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The *Imago Dei* as the End of Evolution

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The word "end" can have two related meanings. First, "end" can refer to the *terminus*, or conclusion, of a story. Second, it can refer to the story's goal, purpose, meaning, destiny, or *telos*. In Christian eschatology, "end" entails both conclusion and goal, both *terminus* and *telos*. Looking forward, we expect a transformation from old creation to new creation. We expect to see the divine image, the *imago Dei*, in its fullness. The *imago Dei* is the divine call forward, a call we hear and respond to now but that draws us toward transformation into a future reality.

This means that human nature is not done yet. Like bread rising before it is put into the preheated oven, the human race is not yet fully baked. If we look at ourselves through evolutionary lenses, we can forecast that our descendants will continue to evolve and perhaps even give birth to a posthuman species. If we look at ourselves through eschatological lenses, we can perceive that we are on the way to becoming transformed into the *imago Dei*, into the new humanity. Do evolution and eschatology complement each other? Is it reasonable to think of the *imago Dei* as the end of evolution?

In this chapter we will experiment with an affirmative answer to these questions: yes, the flourishing of the divine image in the human race is the end of evolution. We will measure the adequacy of this answer using two criteria:

(1) Is it faithful to Scripture? (2) Is it consonant with what modern science has discovered about hominid evolution?

In order to pursue this line of inquiry, we will give special attention to human nature. Traditionally, the topic of human nature within Christian anthropology includes two subtopics: the *imago Dei* and the fall into sin. In addition, Christian believers have assumed the *imago Dei* came first and the fall into sin came second. But in order to be consonant with evolutionary theory, we may have to reverse this relationship. Sin will come first, and the *imago Dei* will come second. Instead of placing God's image into the biological past of the human race, we will experiment with placing it in the future. The full flourishing of the image of God in humans is a promise to hope for.

Although all theologians read the same Bible, their interpretations vary like the size and ripeness of peaches on a peach tree. Some interpretations are juicier than others, even if the taste is generically the same. The ripe peach we offer here is a proleptic model of the *imago Dei* within an eschatological version of theistic evolution.

How Does the New Testament Introduce the Proleptic *Imago Dei*?

The Easter Christ is the proleptic *imago Dei*. According to Scripture, in the eschatological new creation, each of us will don Christ's image, which is God's image.

If we work solely with Genesis 1:26–27, where the human is described as the “image and likeness” of the divine, we might be tempted to look backward to our origin to find the *imago Dei*. The Septuagint translated “image” (*tselem*) with εἰκών (*eikōn*), and “likeness” (*demuth*) with ὁμοίωσις (*homoiosis*). These appear in the New Testament with their Old Testament meanings (1 Cor. 11:7; James 3:9), yet something new and decisive is added. What is new to the New Testament is the central role played by Jesus Christ, who is the image of God, the εἰκών τοῦ θεοῦ. For Paul, Christ “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col. 1:15). Elsewhere he writes, “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4).

Christ is the new Adam or, better, the renewed Adam and Eve. “Thus it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven” (1 Cor. 15:45–47).

Temporal firstness does not equate to conceptual firstness. Even though the biblical Adam and Eve predate Jesus Christ, the latter takes precedence. Christ provides the image that defines the human race in relation to heaven, in relation to God. Adam anticipates Christ, but Christ provides the definition of what is truly Adam. "For Christ who seems to come second, really comes first," writes Karl Barth, and "Adam who seems to come first really comes second. . . . Our relationship to Adam depends for its reality on our relationship to Christ."¹ In short, to view the *imago Dei*, look first to Christ and then to Adam and Eve.

The eschatological reversal of the *imago Dei* is most forcefully presented in Paul's letter to the Romans. Adam and Christ are two versions of the one image of God, but the former draws its reality from the latter. Included in Christ's version is redemption from sin and rescue from death. Theological anthropology includes the move from redemption to creation. As Paul writes to the church in Rome: "If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all" (Rom. 5:17-18).

Barth drives the nail home with a Pauline sledgehammer: "Our relationship to Adam is only the type, the likeness, the preliminary shadow of our relationship to Christ. The same human nature appears in both but the humanity of Adam is only real and genuine in so far as it reflects and corresponds to the humanity of Christ. . . . Adam's humanity is a *provisional copy* of the real humanity that is in Christ."² To ask about genuine humanity is to ask about the *imago Dei*, and the first place a Christian theologian goes to ask about the *imago Dei* is Jesus Christ.

The Christ of whom Paul and Barth speak is primarily the Easter Christ, the risen Christ, the firstfruits of those having fallen asleep (1 Cor. 15:20, 48), the advent of the new creation. Who Adam and Eve were and who we will be can be seen when viewing the Easter Christ.

The term "prolepsis" implies this: as Christ rose on Easter, so will we rise into the everlasting kingdom of God, into God's promised new creation. It is the eschatological future that completes God's work of renewal begun in Christ's Easter resurrection and, thereby, retroactively defines present reality along with our evolutionary past.

The significance for our topic is this: how we as humans are defined is conditioned more by our future than by our past. The human reality is still one of

1. Karl Barth, *Christ and Adam*, trans. T. A. Smail (New York: Collier, 1952), 74-75.

2. Barth, *Christ and Adam*, 46-47.

becoming. Our nature was not fixed at creation, not indelibly determined by the first humans to walk on our planet. Who we are now anticipates who we will be eschatologically. Between now and God's final future, we can experience growth in Christlikeness. As Paul writes to the Corinthians: "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

How Does the Proleptic Model of the *Imago Dei* Interpret Human Nature?

The proleptic model of the *imago Dei* synthesizes creation with redemption. When the world is finally redeemed, it will be created. Right now, we and the world around us are in a phase of becoming. Who we are today will be retroactively determined by who we will be eschatologically. Only when the world becomes redeemed will God say, "Behold, it is very good" (cf. Gen. 1:31). To live today out of the power of the eschatological tomorrow is to live proleptically.

The proleptic model begins with Jesus Christ, not Adam and Eve. Accordingly, we begin with the resurrected Christ and then retroactively incorporate Christ's *imago* into ourselves through faith, hope, and love. According to Stanley Grenz, "Paul argues not only that Christ's resurrection stands at the heart of the gospel but also that this proleptic event guarantees the eschatological resurrection."³ The Easter Christ as the divine image is our prototype. We live now as the *imago Dei* insofar as we live in him, insofar as we participate in the reality of the eschatological resurrection into the new creation.

The proleptic model includes an ontological component. It is the being of God's future that determines the being of all that has happened in past nature and history. Writing in a different context, Michael Burdett gets it right: "The future is God's future and must be set within the interpersonal nature of a promissory triune God who brings new possibilities to the world."⁴ It is not the past that defines us, but rather God's promise of newness.

The proleptic model includes an ethical component as well. We may define ethics as human action aimed at making tomorrow better than yesterday. The Christian ethicist begins with a vision of God's future and then seeks to work creatively to transform present reality in light of this vision. N. T. Wright

3. Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 234.

4. Michael S. Burdett, *Eschatology and the Technological Future* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 2.

Like the axle on a wheel, the center around which the entire theory of evolution revolves is natural selection. Nature selects which inherited traits will survive and which will go extinct. This selection takes place at the moment of reproduction. Selection takes place when those individuals who are fitted to their environment give birth to a new generation that will carry on their traits. The notorious phrase "survival of the fittest" is equivalent to "natural selection" and refers solely to reproductive fitness, to the capacity to reproduce progeny that will carry inherited traits on to future generations. In Darwin's words, "If variations useful to any organic being ever do occur, assuredly individuals thus characterized will have the best chance of being preserved in the struggle for life; and from the strong principle of inheritance, these will tend to produce offspring similarly characterized. This principle of preservation, or the survival of the fittest, I have called Natural Selection."⁷

Darwin could not explain why children are not duplicates of their parents nor why variations in inherited traits occur. A century later, the field of molecular biology arrived at an explanation—namely, genetic variation and mutation. DNA copying in the reproductive process is not precise. Variations appear frequently and normally during it. Even without this genetic knowledge, Darwin was still able to propose an elegant theory regarding speciation that has proved to be very useful and productive. The fertility of Darwin's theory of evolution has generated new research with enormous benefits in expanded food production and in combating viral and bacterial infections by medical science.

Darwin's theory has nothing to say about life's origin. Recall the title of his major work: *Origin of Species*. He tells us how a species originates but not how life originates. In *Origin of Species*, Darwin says about four times that he has no idea how life first emerged from nonlife. He can only explain how life, once present, evolves. I heartily recommend that when we use the term "evolution" that we limit its application to speciation, excluding the still-unanswered question of life's origin.

The neo-Darwinian synthesis—the synthesis of Darwin's original theory of evolution combined with genetics—saturates our science, our society, and our worldview today. "No serious biologist today doubts the theory of evolution to explain the marvelous complexity and diversity of life," contends Francis Collins, director of the US National Institutes of Health.⁸ One of today's leading evolutionary biologists, Francisco J. Ayala, adds: "The message has always been twofold: (1) evolution is good science and (2) there need not be

7. Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, 6th ed., Harvard Classics (New York: Collier, 1909; London: John Murray, 1872), 141.

8. Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 99.

grounds proleptic ethics in our vision of God's future when he says, "The Christian task in the present is to anticipate this eschatology, to borrow from God's future in order to change the way things are in the present, to enjoy the taste of our eventual deliverance from evil by learning how to loose the bonds of evil in the present."⁵ The future new creation is already present within the present creation via the incarnation in Christ, by God's abiding providence, and by Christ's disciples, who today anticipate in their pursuit of justice the reality of God's eschatological future.

In light of the ecological crisis that is gripping our planet, many Christian eco-ethicists lift up a vision of God's promised new creation and then engage in the creative moral action this vision prompts. Nick Spencer and Robert White, for example, claim that "Christians are called to live in a way that announces the future kingdom of God, and to model the reality that, at least in part, the kingdom of God is here already, while realizing that it will only be brought about completely by the decisive intervention of Christ's return."⁶ A proleptic eco-ethic means that the *imago Dei* within us—that is, the dominion that the human race has been given—will be employed to bring justice to the needy and sustainability to the biosphere and thereby anticipate the consummate whole toward which we are being drawn.

Our task now is to fold this theological anthropology into a version of theistic evolution that demonstrates consonance with Darwinian evolution. This may be challenging due to the implications of evolutionary theory for human nature. As we will see, our evolved human nature requires redemption.

What Does the Theory of Evolution Tell Us about Human Nature?

When Charles Darwin published his watershed book *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection*, in 1859, his theory of evolution sought to explain one thing: How do new species develop? His answer was simple: random variations in inheritance are selected in (or selected out) by the natural environment. Some inherited traits survive to be passed on to the next generation. Other traits do not survive; they die out or go extinct. The natural niche—predation, food supply, disease, climate, drought, flood, and such—determines which traits survive and which go extinct. Gradually, over long periods of time, one species dies out or transforms into another. That, in short, is the origin of a new species.

5. N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (London: SPCK, 2006), 96.

6. Nick Spencer and Robert White, *Christianity, Climate Change, and Sustainable Living* (London: SPCK, 2007), 94–95.

contradiction between evolution and religious beliefs.”⁹ The theistic evolutionist celebrates both.

Is Evolution Blood Red in Tooth and Claw?

As we have seen, the axle around which the Darwinian theory of evolution revolves is natural selection. Slight random differences in biological heredity will dispose some individuals more than others to withstand the threats and challenges of the environment. Those who survive to the age of reproduction will pass on their heritable characteristics. The genomes of those who die before they can reproduce will disappear into the oblivion of nature’s evolutionary history. The genes that survive we call “adapted.” They are the fit. They have been selected by nature to advance.

Darwin’s theory of natural selection seems to unwrap and expose the drama of the long trail that life has traversed over deep time. He could wax eloquent about the complex beauty of nature as well as the advance of higher intelligence: “Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life . . . from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.”¹⁰ Darwin shines light on nature’s grandeur. But a shadow accompanies this light. It is the shadow of travail, suffering, death, and extinction. New life depends on the death of the old. New species require the extinction of their predecessors and even their progenitors. In the words of Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poem *In Memoriam*, the natural process by which we arrive at this grandeur is blood “red in tooth and claw.” The grandeur of evolved life seems to require the wanton sacrifice of discarded living creatures.

Darwin observed that nature produces far more offspring than can survive to reproductive age. Nature is profligate, almost planning for widespread death to feed the voracious appetite of selection. Because more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence: one individual with another of the same species, with the individuals of competitor species, or with the physical conditions of life. This means that early death is scheduled for large numbers of those creatures who are born. Nature has no intention to draw each individual life toward fulfillment,

9. Francisco J. Ayala, *Darwin’s Gift to Science and Religion* (Washington, DC: Joseph Henry, 2007), 5.

10. Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 528–29.

toward actualizing its inborn potential. If suffering befalls the less than fully fit, nature sheds no tears. Nature is pitiless.

The demand of the predator to kill and devour its prey is a ubiquitous part of this universal struggle. Reproducing requires living. Living requires eating. Eating requires killing. And the form that killing takes seems cruel and harsh and unnecessary. "Natural selection does not look at all like the kind of mechanism a wise and benevolent God would institute to bring about adaptive evolution," observes Peter Bowler.¹¹ This observation haunts the theologian with the question of theodicy: Why would a God of grace build a machine that unceremoniously chews up and spits out its sentient children?

Exeter theologian Christopher Southgate asks what is at the heart of the problem of evil. Is it pain? No, he answers. The sensitivity to pain we and other higher animals have is necessary for a richer experience. Is it death? No, again. Death is a thermodynamic necessity. Further, we cannot say death is evil if it follows a fulfilled life. Rather, says Southgate, the heart of the problem is that so many creatures are cut down mercilessly before they can experience the richness of a fulfilled life. Think of the newly born impala torn apart and devoured by the hyena. We cannot count the number of the sufferers of predation and parasitism, including organisms for which life seems to contain no fullness, no expression of what it is to reach the potential inherent in being a creature. Indeed, nature's wastefulness in producing far more offspring than we could expect to survive means that snuffing out individuals long before fulfillment is the mass victimage perpetrated by evolution.¹²

The theologian must conclude: this is not the creation Genesis 1:1–2:3 describes as "very good." If we assume the accuracy of evolutionary theory in describing our biological past and prospects for the near future of life on earth, then we must ask: How does evolution fit within a biblically based vision of God's creative and redemptive work? This is the task the theistic evolutionist must take up.

Are We Hopeless Killers?

Evolutionary biology tells theologians what they already know—namely, that all living creatures on earth are related. "The unity of life reveals the genetic

11. Peter J. Bowler, *Monkey Trials and Gorilla Sermons: Evolution and Christianity from Darwin to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 21.

12. Christopher Southgate, "Creation as *Very Good* and *Groaning in Travail*: An Exploration in Evolutionary Theodicy," in *The Evolution of Evil*, ed. Gaymon Bennett, Martinez Hewlett, Ted Peters, and Robert John Russell (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 53–85. See Southgate's treatment of the theodicy problem in chap. 19 below.

continuity and common ancestry of all organisms," emphasizes Ayala.¹³ This means that humans are fully embedded in the natural domain. By observation we see that other creatures exhibit at least a rudimentary level of human endowments we prize, such as rationality, communication, and altruistic love. *Homo sapiens* are as fully natural as are all other species of living critters. The implication for theological anthropology is this: we can draw no sharp line between humans and nonhumans regarding any traits we might identify as unique and hence divine.

In addition, human embeddedness in nature includes the struggle for existence and all its bloodshed. When we look at the archaeological record, we see humans have been engaged in violent if not genocidal behavior for as far back as evidence provides. In his own indirect way, Harvard's Steven Pinker reminds us that *Homo sapiens* have never lived without sin:

Buried in the ground and hidden in caves lie silent witnesses to a bloody prehistory stretching back hundreds of thousands of years. They include skeletons with scalping marks, ax-shaped dents, and arrowheads embedded in them; weapons like tomahawks and maces that are useless for hunting but specialized for homicide; fortification defenses such as palisades of sharpened sticks; and paintings from several continents showing men firing arrows, spears, or boomerangs at one another and being felled by these weapons.¹⁴

This suggests that our human propensity for violence is rooted in our evolutionary history. More than merely killing to eat, our human ancestors committed murder. Was there ever a time when *Homo sapiens* were without sin?

Once Darwinian evolution is taken on board, the theistic evolutionist can no longer locate paradise or prefallen humanity in the past. Rather, paradise or sinless humanity belongs to the future, to eschatological redemption. Right now, within evolutionary history, we must live with ambiguity, with a mixture of sin and grace.

How Will the Theistic Evolutionist Face the Challenge?

Christian theistic evolutionists will want to absorb into their religious vision this evolutionary picture of the human race and to allow the theory of evolution to influence Christian anthropology. The platform on which theistic

13. Francisco J. Ayala, "Molecular Biology: Darwin's Precious Gift," in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Darwin and Evolutionary Thought*, ed. Michael Ruse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 398.

14. Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 306.

evolutionists construct their scheme includes one necessary plank: through evolutionary history God is creating the world.

According to "theistic evolution," writes Robert John Russell, founder and director of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, "God creates the world *ex nihilo* with certain fundamental laws and natural constants, and God acts everywhere in time and space as continuous creator (*creatio continua*) in, with, and through the processes of nature. God's action is trustworthy and we describe the results through these laws of nature. The result is the evolution of life. In essence, evolution is how God is creating life."¹⁵

The school of theistic evolution is by no means the only option for tackling questions raised by Darwinian theory. There are rival schools of thought, to be sure. Atheistic materialism, for example, would deny the existence of a creating and redeeming God; similarly, it would deny that evolutionary development includes a *telos*, purpose, meaning, or end. Creationism in both its biblical and scientific forms would affirm belief in God while denying that Darwinian evolutionary theory provides a complete or final description of the human condition. Intelligent design would similarly deny that Darwinian theory adequately explains the human condition, adding that the presence of design in nature testifies to purpose and meaning.¹⁶

In contrast to these alternatives, the theistic evolutionist begins by granting respect to Darwinian theory and credence to Christian claims regarding God. Any theologian wishing to incorporate evolutionary history must deal with some difficult problems: (1) Where can we find *telos* or purpose in blind, pitiless evolution? (2) Does God favor the fit or the unfit? (3) When does the *imago Dei* appear—the past, present, or future?

Where Do We Find Purpose in Pitiless Evolution?

"Science . . . has no need of purpose, has detected no sign of it, and finds that it can go about its business in its absence," contends biologist and atheist Peter Atkins.¹⁷ When we look at nature through scientific lenses, no purpose, direction, meaning, *telos*, or end can be discerned.

15. Robert John Russell, *Cosmology, Evolution, and Resurrection Hope: Theology and Science in Creative Mutual Interaction*, ed. Carl S. Helrich (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2006), 28.

16. For the agenda of the theistic evolution school in relation to other schools—atheistic materialism, creationism, and intelligent design—see Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation: Conflict, Conversation, and Convergence* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003); Peters and Hewlett, *Can You Believe in God and Evolution?* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009).

17. Peter Atkins, "Atheism and Science," in *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, ed. Philip Clayton and Zachary Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 128.

Meaninglessness is intolerable for Christians. Purpose is required for the cosmos to be thought of as God's creation. The theistic evolutionist needs to affirm purpose *for* nature even if purpose cannot be discerned *within* nature. We can think of divine purpose in the analogy of a human person devising purposes for things in the surrounding environment. God has a purpose for the long history of evolution, to be sure; but that purpose comes from God in redemptive interaction with the world. For theistic evolutionists to perceive an end to evolution, they must anticipate God's end for creation.

In sum, the proleptic theologian does not expect to find purpose revealed within the course of natural events themselves. Rather, we must wait for eschatological revelation. Then we will see the wolf lie down with the lamb (Isa. 11); then we will see the elimination of crying and pain (Rev. 21–22). The *terminus* will reveal the *telos*. The end will determine the end, so to speak. In this limited way, the theistic position remains consonant with evolutionary biology. The theologian does not require the scientist to see God's end in nature's processes.

Does God Favor the Fit or the Unfit?

Our temptation might be to interpret biological evolution as progressive, as leading to more complex and higher forms of life. The risk is that the theologian will mistakenly identify God's providence with fitness, with the winners in the struggle for existence. But this would betray what is revealed in Scripture—namely, that God sides with sinners right along with the losers, the victims, and the unfit.

Celia Deane-Drummond formulates the problem that the theistic evolutionist must address:

Those creation theologies that focus simply on the return to a state of blessedness in the beginning fail to consider in sufficient depth the horror of creaturely suffering that has become known to us through an understanding of evolution. One alternative might be simply to accept such suffering as part of the process. . . . Yet the cross challenges any such acceptance; rather we are left with an image of a co-suffering God who identifies with the victims of such a process, rather than the process itself.¹⁸

Here the theology of the cross becomes relevant. The theology of the cross derives from Martin Luther and has become expanded in recent generations by some theistic evolutionists. Luther writes, "The manifest and visible things of God are placed in opposition to the invisible, namely, his human nature,

18. Celia E. Deane-Drummond, *Creation through Wisdom: Theology and the New Biology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 236.

weakness, foolishness. . . . It does [a theologian] no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross. . . . 'Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself' (Isa. 45:15)."¹⁹ The theology of the cross entails two components. First, God's redemptive work is hidden. It is not obvious. Second, God is present to "human nature, weakness, foolishness . . . humility and shame." The truth of God is not found at first in glory but in humility. Once we have grasped the humility, then the glory becomes visible.

The proleptic theistic evolutionist applies to the natural world what we have learned about God through the cross and resurrection. According to the theology of the cross, God identifies with the victims of the predator-prey competition, not the victors. God identifies first with the losers, the outcasts, the poor, and the unfit.

Applying the theology of the cross has led some theistic evolutionists to amend traditional theology with the notion of *deep incarnation*, a nonanthropocentric version of incarnation. "God's incarnation also reaches into the depths of material existence," contends Niels Henrik Gregersen.²⁰ The idea of deep incarnation implies that in Jesus Christ God enters the domain of physicality—including evolutionary biology—with grace for all the losers in the struggle for existence. As Elizabeth Johnson writes, "God's own self-expressive Word personally joins the biological world as a member of the human race [and] enters into solidarity with the whole biophysical cosmos of which humans are a part. This deep incarnation of God within the biotic community of life forges a new kind of union."²¹

Note what is going on here methodologically. God's presence through deep incarnation within nature is not visible through the lenses of the microscope or telescope. Therefore, the theologian must interpret biological evolution through biblical lenses. Jeffrey Schloss makes this clear: "The Gospel's affirmation [is] that in God's cruciform economy he graciously turns death into life. . . . Not that we learn the principle of redemption from evolution, but having learned it elsewhere, we see it there."²² Johnson succinctly summarizes the implications of deep incarnation for the *imago Dei*: "Christ is the firstborn of the dead on Darwin's tree of life."²³

19. Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, *Career of the Reformer I*, ed. Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia, 1957), 52–53.

20. Niels Henrik Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation: Why Evolutionary Continuity Matters in Christology," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 26, no. 2 (2010): 174.

21. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 198.

22. Jeffrey P. Schloss, "Evolutionary Theory and Religious Belief," in *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, ed. Philip Clayton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 203.

23. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 209.

When Does the Garden of Eden Appear?

If we look at the human condition through evolutionary lenses, there never was a time in the past when our ancestors were not already fallen. Sin, suffering, and evil were always with us. Our fallen state is equiprimordial with our appearance in biological history.

This means we cannot locate the *imago Dei* in the past. "Evolutionary science . . . has shown clearly that no paradisaical period of perfection ever existed in nature's past," writes Georgetown University theologian John Haught.²⁴ A historical interpretation of the garden of Eden in Genesis 2–4 cannot be confirmed by evolutionary theory. Yet this is no reason to surrender our biblical belief in the *imago Dei*. Harvard astronomer Owen Gingerich adds, "If the early chapters of Genesis are not historical, it does not mean they are false or unimportant with regard to their theological insights. Truthful drama, but not actual history."²⁵

Perhaps the Bible never needed an Eden in the past for us to return to. The Bible is bookended with paradise, with the garden of Eden in Genesis and again in Revelation. When we walk downtown in the new Jerusalem, we will find the same river of life and tree of life we had left back in Genesis.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

"See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away."

And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." . . . Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its

24. John F. Haught, "Science, Teilhard and Vatican II," *Lumen: A Journal of Catholic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 4.

25. Owen Gingerich, *God's Planet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 91.

twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Rev. 21:1–5; 22:1–2)

The decisive theological point made by both the story of Eden in Genesis and the new Jerusalem in Revelation is this: the creation God intends is not the one in which we currently live. Whether we describe the evolutionary world in which we live as fallen from a pristine past or rising into an eternal future, the point is that what we experience today is out of sync with God's intention. We today are estranged, alienated, separated from God's judgment that creation is "very good" (Gen. 1:31).

The estranged state of the present creation is defined by its relation to God's promised new creation. Or, working within the proleptic model, the present creation is a stage in the arrival of the new creation. Russell puts it this way: "The eschatological future reaches back and is revealed in the event of the resurrection of Jesus. . . . Both creation and New Creation are part of a single divine act of creation *ex nihilo*."²⁶ The eschatological new creation incorporates and transforms the present creation. To say it another way, the new creation consummates while redeeming the now-evolving creation.

What Should We Conclude?

"Cosmic and biological evolution instruct us as never before that we live in a universe that is in great measure not yet created. . . . In an evolving cosmos, created being as such has *not yet* achieved the state of integrity," says Haught rightly.²⁷ For both the evolutionary biologist and the proleptic theologian, the future is open, anticipating newness. "The notion of an unfinished universe still coming into being . . . opens up the horizon of a new or unprecedented future. . . . In its depths, nature is promise."²⁸ Because nature is promise, the Christian hope for God's new creation can be rendered consonant with evolutionary theory.

Placing the *imago Dei* within the eschatological new creation means we creatures anticipate an end in two senses of the word: end as the *terminus*, or conclusion, of God's creative work within evolution, and end as evolution's goal, purpose, meaning, destiny, or *telos*. In Christian eschatology, "end"

26. Robert John Russell, *Time in Eternity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 15.

27. John Haught, *Deeper than Darwin* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003), 168 (emphasis original).

28. Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 170.

entails both conclusion and goal, both *terminus* and *telos*. Looking forward, we expect a transformation from old creation to new creation. We expect to see the divine image, the *imago Dei*, in its fullness. For creatures within the lengthy story of evolution, the *imago Dei* is the divine call forward, a call we hear and respond to now but that draws us toward transformation into a future reality.

The proleptic model of the *imago Dei* prepares us for a robust theistic evolution. When we turn to Darwin's theory of evolution, we find a scientific description of unredeemed biological and social processes that mark estrangement from God's end—both *terminus* and *telos*—for creation. Evolutionary processes may be God's way of creating today, but this divine creating will not be completed until all of nature is redeemed.

We began with one decisive assumption: the *imago Dei* derives not from Adam and Eve in the past but rather from the eschatological Christ in the future. This leads to the following conclusion: when we and the cosmos are redeemed, we will be fully created. Then God can finally say, "Behold, it is very good."
