

Could we have evolved the image of God?

Human Origins and the Image of God: Essays in honor of J. Wentzel van Huyssteen

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In the academic discipline of theology, there is growing pressure for believing Christians to compromise their faith in all sorts of ways to be seen as sophisticated. To accept inerrancy, for example, is to assume the conclusion *a priori*, the argument goes, and so the sophisticated theologian will allow for and even assume errors great and small all throughout the text of Scripture. In place of the authority of Scripture, they accept the authority of whatever they believe the consensus of science to be. Because some (not all) still profess to be Christians, they must pay lip service to biblical ideas, but because Scripture is not their authority, they end up philosophizing on a foundation of sand.

Human Origins and the Image of God is a prime example of the sort of literature that is produced by these sorts of academics. Written in honour of Jacobus Wentzel van Huyssteen (b. 29 April 1942), the James I. McCord Professor of Theology and Science at Princeton Theological Seminary (1992–2014), who dedicated his career to reconciling evolution and Christian theology, it features essays from natural scientists, philosophers, historians, and theologians.

Many (though not all) authors in this volume demonstrate a mastery

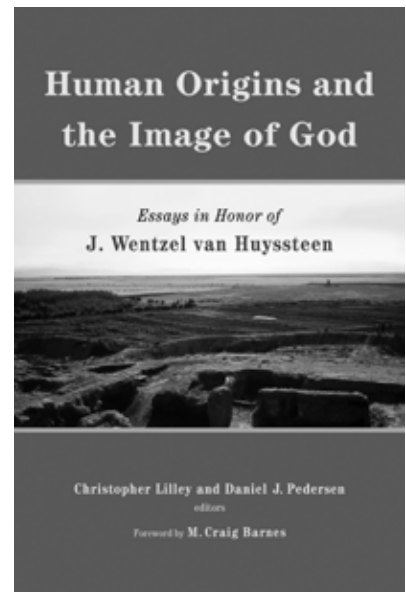
of the dreadful sort of writing that puts words in their proper grammatical order, but successfully evades communicating any meaning. For instance, in this extended quote, an unbelieving archaeologist attempts to describe a theory of entanglement, which he describes as follows:

“I wish to suggest that religion originates in the human impulse to fix things. ... According to this view, humans and things are entangled with each other in various ways. Entanglement is the sum of human dependence on things, thing dependence on humans, thing dependence on other things, and human dependence on other humans. Within the central notion of dependence there are both reliance and constraint or dependency. Entanglements between humans and things afford agency, but they also entrap into specific pathways. Entanglement can thus also be defined as the product of a dialectical relationship between dependence and dependency. Put another way, humans and things get caught up in each other and push and pull each other in specific directions” (p. 44).

Such writing is beyond parody and beneath contempt, but is sadly popular among academic liberals, and this is not an isolated example from the book. (For instance, after reading through the chapter on axiological sensitivity twice, I still could not translate it into meaningful thought.)

The foundation of true knowledge

Some authors in this collection reason from the foundation of evolutionary biology or anthropology,



others from the foundation of some sort of philosophy. What is lacking is anyone who reasons from the foundation of Scripture. So there is no reasoning that is properly Christian in the entire book. That it does not even make a pretence is odd for a book on a Christian topic.

Rather, the argumentation is founded on evolutionary presuppositions and postmodern interpretation. The effect is that the vast majority of the book has an ephemeral and forgettable quality, especially when paired with the meaningless jargon that makes up the majority of the book.

The image of God

This book purports to examine the concept of the image of God and how it might be interpreted in light of evolutionary theory. But it does not have a biblical definition of God, and therefore no biblical definition of the image of God. Several authors struggle to see the image of God as a unique quality of humans as distinct from animals. This is understandable given that they see humans as evolved from a common ancestor with other living things.

A refreshingly honest chapter

Michael Ruse's chapter, "Human Evolution: some tough questions for the Christian" was much more useful for a couple reasons. First, it addresses biblical teaching regarding origins and the inconsistencies of interpretations which try to incorporate evolution. Second, Ruse is a good communicator in writing and comes across much more straightforwardly.

Ruse, like the other authors, accepts the evolutionary narrative of the origins of the universe and humanity. (He has a decades-long history of anti-creationist activism and writing.) He characterizes the Christian belief that he addresses as follows:

"A creator god exists and this god is all loving and all powerful. Humans are made in the image of this god (whom I will now capitalize as 'God'), meaning that we have intelligence and a moral sense and free will in some sense to go with this. We are tainted by original sin, and Jesus who is one substance with God, came to Earth and died on the cross for our salvation. We have therefore the real possibility of eternal life. We are expected to behave properly, but doing good in itself could never be enough. For that, we need Jesus. The Bible is the revealed word of God, true throughout; but it has long been recognized (at least since Augustine) that it often needs to be understood metaphorically or allegorically. It is not a work of science" (p. 157).

That one of the unbelievers should give the plainest and best overview of what Christian faith entails in the book should be shameful to those who presumably claim some sort of Christian faith (though of course we would take issue with allegorical interpretation—Augustine himself was a young-earth creationist).

Ruse points out that a historical Adam and Eve are indispensable for a Christian doctrine of original sin, and evolution has no place for a literal first couple who were the special creations of God. "It just won't do to say that one day God put immortal souls in a pair of hominins and that did the job. Either every member of the species was made in the image of God, or none was" (p. 158). He believes that it is impossible to salvage the doctrine of Original Sin in light of the 'fact' of evolution, but proposes a solution.

"With the removal of Adam and Eve, you are not pushed to saying that we are not sinful. We are. You are pushed to saying that sin is part of human nature, part of the way in which we developed, and should not be pinned down on one dope a long time ago" (p. 159).

But just as the sinful parts of our nature are the fault of evolution, according to this way of thinking, Ruse argues that there is a positive side to selection, in that we evolved to cooperate with each other and to be altruistic. "Hence, I would suggest that claims made in the name of Christianity about us being irredeemably corrupt are simply hogwash" (p. 160). Ruse credits this cooperation to sexual selection, and somehow the fact that women are as important in the process of sexual selection as men causes him to make the leap to arguing for female clergy.

"You can keep going with all-male pastors and priests. But if nothing else, it starts to suggest that there is something unnatural about keeping women in subservient roles God has made things to function, to work naturally, and it is our obligation to go with what God designs and wants. If God made women equal to men, then who are we to give them subservient roles?" (p. 162).

But if life on Earth developed through evolution, are humans a mere fluke, or were we necessarily a part of God's plan for the world? Ruse rejects a scenario where God overtly influences

the process of evolution in such a way as to ensure human beings.

"The trouble with this is first, as Darwin grumbled, you really are taking the matter out of science. . . . Second, there is no empirical evidence for such direction Third, theologically, once you bring God into the business on a daily basis, then you are open to questions about why God doesn't do a bit more. Why doesn't he correct mutations that are going to lead to horrendous effects like many genetic diseases?" (pp. 164–165).

Some evolutionists argue that humans or something like them would have almost inevitably emerged as a result of the 'arms race' of natural selection. But Ruse points out that there are innumerable contingencies involved and the evolution of humans was by no means a necessary outcome. He eventually settles on the multiverse as a possible solution.

Of course Ruse comes at the question from an evolutionist, non-Christian stance, and Christian biblical creationists would completely disagree with him regarding nearly every assertion he makes in his essay. But at least he presented his arguments clearly, and had more regard for the Bible in his interactions with Christianity than any of the other writers. If the entire book had been written along these lines, creationists would still have disagreed with it, but it might have been more useful as an example of what we could answer in our work. Or, as the great physicist Wolfgang Pauli might have said, Ruse wasn't right, but the other authors were not even wrong.

Reasoning from foundations of sand

None of the authors succeed in discussing the image of God, because none of them really believe in God, and none of them believe that humans are

created in His image. So one wonders why they bothered.

So why should biblical creationists care about a bunch of mostly post-modern academics they've never heard of writing in celebration of another postmodern academic they've never heard of? Well, it's useful to know that these sorts of conversations about very important theological concepts are going on, so that we're not blindsided when some atheist brings them up. But that doesn't make them less of a chore to read. It also alerts readers to the state of theological education in the most 'prestigious' seminaries, so we can avoid sending students there.