

## Evolution and faith conference

### Is there any theological doctrine threatened by evolutionary theory?

#### Imago Dei

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, in the likeness of ourselves; and let them rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the animals, and over all the earth, and over every crawling creature that crawls on the earth." (Genesis 1:26 CJB)

So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27 CJB)

*Imago Dei* for example. Evolutionary theory and the fossil record of bipedal-hominoid species suggest that there was no specific divine action that resulted in the immediate creation of the human being; that it was a lengthy process, the final stages being at least 2 million years in length our own species becoming distinct 200000 years ago. In the fossil record we may see that there was perhaps also a gradual spiritual awakening in hominid species and that perhaps 400000 years ago Heidelbergensis conceived of an afterlife as did the later Neanderthalensis, perhaps indicating an enlarged view of his or her own existence and conception of a universe and purpose beyond survival.

Further thought and research would need to be conducted to see whether the presumptions of the theological doctrine of *Imago Dei* agree with the observed evolutionary narrative, that is the narrative deduced from the fossil record. Difficulty may arise in the evangelical distinction between animals and human beings that is a major element of *Imago Dei*. Evolutionary theory suggests that human beings (*homo sapiens*) descended from 'animals' with no special spiritual awareness, and that gradually pre-human species became spiritually aware in a special way 400000 years ago. Finally, in what way does *homo sapiens* with its alternate evolutionary narrative emulate God?

#### Fall

Then Adonai, God, formed a person [Hebrew: adam] from the dust of the ground [Hebrew: adamah] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, so that he became a living being. (Genesis 2:7 CJB)

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together to make themselves loincloths. (Genesis 3:7 CJB)

If the 'gift of the breath of life' (the spiritual quickening of the human) in Gen 2:7 above could be seen as the spiritual awakening of Heidelbergensis hominid, a *homo sapiens* ancestor, then how does this affect the doctrine of the fall? When and how did the human being 'fall'? What is the fall? Is our 'distortion' part of our evolutionary history and are we responsible for its origination?

In evolutionary theory, environments that contain the right balance of challenge/adversity and prosperity/peace are catalysts for development, natural selection and promote strong populations and beneficial mutations. In evolutionary psychology researchers are also exploring the idea that human

beings as species have become genetically hard-wired for survival with conflicting desires balanced to both promoting self-interest for the preservation of individual life, and self-sacrifice in the interests of the group. Generally speaking human beings are hard-wired with the desire to mate, and procreate. Females are hard-wired to bond with their child. Males are, speaking in generalizations, hard-wired to react quickly, to be protective of the group, to be aggressive.

While the survival and prosperity of the community involves the right balance of repression and expression of innate desires the question of 'sin' and 'fallen-ness' arises ... are these base instincts that drive us, those base desires, the product of 'the apple' or the evolutionary survival instinct, our innate yearning to live. Perhaps in embracing the 'apple' we have shouldered more guilt than for which we are responsible. Evil and depravity obviously exists in the world and brings death and weakens the chances of survival for the group. As communities systems, cultures arise that suppress this evil – religion also can be seen as evolved to engage with this suicidal element of humanity.

### **Is Christianity dangerous?**

Some expressions of Christianity are dangerous ... in that these particular expressions reject knowledge, reject opportunities to reshape as a process acknowledging scientific progress, fail to adjust and drive a wedge between that part of the community that becomes aware, and that part hanging on to what might be referred to as a group hallucination. This failure to recognize a growing consensus of knowledge on origins and its impact for the future, means that important, meaningful developments in theology truly relevant to the modern world cannot take place easily. The result will be the estrangement and fossilization of religious groups. Individuals who might contribute to the discussion on the 'new' theology that really grapples with what evolution might mean are not free to do so. The creative, inquisitive, is repressed.