape and as a child developed a deep interest in geology and fossils. He was shaped in equal measure by his family's

deep Catholic piety, and became a Jesuit aged 17. Teilhard lived in the period between the rise of Darwin's theory that humans were biologically descended, through evolution, from other animals, and the doctrinally liberalizing Second Vatican Council. During this whole era, the Roman Catholic Church was grappling with the issue of how to reconcile several of its traditional dogmas with the theory of biological evolution. These included the historicity of Adam and Eve; the notion that sin originated in an historical act of human disobedience; the existence of an earthly paradise; and the status of the soul as metaphysically distinct from the body. Teilhard put forward a revisionary synthesis of theology and evolution that more conservative figures within the Roman Catholic Church saw as a threat to doctrinal orthodoxy. Because of this, he was refused permission to publish key theological works with the result that most of his writings appeared only following his death in 1955.

The key turning point in Teilhard's theological fortunes was the first half of the 1920s. Because of his wish to address the doctrinal topics just listed in the light of modern evolutionary theory, he was subjected to a formal investigation by the Jesuit curia in Rome. Until recently, key documents relating to this crucial period in Teilhard's life have been inaccessible. For this reason, scholarly understanding of the factual details, their wider significance for Teilhard's theology, and the place of the events in the gradual process by which the Roman Catholic Church has reconciled itself with the theory of evolution, has been severely limited. The respective roles of Teilhard's peers at the Institut Catholique in Paris, the Jesuit provincial superior, the superior general in Rome, the Holy Office, and Pope Pius XI have been unclear, as have the reasons for his subsequent "exile" in China and its expected duration.

Above all else, none of the existing intellectual biographies of Teilhard provides any details of the content of the Six Propositions. The earliest and now classic biography vaguely states that "Teilhard's religious superiors pressed him to leave the Institut Catholique" and that "we know little of his life from November, 1924 to April, 1926" (Cuénot [1958]1965, 61, 56). The first major biography written in English acknowledges that Teilhard was "requested to subscribe to six propositions" (Speaight 1967, 137). This study also contains some information about the order of events preceding his subscription. Cardinal Raphaël Merry del Val, the secretary of the Holy Office (now the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith)<sup>1</sup>, received Teilhard's paper on original sin and "made sharp representations" to the Jesuit superior general, Włodimir Ledóchowski (136). Other details outlined here are traceable to letters sent by Teilhard to his mentor Auguste Valensin. These include his dissatisfaction with the vague yet absolute nature of the demand not to write against the traditional understanding of original sin, and his hope to soften what he was being pressed to sign (letter of November 13, 1924: Teilhard 1974b, 111–12). Reference is also

made to the acute difficulty that the fourth proposition caused him, and his consequent decision to subscribe to the Six Propositions with explicit reservation (letter of June 12, 1925; 122–23). However, even Teilhard's defender Henri de Lubac, when annotating this correspondence, admitted: "We have not found any trace of these six propositions" (123, n. 2).

The second biography in English provides a little more information, including the claim that the action against Teilhard commenced after a "bloc of conservative French bishops" complained to the Holy Office (Lukas and Lukas 1977, 86). Teilhard's provincial superior<sup>2</sup> Fr. Jean-Baptiste Costa de Beauregard is presented as the principal mediator, both conveying the superior general's orders to Teilhard and himself travelling from Lyons to Rome to intercede on Teilhard's behalf. Also mentioned as supporters of Teilhard are Fr. Félix Mollat, the provincial superior for Paris, where Teilhard worked, who accompanied Costa to Rome, and Mgr. Alfred Baudrillard, the rector of the Institut Catholique in Paris, who was later created a cardinal. After these biographies were published, no further knowledge of the Six Propositions, nor of the events surrounding them, became available until now. This has been due to a lack of new archival material and the diminishing number of living people with any knowledge of the events. More widely, Raf De Bont justly notes that "hardly anything is known about the Roman policy towards evolutionism" during the first half of the twentieth century (2005, 459), between Pope Pius X's condemnation of modernism in 1907 and Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Humani generis* in 1950.

#### "NOTE ON SOME POSSIBLE REPRESENTATIONS OF ORIGINAL SIN"

In early April 1922, Teilhard produced a "Note" in which he discussed the doctrine of original sin in the context of modern science. This followed a request by Fr. Louis Riedinger, who was professor of dogma at the French Jesuit scholasticate at Enghien in Belgium. Teilhard sent this "Note" to his mentor Auguste Valensin for comment on Holy Saturday (i.e., April 15, 1922: Teilhard 1974b, 81–83). He opens the "Note" by distinguishing two aspects of original sin. The first is its "dogmatic attributes," of which he gives as examples the factors that brought about the initial transgression, and universal redemption. The second aspect is its "external circumstances," by which he means the specific forms under which it has been represented. Teilhard thereby seeks to detach the dogmatic elements of the first transgression from the narrative presented in the opening chapters of Genesis. He writes: "It is apparent today that we are being irresistibly driven to find a new way of picturing to ourselves the events as a consequence of which evil invaded our world" (1922a, 45). Teilhard presents his investigation as primarily descriptive, stating that he aims to lay out the scientific findings that are "gradually obliging" Christian theologians to reconceive original sin, and to indicate the turn that believers are now taking as they attempt

to reconcile the dogma of the Fall with the “least hypothetical” (that is, most credible) evidence drawn from experience and history.

In the shorter of a pair of main sections, Teilhard outlines two difficulties with the traditional representation of original sin. The first is that science does not leave any place for Adam. In one key respect, Teilhard continues, science and dogma agree, with each positing the human race as a unity. Yet whereas theologians promote monogenism (the descent of all humans from a single individual or pair of ancestors), natural scientists defend gradual emergence “through a number of avenues [*issues*] and perhaps through a number of channels of transmission [*émissions*]” (1922a, 46). This accounts for the diversity of primitive human characteristics more satisfactorily than the extremely improbable “realization of a zoological type in one individual.” The second difficulty with the classic representation of original sin, which is associated with the first, is the notion of an earthly paradise. Citing the physical, chemical, and zoological interconnection of the world into a single general state, Teilhard calls into question the notion that death, suffering, or evil could anywhere be absent. He writes: “As far back as the mind can reach, looking backwards, we find the world dominated by physical evil, impregnated with moral evil . . . we find it *in a state of original sin*” (1922a, 47). Teilhard continues that it is “impossible to include Adam and the earthly paradise (taken literally) in our scientific outlook,” and that the alternative perspectives provided by science and sacred history cannot be combined.

The second, longer section of Teilhard’s “Note” explores possible new ways of understanding original sin. He begins by observing that the Fall is unverifiable. This, he continues, may be for one of two reasons: it is either too small and distant from us, or too large and close in time to us. Teilhard associates the first of these explanations with “conservative theologians,” who, he protests, minimize the preternatural gifts of Adam and Eve before the Fall, and identify the suffering and death brought into the world at the Fall with the suffering and death of humans alone (1922a, 48). Teilhard asserts that paradise should, had it existed, have made greater positive impact on the history of the world, and that, for Paul, the Fall is a response to the problem of evil in its non-human forms too.

Disagreeing with the conservative position just outlined, Teilhard argues that, in fact, the Fall is unverifiable for the second reason: because its great magnitude transcends human conception. He then offers several different models for understanding this. The first he terms the “switch model”: Adam and Eve were born into a non-natural portion of the world, then, as a result of the Fall, were reborn into the lower, natural, animal sphere that humans inhabit (1922a, 49). This means that humans were, through Adam and Eve, incorporated into an existing zoological series. Such an explanation accounts for the absence of an earthly paradise. Moreover, according to this

explanation Adam and Eve either symbolize human origins or, in their Fall, pluralize those origins as the group basis for the evolution of zoological types requires.

However, Teilhard identifies a difficulty with the above account: that it posits an initial animal world evolving of its own accord. This leads him to propose a second model of the Fall, as effecting the materialization of Adam and Eve from a previously more spiritual state, from which was produced the “woeful multiplicity from which consciousness is now, in every quarter, painfully re-emerging” (1922a, 50). Teilhard terms this the “recasting model” and characterizes it in two phases. In the first phase, involution in matter, the present Earth would be formed as the result of a centrifugal, fragmentary impulse starting from the first Adam. In the second phase, evolution towards spirit, the new earth is being brought into being through centripetal concentration in the second Adam. The closest we can get to any evidential basis for the first phase, Teilhard states, is by extrapolating backwards from the second, evolutive phase towards a “progressively more dissociated multiplicity” (1922a, 51).

Both the switch model and the recasting model, Teilhard affirms, have the advantage of being able to accommodate “an individual sinful act—even that of a first, personal Adam.” However, Teilhard recognizes that they also have the disadvantage of positing a past that is receding without limit. He therefore proposes a third model, in which original sin “expresses, translates, personifies, in an instantaneous and localized act, the perennial and universal law of imperfection which operates in humankind *in virtute* of its being ‘*in fieri* [in process of becoming].” He continues:

One might even, perhaps, go so far as to say that since the creative act (by definition) causes being to rise up to God from the confines of nothingness (that is, from the depth of the multiple, which means from some other matter), all creation brings with it, as its accompanying risk and shadow, some fault: in other words, it has its counterpart in some redemption. Seen in this way, the drama of Eden would be the very drama of the whole of human history concentrated in a symbol profoundly expressive of reality. Adam and Eve are images of humankind pressing on towards God. The beatitude of the earthly paradise is the salvation constantly offered to all, but rejected by many, and so arranged that nobody can succeed in obtaining it except by unification of his being in our Lord. (And what determines the *supernatural* character of this unification is that it is effected gratuitously around the Word and not around an infra-divine center.) (1922a, 51–52)

In summarizing his model, Teilhard presents creation as out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) not in the sense of out of a vacuum from which the possibility of being is excluded, but in the sense of out of an extremely or even infinitely dispersed multiplicity. He associates this act of creation with redemption,

which is a corollary of the fact that evil is its inevitable shadow side. Adam and Eve are images of humanity rather than its biological progenitors, while the paradisiacal state is the salvation open to all, which is obtained only through unity with Christ.

Teilhard reckons that this third model of original sin satisfactorily answers all scientific objections. Yet he recognizes that it excludes the possibility of an “individual Adam and an initial fall,” unless these are figuratively identified with the “moral crisis which apparently first accompanied the first appearance of intelligence in humans.” Moreover, a consequence of these exclusions is that the Fall, and recovery from it, are “no longer two distinct periods, but two components which are constantly united in each human and in humankind” (1922a, 52–53). However, Teilhard proceeds with the passionate defense that his model is an “intellectual and mystical development” of the traditional doctrines of the Creation, the Fall, the Incarnation, and Redemption. To view any of these as “fleeting accidents occurring sporadically in space and time” is, he contends, a “grossly immature view which is a perpetual offense to our reason and a contradiction of our experience” (1922a, 53). In his model, these four events “become co-extensive with the duration and totality of the world,” and, from a physical viewpoint, are aspects “of one and the same divine operation.” Quoting Paul’s image in Romans 8:22 of the “whole creation groaning in travail together,” Teilhard describes the incarnation as the “final term of a creation which is still continuing everywhere,” and locates the supreme transgression not in the past but in the future, when humanity will divide into two clear groups of apostates and believers.

#### INVESTIGATION BY THE JESUIT CURIA

On September 2, 1924, Fr. Norbert de Boynes, the Jesuit regional assistant superior general for France in Rome, wrote to Fr. Costa, who was the Jesuit provincial superior for Lyons, reporting that a paper interpreting the doctrine of original sin in the light of modern science had been sent to the Jesuit general curia in Rome.<sup>3</sup> It was suspected, he continued, that Teilhard was its author. De Boynes was aware that Teilhard was returning to France from China, where he had been engaged in paleontological research since May 1923. Costa was instructed to verify if Teilhard was indeed the paper’s author, and, if he was, to request from him a written promise neither to say nor to write anything, whether for a public or a private audience, contrary to the Church’s traditional dogmatic teaching on original sin as traditionally interpreted. Costa was also asked to report back on Teilhard’s general disposition toward traditional Church teaching.

In an already published letter of November 13, referred to by Speaight and described above, Teilhard (1974b, 111–12) wrote from Paris

suggesting that the formula being pressed upon him had little to commend it apart from the fact that it had come from his superiors. At all costs, he stated, he wished to avoid receiving a tougher ultimatum to which he would not in honesty be able to subscribe. On November 20, a week later, Teilhard wrote from Lyons to the Jesuit curia clarifying that his reflections were merely provisional, being exercises undertaken to show that it is in principle not impossible to reconcile dogmatic requirements with those of experience. He affirmed his resolve to bring his reflections into the greatest possible conformity with standard orthodox theological understandings of original sin and to emphasize that they were not authoritative but merely hypothetical. On November 24, having met Teilhard, Costa wrote to Fr. de Boynes affirming Teilhard's loyalty and stating Teilhard's regret for allowing his paper to circulate without making the hypothetical nature of the positions it outlined sufficiently clear. In fact, Costa argued, formal censure would be superfluous because Teilhard had not intended to make any positive doctrinal affirmation.

Teilhard and Costa clearly hoped that Teilhard's apology and clarification, coupled with Costa's demonstrated exercise of his authority as provincial superior, would put the matter to rest. This was not to be. On December 18, Fr. Włodimir Ledóchowski himself wrote to Costa in French. In the letter, he accused Costa of trying to defend Teilhard by presenting him as boldly seeking to reconcile the data of science with the truths of the faith, and by stating that his ideas were merely hypothetical. He threatened that if Teilhard continued to defend his hypotheses with such obstinacy, he would be expelled from the Jesuit order and denounced by the Holy Office. Accompanying the letter was a censure to be passed to Teilhard. If Teilhard objected to any of its contents, the superior general wrote, he should write directly to him and these objections would be submitted to theologians for consideration. In any case, Ledóchowski continued, Teilhard must clearly and unambiguously reject everything that the censure indicated was contrary to the faith, even if expressed hypothetically, and take all possible steps to withdraw his writings from circulation.

In the letter, Teilhard was also warned to distance himself from the influence of Marcellin Boule, the prominent paleontologist at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris, under whom he had studied and worked since before World War I. Boule was best known for his work on the first complete Neanderthal skeleton, which had been excavated at La Chapelle-aux-Saints in southwestern France. Although the skeleton appeared to have been intentionally buried, Boule (1923, 176–245) emphasized the difference of its posture, physiology, and mental capacity from those of humans. The skeleton, he argued, lent support to his branch theory of evolution, suggesting that Neanderthals constituted an evolutionary dead end and that, as Darwin had also thought, humans



could not be descended from them. In being urged to stay away from Boule, Teilhard was effectively being asked to withdraw from the Parisian scientific circles in which he had become a well known and respected figure.

On January 4, 1925, Costa wrote briefly to Ledóchowski reporting that he had communicated the warning to Teilhard and that, because he was about to travel to Algeria (which was part of the Lyons Jesuit province), he had asked Teilhard to respond directly. On January 13, Teilhard did so, and his letter is annexed to this article. In it, he restated that his theological attempt to reconcile dogma with the accumulating body of observable facts in the world was hypothetical, explicitly disavowing anything that contradicted the dogmatic points cited to him. Nevertheless, he continued, the reconciliation of faith and experience was a pressing matter that he felt impelled to pursue under Church direction. Turning to science, he acknowledged the deficiencies of the scientific worldview with which he was engaged. Nonetheless, he also recognized the weight of the geological evidence for biological evolution, presenting engagement with this evidence as a matter of intellectual honesty, and denial of it as a sin. Teilhard accepted the instruction to withdraw his "Note" from circulation, and suggested that, in order to dispel any remaining doubts, a mutually agreed theologian be nominated to whom he could expound his thought.

For the second time, Teilhard hoped that he had given sufficient ground to satisfy his superiors. However, the Jesuit curia commissioned two formal reviews of his "Note." The Teilhard *Censura* file shows that one of these was by Fr. Augustin Bea, who had served as the Jesuit provincial superior for Germany but had recently taken up a chair at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, of which he would later become rector. On February 25, Bea submitted eight pages of "Animadversiones [*Observations*]," in which the focus of his concern was not Teilhard's geology but his modernist theology, which Bea claimed was close to pantheism. The other reviewer was Fr. Henry Pinard de La Boullaye, another Jesuit, who was professor of fundamental theology at Enghien in Belgium and would shortly move to the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. A six-page "Judicium [*Judgment*]" was received from Pinard on March 18, in which he critically noted, among much else, Teilhard's assumption that the state of the universe before the sin of Adam was incomparably higher than now.

Having received the reviews, Ledóchowski wrote to Costa on April 13 summarizing Teilhard's letter to him of January 13 and stating that he could not be permitted to continue to teach at the Institut Catholique. On May 15, Costa communicated this decision to Teilhard at a face-to-face meeting in Lyons, along with the instruction from Rome that, the following Easter, he must leave Paris and return to China. The news precipitated a

flurry of letters from Teilhard to Valensin, which have for several decades been the principal source of knowledge of the investigation of Teilhard and the propositions. In the first, dated May 16, Teilhard (1974b, 115–16) reported the meeting and related his experience of an internal agony or tempest at being required to choose between his two sacred vocations of the Gospel and scientific research, which he had pursued in tandem since the age of eighteen. The same day, he wrote in his unpublished diary:

Which is the more sacred of my two vocations? The one I followed as a youth of eighteen? Or the one that revealed itself, like the true spouse, in the fullness of my adult life? I tell myself that there is no contradiction. Were I to let my research project be destroyed, I would still work to preach the Gospel of Research. But do I really have to be a victim to precisely that which I have always sought to combat: the formalization and the mechanization of spirit? I don't accept the idolatry that makes the religious orders set up loyalty to themselves as the first commandment of God! (quoted in Teilhard 2008, 31)

Receiving a speedy response to his letter to Valensin, Teilhard wrote again at length on May 19 (Teilhard 1974b, 117–19), describing his admiration for people whom he had met who had sacrificed a conventional life for the sake of their convictions, and expressing his fear of a merely prudential fidelity that could not be affirmed in truth. He accepted Valensin's suggestion that, as a result of being uprooted from his Parisian life, his spirit and his heart might be opened to new things. Indeed, the wish of the authorities in Rome that he should settle in Tientsin could even indicate providence. Nevertheless, he worried that such a departure, even on a geological mission, would amount to a premature desertion of the scientific community in Paris. Indeed, he regarded severing links with the National Museum of Natural History as more serious than giving up his chair at the Institut Catholique. It was unclear when, if ever, he would be allowed to return to Paris, and he feared that a sacrifice was being demanded of him that would benefit nobody. Valensin again responded quickly. Teilhard wrote back to him on May 26 (120–21), describing the calling he felt to expound ideas that perhaps one-third of both believers and unbelievers desired to hear, and portraying his own geological vocation as providing what was for him an essential "contact with the real" and a participation in human effort. He also voiced his hope that, by sacrificing his position at the Institut Catholique, he might be permitted to retain at least some scientific attachments in Paris. On May 30, he briefly replied to a further letter from Valensin (122), accepting that the Spirit may be saved by showing that it is manifested in received forms—including, by implication, Church teaching. Teilhard's final letter in this series to Valensin, of June 12 (122–23), was cited much earlier. He here discusses the Six Propositions individually, so it is to these that we now turn.

## THE SIX PROPOSITIONS

The following is the text found in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu. The French is handwritten by Teilhard (underlining in the original).

Propositiones admittendae:<sup>4</sup>

- 1) Primus homo Adam, cum mandatum Dei in paradiso fuit transgressus, statim sanctitatem et iustitiam, in qua constitutus fuerat, amisit (Conc.Trid., sess.5,can.1; Denz.-Bann.788).
- 2) Adae praevaricatio non sibi solo sed etiam eius propagini nocuit, et acceptam a Deo sanctitatem et iustitiam, quam perdidit, non sibi soli sed nobis etiam perdidit (Trid.,ibidem, can.2).
- 3) Hoc Adae peccatum, quod origine unum est et propagatione, non imitatione transfusum, omnibus inest unicuique proprium (Trid. ibidem, can.3).
- 4) Ergo universum genus humanum ex uno protoparente Adam ortum habuit (haec quarta propositio nullibi est quidem explicite definita; sed continetur evidenter in tribus praedictis).
- 5) Etsi fides sit supra rationem, nulla tamen unquam inter fidem et rationem vera dissensio esse potest (Conc.vat.sess. 3, cap.4; Denz. 1797).
- 6) Fieri non potest ut dogmatibus ab Ecclesia propositis, aliquando secundum progressum scientiae sensus tribuendus sit alius ab eo, quem intellexit et intelligit Ecclesia (Vat.,sess.3, can.3 de fide et ratione; Denz. 1818).

*J'admets ces propositions avec le sens plein que leur donne la Ste Eglise. Et je les signe d'autant plus volontiers que, malgré les apparences que j'ai pu donner, je n'ai jamais eu d'autre idée que de les faire dominer sur toute vérité scientifique.*

*Profondément convaincu que la science humaine n'a de valeur que en dépendance du Christ et ramenée à lui, je suis absolument décidé à faire passer, avant tout résultat scientifique, la conservation, dans son intégrité et sa réalité parfaite, de la figure révélée de NS. J. C.*

*Paris. 1er Juillet 1925  
P. Teilhard de Chardin*

Translation:

Accepted Propositions:<sup>5</sup>

- 1) The first man, Adam, when he acted against God's command in paradise, immediately lost that holiness and justice in which he had been created (Council of Trent, Session 5, Canon 1).
- 2) The sin of Adam damaged not only him alone but also his descendants; and the holiness and justice received from God, which he lost, he lost not only for himself alone but also for us (Council of Trent, Session 5, Canon 2).

- 3) This sin of Adam, which is one by origin and passed on to all by propagation and not by imitation, inheres in everyone as something proper to each (Council of Trent, Session 5, Canon 3).
- 4) Therefore the whole human race takes its origin from one protoparent, Adam (this fourth proposition is nowhere explicitly defined; but is clearly implied by the preceding three).
- 5) Even though faith is above reason, there can never be any real disagreement between faith and reason (First Vatican Council, Session 3, Chapter 4).
- 6) It is impossible that at some time, given the advancement of knowledge, a sense may be assigned to the dogmas propounded by the Church which is different from that which the Church has understood and understands (First Vatican Council, Session 3, Canon 3 on faith and reason).

*I accept these propositions in the full sense that the Holy Church gives to them. And I sign them all the more voluntarily because, despite the appearances that I might have given, I have never had any other idea than to let them dominate all scientific truth.*

*Profoundly convinced that human knowledge only has value if derived from Christ and led back to him, I am absolutely determined to make known, before every scientific result, the continuation, in his integrity and his perfect reality, of the revealed figure of Our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Paris, July 1, 1925  
P. Teilhard de Chardin*

Teilhard apparently received the Six Propositions at his meeting with Costa on May 15. As will be discussed later, such a document would have originated from the Holy Office, which was responsible for doctrine, and subsequently passed through the Jesuit curia. Teilhard had therefore been agonizing over whether to subscribe to the propositions for several weeks. This was a period of intense private introspection for him, and there is no evidence that he discussed the matter with anyone other than Valensin. In his letter to Valensin of June 12, Teilhard (1974b, 122–23) wrote that the fifth and sixth propositions presented him with little difficulty (“5 et 6 ne font évidemment pas de difficulté”), and that the first, second, and third propositions presented hardly any more difficulty (“1, 2 et 3, pas beaucoup plus”). The fourth proposition, however, on the descent of the whole human race from Adam, was different. On this, Teilhard reflected:

All that I know of science, and all the experience of the last three centuries, makes me think that this last proposition suppresses a part (which determines itself little by little) of “appearance” that will modify itself (like geocentrism, the universality of the flood, the four thousand years, etc.) in discovering the true dogmatic substance included in the traditional “representation.” I am able to subscribe to it in faith only with the implicit or explicit reserve that I regard the proposition as subject to revisions (and, what is more, essential revisions) of the kind to which belief in the eight days of creation,

the flood, etc. has been subjected; and I do not see how anyone could forbid me this position. On this point, should I be *explicit* or *implicit*? Tell me. I am inclined to be explicit. It is less diplomatic, but it is the only stance that would be truly honest.

This statement of intent sets in context Teilhard's subscription to the propositions "in the full sense that the Holy Church gives to them." In other words, the fourth proposition, which is, as the document itself states, "nowhere explicitly defined" in Church teaching, could in theory be subordinated to explicit Church teaching, as well as to the principle that human knowledge— theological as much as scientific— must be "derived from Christ and led back to him."

Now that the nature of Teilhard's assent to the Six Propositions has been made clear, the content of each of the three clusters of individual propositions may be discussed in turn. Propositions 5 and 6, on faith and reason, are from *Dei filius*, the First Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, which was promulgated at the Council's third session on April 24, 1870. It has already been noted that Teilhard experienced "little difficulty" subscribing to these. Proposition 5, which was extracted from the document's fourth chapter, presents faith in positive terms as above reason and consistent with it. This could be read as entailing that, in the event of a conflict between faith and reason, faith must rule over reason, and this presumably is the sense in which it was intended for Teilhard. However, it could also be read as describing the deeper consistency between the doctrines of faith and the findings of science that Teilhard passionately espoused. Proposition 6 was from a canon, which, being written in a standard format, anathematized anyone who rejected it. It ruled out the possibility that the sense of dogma may change across historical time as the result of advancements in knowledge, and we may suppose that it was intended for Teilhard because it effectively prohibited the creative interpretation in which he was engaged. However, Teilhard considered himself to be developing and drawing out of historical dogma its full sense for the present day, rather than presenting a new sense that contradicted an historic sense.

Now let us consider Propositions 1–3 on original sin, which are taken from Canons 1–3 of the decree on original sin that was promulgated on June 17, 1546, at the fifth session of the Council of Trent. These canons also anathematized anyone who rejected them. Notwithstanding Teilhard's statement that he had "hardly any more" difficulty with them, more and less conducive elements are identifiable. Referring back to his "Note," we may see that elements that he could have accepted without difficulty include the imagery of Adam transgressing God's command in paradise and losing holiness and justice (Proposition 1), the fact of sin damaging not only Adam but other humans too (Proposition 2), and the proper inherence of this sin

in all humans (Proposition 3). However, other elements sit less easily with his alternative model. In Proposition 1, the presentation of Adam as the first human, if accepted literally, contradicts Teilhard's position, held on scientific grounds, that a zoological type could not be realized in a single individual but requires several lines of descent. Moreover, the lost holiness and justice emphasized in Proposition 2 form but one half of the fall and recovery diptych that he presents in his own model.

As already noted, Teilhard had far greater difficulty subscribing to Proposition 4 than to any of the others. This stated that the "whole human race takes its origin from one protoparent, Adam." Indeed, he subscribed to this "in faith only," as he put it to Valensin, or, as expressed in his subscription to the propositions, "in the full sense that the Holy Church gives to them." In other words, Teilhard could not accept this as a scientific proposition, but only as a dogmatic axiom, which from his viewpoint always required reconciliation with the facts of human experience as presented by science. However, because the fourth proposition's subject was scientific rather than theological, it is unclear how it could be assented to in faith, and therefore in what sense, if any, Teilhard did in fact subscribe to it. It is noteworthy that this proposition alone was composed for the occasion, rather than extracted from past conciliar teaching. This left open the question of its validity: if Proposition 4 was nowhere explicitly defined, on what authority was subscription to it required? Moreover, if Proposition 4 was really "clearly implied" by Propositions 1–3, why did it merit separate definition? On both counts, it seemed that Teilhard was being required to submit to a more restrictive formula than could be justified on either historical or logical grounds.

On July 8, a week after Teilhard's assent to the Six Propositions, Costa wrote to the Jesuit curia about replacing him at the Institut Catholique. Later that month, on July 24, Ledóchowski wrote to Teilhard describing the "great joy" that his assent had brought him, due to Teilhard, as he saw it, no longer being in danger. He restated his earlier stance that positions that conflict with dogma are unsafe to entertain even hypothetically and must be excluded from consideration. "I know you still tell me," he wrote, "that all the incriminating propositions judged contrary to dogma were purely hypotheses, but as I have told you before, we have the right to risk, even in the form of hypotheses, only those that conform with the faith. Among the innumerable hypotheses that may present themselves to the spirit, those that are contrary to dogma must be dismissed in advance, even if we take care when divulging them. But it is unnecessary to insist on this because your prudence is henceforth sure and your good will remains complete." ["Je le sais bien, vous me direz encore que toutes les propositions incriminées et jugées contraires au dogme n'étaient que de pures hypothèses, mais comme je vous l'ai dit précédemment, nous n'avons le droit de risquer, même en fait d'hypothèses, que celles qui cadrent avec la

foi. Parmi les innombrables hypotheses qui peuvent se presenter à l'esprit celles-là doivent être écartées d'avance, même si nous nous gardons de la divulguer, qui sont contraires au dogme. Mais c'est inutile d'insister puisque votre prudence est désormais en éveil et que votre bonne volonté est toujours restée entière." Ledóchowski ended his letter by recognizing the suffering that Teilhard had endured. Ledóchowski stated that his own very clear duty throughout had been to preserve the honor of the Jesuits and the good of souls, including Teilhard's own. Teilhard responded on July 30, stating that his attachment to the Jesuits was even greater, and affirming his readiness, with God's will, to do everything demanded of him in the Lord's service.

#### COMPARISONS AND CONTRASTS WITH OTHER CURIAL INVESTIGATIONS

The first half of the 1920s saw a series of similar investigations by Church authorities of lesser known figures. Greater understanding of the investigation of Teilhard may be gained by comparing it with these. In April 1920, Fr. Jules Touzard was reprimanded by the Holy Office for two articles denying the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, although he was permitted to retain his teaching post at the Institut Catholique in Paris (Laplanche 2006, 137–38). In July the same year, Ledóchowski proscribed the teaching of the Jesuit Pierre Rousselot (Dulles 1990), who had died fighting in World War I, on faith and credibility. Well known for his article on the "Eyes of Faith," Rousselot contended that the data of revelation deriving from Scripture, miracles, and the like were not naturally believable. Rather, an infused, supernatural light of faith, which was due to grace, was required to connect these data with the truth itself. In short, assent required prior faith. This might not seem contentious today, but in the aftermath of World War I, when numerous Jesuits were returning from military service with greatly expanded intellectual horizons, it was regarded as a great threat to the authority of Christian dogma.

In 1922, the Belgian priest, theologian, and geologist Henry de Dorlodot published *Darwinism and Catholic Thought*, which was a translation of a book in French, in which he promoted a theistic and providential view of evolution. The work received many positive reviews in the Anglo-American press and was taken as evidence that the Roman Catholic Church was reconciling itself to evolutionary theory. In May 1923, Fr. Paulin Ladeuze, who was Dorlodot's rector at the University of Louvain as well as professor of exegesis, was contacted by the secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission and asked to request from Dorlodot some further explication of his views. Moreover, it was suggested that Dorlodot was too close to Touzard (De Bont 2005, 470), who, as just explained, had denied the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Dorlodot responded to Ladeuze by defending

his biblical orthodoxy and called into question the competence of the Commission to judge evolutionary theory, suggesting that this, being strictly non-biblical, was a matter for the “Holy Chair” itself. Dorlodot sought to mobilize networks of support, including Cardinal Francis Bourne, who had provided his imprimatur for *Darwinism and Catholic Thought*, Archbishop Pietro Maffi of Pisa, and the Vatican archivist Francis Gasquet (De Bont 2005, 471). Meanwhile, Ladeuze responded eirenicly to Cardinal Willem Van Rossum, the Commission’s president, but in June the cardinal replied to him stating that he had had Dorlodot’s book subjected to formal examination and that faults had been found with it (quoted in Lambert 2009, 518). However, without referring to any faults in detail, Van Rossum continued that the real issue was the unacceptability of the book’s central defense of “absolute” natural evolution, even of the human body. As a result, Van Rossum continued, Dorlodot was to publicly retract, in one of the university’s journals, his defense of the natural evolution of the human body using a supplied form of words, and was to withdraw his book from sale. Non-compliance would result in the matter being referred to the Holy Office.

Dorlodot indeed refused to comply, adding that to do so would be to lie, and restating his view that Van Rossum was stepping beyond his competence. Ladeuze, who was increasingly worried about the impact of the growing confrontation on the University of Louvain and Catholics in the wider region (De Bont 2005, 472), prevailed upon Arthur Vermeersch, a Jesuit theology professor at the Gregorian University in Rome, to seek an audience with Pope Pius XI in July, which he secured. After Vermeersch had presented the matter, the Pope indicated his personal interest in the topic, on which he had written in his youth, including with reference to the French palaeontologist Joachim Barrande (De Bont 2005, 473). Dorlodot’s bishop, Mgr. Thomas-Louis Heylen of Namur, travelled to Rome and also spoke with the Pope. Little happened for almost two years, although during this period measures were being taken against others. For instance, in 1923 the priest Gustave Bardy was required to leave his teaching post at the Catholic Theological Faculty in Lille, after publishing a study of Paul of Samosata that was judged to employ an excessively critical method (Laplanche 2006, 307). However, in March 1925, Cardinal Merry del Val, the secretary of the Holy Office, himself wrote to Cardinal Mercier of Mechelen, stating that Dorlodot’s book should be withdrawn from sale, that Ladeuze should be reprimanded, and that no sequel should be permitted (474). In May, Mercier visited Rome to speak with the Pope, Merry del Val, and others, after which nothing more occurred. Dorlodot did not publish his second volume. He declined the possibility of a German translation, delivered no further lectures on evolution, and died in 1929. However, his book was not withdrawn from sale and he made no public retraction of his views (475). Furthermore, significant portions of his manuscript for the second



volume found their way into Ernest Messenger's *Evolution and Theology* (1931; Lambert 2009, 520; Dorlodot 2009).

Several similarities may be identified between these investigations and the investigation of Teilhard. These include (1) initiation by the particular authority in Rome to whom the individual is subject, after it is made aware of an issue; (2) negotiation between the local authorities and the relevant Roman authority, with the possibility that local authorities might mitigate or defer sanctions by direct or mediated appeal; (3) the possibility that the relevant Roman authority might formally refer the issue to the Holy Office, although not immediately; (4) the likelihood that the Holy Office is in reality already aware of the issue; (5) a local concern about the likely impact of formal sanctions on the individual's institution or wider community; (6) the question of whether a teaching position might be retained; (7) the question of subscription to a written formula; (8) a warning about a figure deemed to exert a bad influence; (9) publishing restrictions; and (10) the possibility both of decisive responses and of extended periods of inaction or compromise.

#### ASSESSMENT OF THE TEILHARD INVESTIGATION

How may the actions of each of the key players and their contributions to the outcome of the investigation of Teilhard be assessed? First may be considered the two censors, whose roles were relatively minor. Bea had scholarly interests in cosmology, while Pinard, as well as specializing in creation theology, was developing his work in ethnology and comparative religion (Schmidt 1992, 79–84; Goetz 1958). The fact that both had broad intellectual horizons suggests they were not selected by the Jesuit curia because of their antipathy to Teilhard, even if their methodologies were more conservative than his and they were both insiders in Rome. Moreover, the review of a text could be a necessary formality in an investigation, with the verdicts provided being insignificant to the outcome.

The role of Ledóchowski was considerably more important. He stated to Baudrillart (diary entry of October 19, 1926; Baudrillart 1994–, 4:498) that, in his view, Teilhard would not have voluntarily remained silent about the questions that occupied him. In Ledóchowski's assessment, therefore, any effective silencing had to be coercive. Moreover, Ledóchowski also told Baudrillart that, at the point when he intervened, a denunciation by the Holy Office had been imminent, and that, had this occurred, it would have gravely damaged the Institut Catholique, of which Baudrillart was rector. However, that the Holy Office was the prime mover, if not the proximate mover, is confirmed by René d'Ouince (1970, 106–07), who reports a much later conversation with the geologist Fr. Christophe Gaudefroy, which took place sometime after Teilhard's death. Ledóchowski,

d'Ouince relates, had indeed received a denunciation of Teilhard by another Jesuit. Cardinal Merry del Val, who as the secretary of the Holy Office was even more powerful than the Jesuit superior general, was in possession of a copy of the "Note" on original sin, and had decisively intervened as part of his wider attempts to control the Jesuit order. Moreover, the Holy Office cited texts from the Council of Trent and the First Vatican Council in its measures taken in December 1923 against the Sulpician biblical scholar Auguste Brassac (Fouilloux 1997, 88), which suggests that it was also responsible for collating the Six Propositions.

This leads, finally, to a consideration of the motives of Pope Pius XI himself. Did he direct or endorse the Holy Office in its prosecution of Teilhard? Before his election as Pope in February 1922, Ambrogio Ratti had been regarded as a liberal in so far as he believed the Church needed to engage with culture and society (Petit 1998, 68–69, 224–25). Moreover, in February 1924, only two years after becoming Pope, he had promulgated the encyclical *Maximam gravissimamque*, which permitted the creation of diocesan associations according to the "association culturelle" model recognized by the French republic following the church–state separation of 1905. This reestablished the Church's legal existence and rights within the secular state in such a way that its ecclesial identity was not compromised. Citing Auguste Valensin, Fouilloux (1997, 100) speculates that Merry del Val, who was hostile to what he viewed as an accommodation with secularism, might have secured as compensation the January 1924 condemnation of Brassac. The measures against Teilhard, it might be added, could also have been part of this tacit or explicit agreement between Merry del Val and the Pope. In any case, this compromise with the French republic had provoked intensive criticism by neo-monarchist groups, of which the most powerful was Action française. While Teilhard was under investigation, the Pope had been in dialogue with politically liberal French Catholic organizations, meeting the leaders of Action catholique de la jeunesse française in May 1924 and of Action populaire in June 1925 (Prévotat 2001, 233–36), as part of a policy of encouraging change within the French Church and giving it greater recognition in Rome (Lebrun 1980, 418–19, 422–23). These events culminated in the condemnation of Action française on December 29, 1926. This was the Pope's own initiative, and was not welcomed by Merry del Val and other curial conservatives (Prévotat 2001, 308, 338). The Pope's willingness to cooperate with these Catholic political groupings did not, of course, make him a liberal in the sense of promoting the alignment of traditional dogmatic teaching with secular aspects of culture or society. On the contrary, as part of the trade-off just described, change on the political front might well have been easier because doctrinal orthodoxy was known to be actively defended.

Nevertheless, as a consequence of these shifting political allegiances, measures were being taken against someone who expressed, at least privately, his

opposition to conservative monarchism and supported the changes taking place. In his unpublished diary, Teilhard wrote: "I consider myself to be an adversary of Action française and its associates, because on intellectual grounds I regard liberalism as absolutely necessary, liberalism, that is to say, not as an equal right to truth and falsehood, but as an expectant and seeking attitude, accepting that nothing is finished nor completely certain" (entry of January 23, 1922; Teilhard 1922b). A few weeks later, he critically noted the movement's rationalism and its celebration of the routine (entry of March 12, 1922; Teilhard 1922b). When Action française was condemned, he expressed his approval, although, writing from China, he voiced his shock at the brutality of the measures taken against its lay sympathizers, above all the withholding of the sacraments (letter of November 12, 1926; Mathieu 2000, 105). From a purely pragmatic perspective, Teilhard might have been viewed as a prudent sacrifice to appease the conservatives within the Jesuit curia and the Holy Office, and to contain the somewhat more liberal tendencies with which the Church was aligning itself. Church politics were in practice at least as important as theological issues in science and religion, constituting the institutional context in which adherence to dogma was promoted and enforced.

#### AFTERMATH AND AFTERLIFE

The following year, on April 24, 1926, Teilhard was steaming through the Straits of Bonifacio between Corsica and Sardinia en route for China. The delay in his departure from Paris had been devised by Ledóchowski to avoid drawing attention to it (Baudrillart 1994–, 4:915). He disembarked at Shanghai on May 29, and from there sailed up the coast to Tientsin (Teilhard 1972, 23, 28), where he gradually settled back into the life of a palaeontologist, working with his fellow Jesuit Emile Licent. The hope remained of rebuilding his profile in Paris. However, at the end of January 1927, he learned that the Jesuit curia in Rome would not permit him to return to his position at the Institut Catholique (Teilhard 1972, 56). This possibility led him to consider spending periods at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris coupled with trips to China (letter of April 2; Baudrillart 1994–, 4:1096–97) via the relatively fast Trans-Siberian Railway. Indeed, on April 6 he received a letter from the Jesuit curia giving him permission to return to Paris for a few months for scientific work, and perhaps permanently at some future point (Teilhard 1972, 65). He set sail from Shanghai on August 27 and docked in Marseilles on October 1 (78). He remained in Paris for thirteen months, until November 1928, working at the National Museum of Natural History and addressing groups, including students at the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure (Cuénot [1958]1965, 86–89). However, by then Ledóchowski was clear that Teilhard should spend most of his time in China for the foreseeable

future (diary entry of April 17, 1928; Baudrillart 1994–, 4:915). Teilhard's next period in France lasted four months, from September 1930 to January 1931, when he visited both Paris and his family home in the Auvergne (Cuénot [1958]1965, 108–10). He subsequently made four more trips to Paris, each of a few months' duration: from late September 1932 to January 1933, May to September 6, 1935, April 19 to August 5, 1937, and November 1938 to June 23, 1939 (Cuénot [1958]1965, 139–43, 202–03, 218–23). He would not make Paris his home again until June 1946, twenty years after his departure. During this whole period he spent a total of just three years in France.

In writings from this period, which were published only following his death, Teilhard continued to return to monogenism, to which he had assented in Proposition 4 with explicit reservation. He called into question the “completely unreal” rupture in history that the traditional dogmatic understanding of Adam and Eve entails. Furthermore, he repeated the suggestion made in his “Note” that his own model in fact took sin and evil more seriously than the traditional one, because it pictured them as intrinsic to existence rather than as the consequence of a contingent act (1933, 79–86). Indeed, close to the end of this discussion Teilhard alluded to Propositions 1–3, stating: “I am familiar with the solemn decrees of the Council of Trent on the subject of original sin.” Moreover, he later reaffirmed that experience and faith together make it impossible to localize the Fall at a specific time or place. Rather, he states, the Fall is a function of evolution (1942, 148–50).

Teilhard broadly restated his view of original sin in a second full paper on the subject written in 1947, the year following his return to Paris. In “Reflections on Original Sin,” he developed the “Alexandrian” model that he had referred to in passing in his “Note” of twenty-five years earlier, where he had identified it as the sole exception to the tendency to rely on a literal reading of the opening chapters of Genesis to represent original sin (1922a, 45). Moreover, alluding to the “watcher legend” of Genesis 6:1–4, Teilhard had also, in his “Note,” associated the Fall with “an infidelity similar to that of the angels” (1922a, 50). In his new paper, he articulated more clearly his view of original sin not as an event at the beginning of an historical series but as a trans-historical condition of history. Death, Teilhard convincingly argues, is built into the physico-chemical structure of matter, and its origin cannot therefore be localized within the material world. This “Alexandrian” model is comprised of four successive phases: the instantaneous creation of the first Adam, who is perfect and uncountable; some form of disobedience; a “fall into the multiple,” which he identifies as the “pre-cosmic phase of involution”; and “redemptive reascent,” which is designated the “cosmic, historical phase of evolution” (1947, 191–92). Teilhard commends this model for presenting the beginning of the universe as a multiplicity in which death is omnipresent, rather than in the terms

of Eden and its inhabitants. Nevertheless, he expresses concerns about the speculative character of the model's first three phases, the incomprehensibility of Adam's instantaneous creation, and the improbability that a perfect being would succumb to temptation on the first occasion. He therefore offers another model that adapts this "Alexandrian" model by folding its initial three phases into a developed fourth phase and beginning with the multiple. Sin thereby ceases to be identified with an originating event but is associated with the ongoing state of suffering, error, and local disorder, which inevitably appear during the universe's gradual arrangement and unification (1947, 194–96). This model, Teilhard argues, does not weaken the Fall's dogmatic characteristics but rather intensifies them by universalizing sin in the structure of the created order, and thereby universalizing the need for redemption and infant baptismal regeneration. As in his much earlier "Note," the Creation, Incarnation, and Redemption are all aspects of this process.

The Six Propositions anticipate the controversy that would erupt twenty-five years later with the publication of the encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Humani generis*. The encyclical's wide setting was the Holy Office's ongoing hostility to new uses of reason that did not defer to divine revelation, and it presented these as undermined by "evil passions arising from original sin" (1950, 175). The document famously asserted that the theory of evolution has "not been fully proved even in the domain of natural sciences," and censured unnamed figures whom it described as holding the "monistic and pantheistic opinion that the world is in continual evolution" (ch. 5). Indeed, the Holy Office's case against Teilhard as laid out in the Six Propositions is present, at least in outline, in *Humani generis*. Propositions 1–3 are evoked in the protest that "disregarding the Council of Trent, some pervert the very concept of original sin, along with the concept of sin in general as an offense against God" (ch. 26). Proposition 5 is supposed by the encyclical's insistence that the Church is the protector of true rationality and philosophy, which exist in order to be placed at the service of faith (chs. 29–33). Proposition 6 is echoed in the assertion that doctrine, when theologically explicated with reference to revelation, must be affirmed "in that sense in which it has been defined by the Church" (ch. 21). Moreover, Chapter 18 directly quotes from the short passage following the canons on faith and reason, in which, in a purported context of open contempt for the Magisterium on the grounds that it hinders scientific progress and theological reform, the faithful are exhorted to observe the "constitutions and decrees by which such evil opinions are proscribed and forbidden by the Holy See."

Moreover, in *Humani generis* the Magisterium's interest in positions that are scientific rather than dogmatic, such as Proposition 4, is defended at length. The document addresses "those questions which, although they pertain to the positive sciences, are nevertheless more or less connected with

the truths of the Christian faith” (ch. 35). Although, it continues, “not a few insistently demand that the Catholic religion takes these sciences into account as much as possible,” caution must be exercised when their subject matter consists not of “clearly proved facts” but of “hypotheses, having some sort of scientific foundation, in which the doctrine contained in Sacred Scripture or in Tradition is involved.” “If such conjectural opinions are directly or indirectly opposed to the doctrine revealed by God,” the encyclical states, “then the demand that they be recognized can in no way be admitted.” Discussion then follows of the “doctrine of evolution,” which is defined as enquiry into the “origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter” (ch. 36). (Souls, the document asserts, are immediate divine creations.) It is accepted that research and discussion by those competent in both science and theology may take place. However, the reasons for and against evolution must, the text advises, be carefully weighed. Yet following these qualifications, its next chapter is devoted to the refutation of polygenism. This theory, that humans are descended from multiple ancestors rather than from a single pair, was precisely the target of Proposition 4. The encyclical contends,

The faithful cannot embrace that opinion which maintains either that 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 represents 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. (ch. 37)

Strikingly, direct reference is made in this chapter of *Humani generis* to Canons 1–3 of the Council of Trent’s decree on original sin, on which Propositions 1–3 were based, along with the fourth canon on the necessity of infant baptism for the remission of original sin contracted by generation.

In *Humani generis*, it is clear that part of the reason for calling biological evolution into question was the supposition that it forms part of a larger evolutionary discourse that includes communism, which as part of a developmental view of history promotes dialectical materialism and denies the existence of a personal God, and existentialism, which in embracing a similar metaphysics of flux and flow ignores immutable essences in favor of individual existence (chs. 5–6). Nevertheless, the document’s contestation of biological evolution in general, and of polygenism in particular, became the principal goal for criticism. In 1950, Teilhard wrote a brief response to the encyclical, which, like his 1922 and 1947 texts, remained unpublished during his lifetime. His response focuses on human origins, and the only reference to original sin is in a footnote. Teilhard begins by articulating a first principle: that, because it is impossible in the fossil history of

the world to distinguish individuals from populations, both monogenism and polygenism are purely theological concepts with a dogmatic, extra-scientific function. There follows a second principle: that, from a scientific viewpoint, the unity of the human species does not require the existence of a “single original couple” (1950, 209). Rather, all that human unity entails is that humans represent a single zoological stem. For this reason, it is impossible in science to speak strictly of monogenism or polygenism. Rather, scientists must refer to “monophyletism” or “polyphyletism,” that is, to one branch or phylum, or to a number of branches or phyla, at the origin of humankind. The theologian, on the other hand, possesses a degree of liberty to “assume what seems to him to be dogmatically necessary inside the area of indetermination created by the imperfect nature of our scientific vision of the past” (1950, 210). But how far does this liberty extend? Two points militate against the hypothesis of an individual Adam. First, to a geneticist the “simultaneous appearance of a mutation in one single couple seems infinitely improbable” and, in any case, would be extremely unlikely to propagate itself. Second, the necessarily unique characteristics of this new couple as *Homo sapiens* would have to be “*fully complete in their specific development* from the first moment.” Teilhard wryly continues that, in response to *Humani generis*, there will either be a change in the scientific laws of speciation tomorrow, or theologians will come to accept a far closer solidarity in the “extraordinary internal cohesion” of a world currently undergoing cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis, in which humans and the rest of the created order are continually being generated anew (1950, 211).

### CONCLUSION

In his response to *Humani generis*, Teilhard provocatively identifies monogenism as a theological concept. This apparently contradicts his much earlier assessment of it as an hypothesis to be proven or disproven by science. In identifying both monogenism and polygenism as theological, he acknowledges the contingent and developing nature of his own understanding and that of science generally. This is in notable contrast with the theory of knowledge that underpins *Humani generis*, in which dogma and science are presented as clearly demarcated entities existing in a mutually antagonistic relation. From the 1920s onwards, Teilhard lived this conflict in the depths of his being, always remaining obedient to the direction of the Church authorities not to publish his writings on original sin. He accepted that power is, when properly exercised, a legitimate part of how the Church legitimately preserves itself as an institution. However, as has been seen, the fourth proposition to which he was required to subscribe was not defined in any formal teaching. Requiring Teilhard to subscribe to this proposition may therefore be regarded as an illegitimate exercise of power.

Teilhard was charged with not taking sin seriously. Yet in this article we have demonstrated that his intention was precisely the opposite, being to conceive sin not in localized and historical terms but as coextensive with the created order. Moreover, Teilhard experienced at first hand how, as a result of sin, individuals and institutions may acquire and exercise power in ways that are not fully legitimate. This may bring institutional stability in the short term, but only at the cost of deferring engagement with the pressing intellectual issues raised until a time when their resolution becomes even more difficult. The availability, at last, of the Six Propositions, along with an accurate and detailed account of the events surrounding them, enables a full acknowledgement of the Church's intellectual and moral debt to Teilhard, as its members continue to live and represent their Christian faith in the light of modern scientific understandings of God's world.

## ANNEX

Letter of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin to Fr. Wlodimir Ledóchowski, Jesuit superior general.

13 Rue du Vieux-Colombier Paris VI  
13 Janvier 1925

Mon Très Révérend Père, P.C. [Pax Christi]

Je n'ai reçu que hier, de M. J-B. Costa de Beauregard une lettre me parlant de la suite que vous donniez à une affaire que j'avais été traiter avec lui, en Novembre, touchant une Note de moi qui a paru dangereuse. M. Costa, partant pour l'Algérie, me conseille de me mettre directement en rapports avec vous. Je le fais bien volontiers, et, soyez en sûr, très filialement.

Avant tout, il me semble qu'il y a, dans la censure qui a été faite de ma Note, tant de choses diverses touchées, qu'il ne m'est pas possible d'y souscrire loyalement en bloc. Je ferais volontiers deux parts, dans la question: une part théologique et une part scientifique.

1) Sur le terrain théologique, j'ai tenté une hypothèse (des hypothèses) pour essayer de concilier le Dogme avec des faits qui prennent chaque jour une consistance grandissante. Mes essais ont paru hérétiques. Volontiers je désavoue explicitement et sincèrement, tous les points de mon travail qui vont contre les points dogmatiques que mon réviseur m'oppose.

Mais V. R. [Votre Révérence] observera une chose: c'est que ces textes dogmatiques laissent entièrement subsister la difficulté pendante. Comment concilier la Foi et l'expérience dans l'opposition grave qui se manifeste aujourd'hui? - Je ne puis (sous peine de compromettre ma foi) m'empêcher de chercher une solution provisoire, au moins pour moi-même. Je ne demande qu'à accepter, en cette matière, la solution (ou les directions de solution) de l'Eglise. Mais alors qu'on nous les donne, au lieu de nier trop souvent le problème lui-même.

En attendant, je suis arrivé, depuis deux mois, dans plusieurs circonstances où j'ai dû (sans l'avoir cherché) traiter de ces questions, - je suis



arrivé, dis-je, à apaiser les esprits sans faire la moindre allusion à aucune des explications condamnées dans ma Note. J'agirai désormais ainsi; et j'espère arriver toujours mieux à trouver les expressions qui calment et éclairent les âmes sans effleurer si peu que ce soit la pureté du dogme. Mais, là comme ailleurs, on ne peut se frayer que peu à peu son chemin.

2) Sur le terrain scientifique, je crois connaître, autant que personne les points faibles ou caducs d'une Science où je vis, à fond, depuis 15 ans (et, soit dit en passant, vous pouvez être sûr que M. Boule, à qui je dois beaucoup en matière scientifique, n'a aucune influence sur ma pensée profonde).

Mais aussi, mieux que d'autres, je puis apprécier ce qu'il y a de définitif dans certaines vues géologiques, et savoir l'acuité de problèmes qui sont beaucoup plus graves que certains théologiens ne se l'imaginent. Et parce que je ne saurais loyalement (sans un véritable péché) me nier ce que je vois, je ne puis en aucune façon changer, substantiellement, mes vues générales sur l'existence d'une certaine évolution biologique sagement comprise.

Voyez-vous, mon R. P. [Révérend Père], il y a aujourd'hui un besoin immense et presque désespéré de mise au point entre Science (au sens le plus général du mot) et Christianisme. Et ce besoin, que je sens en moi, et que j'aperçois sans cesse autour de moi, n'est pas désir orgueilleux de nouveauté, mais besoin profond de vivre plus pleinement la Religion. Il faut donc chercher. J'ai été trop vite, en ce qui me concerne. Je le regrette. Mais il faut nous aider, mon Père, et ne pas nous condamner tout de suite. La Foi est la plus précieuse des choses. Mais ne doit-elle pas être une perpétuelle conquête?

Je vais m'occuper de retirer ce que je pourrai des quelques copies de ma Note qui ont été mises en circulation (une demie-douzaine, dont la plupart placées chez des professionnels de la Théologie, et donc inoffensives). Quant à écrire et vous envoyer une "apologie," ce serait trop long, presque impossible. C'est toute ma situation intérieure qu'il faudrait raconter. Je suis sûr, par contre, qu'une conversation que j'aurais personnellement avec vous dissiperait immédiatement tout malentendu et tout malaise. Comme ceci ne paraît guère possible, au moins immédiatement, je pourrais, en attendant, exposer ma pensée complète à un théologien en qui V.R. et moi aurions confiance, par ex. M. L. de Grandmaison, ou quelque autre.

Croyez, en tout cas, à mon sincère et filial attachement à V. R. et à la Compagnie. Si je me suis trompé, dans cet affaire cela n'a été qu'en explicitant maladroitement l'excès de grandeur que je sens, et que je voudrais faire sentir, dans la Personne de Notre-Seigneur.

In X servus  
P. Teilhard de Chardin

Translation:

13 Rue du Vieux-Colombier Paris VI  
January 13, 1925

My Very Reverend Father, the peace of Christ be with you.

I received only yesterday a letter from M. J.-B. Costa de Beauregard, telling me that you have been concerned with a matter that I had discussed

with him in November, regarding a Note by me that appears dangerous. M. Costa, who is leaving for Algeria, has advised me to contact you directly. I am doing this voluntarily and, you may be certain, in the spirit of a son.

First, it seems to me that, in the censure that has been made of my Note, many different things are covered, to which it is not possible for me to subscribe honestly all together. I would like to consider the question in two parts: one theological and the other scientific.

1) In the theological field, I have put forward a hypothesis (hypotheses) to try to reconcile Dogma with the facts that every day assume a greater consistence. My efforts have appeared heretical. I freely disavow, explicitly and sincerely, all aspects of my work that go against the dogmatic points with which my reviser opposes me.

But Your Reverence will observe one thing: that these dogmatic texts leave the following difficulty completely unresolved. How are faith and experience to be reconciled, given that today they manifest grave opposition? I cannot (without compromising my faith) refrain from searching for a provisional solution, at least for myself. I wish to accept, in this matter, the solution (or the directions to solution) of the Church. But while we are given them, we often deny the problem itself.

Meanwhile, over the past two months I have reached a point (without having sought it) at which I have had to address these questions—I have, I may say, satisfied these concerns without making the least allusion to any of the condemned analyses in my Note. I will continue to act thus in future; and I hope to always do better to find expressions that console and enlighten souls without undermining, however little, the purity of dogma. But, there as elsewhere, one can only open a path for oneself little by little.

2) In the scientific field, I think I know as well as anyone the weak or invalid points of a science that I have lived deeply for 15 years (and, may I say in passing, you may be sure that M. Boule, to whom I owe much in scientific matters, has no influence on my deep thoughts).

But also, better than others, I perceive something conclusive in certain geological views, and know the acuteness of problems that are much graver than certain theologians imagine. And because I could not in faith (without real sin) deny what I see, I cannot in any way substantially change my general views on the existence of some kind of biological evolution, soundly understood.

You see, Reverend Father, there is today an immense, almost desperate, need to bring together Science (in the most general sense of the word) and Christianity. And this need, which I find in myself, and that I unceasingly perceive around me, is not an arrogant desire for novelty, but a deep need to live Religion more fully. One must search. I have been too quick as regards myself. I regret this. But you must help us, Father, and not condemn us straightaway. Faith is the most precious thing. But does it have to be a perpetual conquest?

I am going to withdraw as many copies of my Note that were circulated as possible (half a dozen, of which most were given to professional theologians, and so are harmless). As for writing and sending you an “apology,” that would be too long, almost impossible. I would have to describe my entire interior state. I am sure, however, that a personal conversation with you would at once dispel all misunderstanding and difficulty. As this would hardly appear

possible, at least not immediately, I could in the meantime expound my whole thought to a theologian in whom Your Reverence and I would have confidence, for example, M. L. de Grandmaison, or someone else.

Believe, in any case, my sincere and filial attachment to Your Reverence and to the Company. If I was in error, that was only in expressing badly in this affair the superabundant greatness that I feel, and that I would like to be felt, for the Person of Our Lord.

Your servant in Christ,  
P. Teilhard de Chardin

## NOTES

1. Until 1968, the prefect was the Pope himself.
2. In the Society of Jesus, the provincial superior leads the order within a specified geographical region, under the authority of the superior general at the Jesuit curia in Rome.
3. Correspondence from Jean-Baptiste Costa de Beauregard, Norbert de Boynes, Włodimir Ledóchowski, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin is from the Roma–Lugdunensis correspondence, Lugdunensis–Roma correspondence, and the Teilhard *Censura* file, held by the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Borgo Santo Spirito 8, 00193 Rome, Italy.
4. The title and propositions are in typescript and were presented to Teilhard for assent. The punctuation and spacing of the references is copied exactly from the original. The final two paragraphs and signature were handwritten by Teilhard to indicate his assent.
5. The translations of Propositions 1–3 and 5–6 follow Tanner (1990), 2.666, 808, 811.

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