

What Is Man?

Basics of the Faith

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A. Craig Troxel



P U B L I S H I N G

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*Who am I?
They mock me, these
lonely questions of mine.*
—DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

■ “Who am I?” That question may arise during the stormy seas of teenage years or in the dead calm of middle age. It may come when you have lost a job or lost at love. It may be brought on by the threat of a new competitor or after the death of a loved one. But at some point in your life, you have asked yourself that question—a question about your identity, your worth, and your purpose in life. It could be that you still seek the answer.

No shortage of voices answer that question from every branch of learning under the sun: biologists, sociologists, psychologists, geneticists, archaeologists, philosophers, zoologists, literary artists, and theologians—all have a vested interest in the study of who we are as humans. Some of them tell us that we are a collection of cells that have evolved from a random cosmic accident; or that with unrealized potential we can ascend to the heights of Ayn Rand’s liberated “Ego” or Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*; or that we are born a *tabula rasa* to be written upon by the experiences we meet; or, conversely, that we suffer from the illusion of identity as we are culturally predetermined; or that as modern men we are autonomously coherent and objective rational beings; or that as postmodern men we are fragmented selves adrift from any moorings of truth and shaped by our pluralistic, self-manufactured linguistic communities.

“Who am I?” Every scientist, every armchair philosopher, every pro athlete, every poet, every “regular Joe,” and every musician has secretly asked the very same question. It is an unsettling question, and many end this life without ever finding the answer. Rising above these voices is the truth of the living God, who is neither afraid to pose such questions nor unwilling to provide invaluable answers.

THE CREATION OF MAN

Created or Evolved?

This anthropological question has been the same for the last hundred years: Are we created or have we evolved? Evolutionary thought now enjoys an academic monopoly that dominates modern biology and most other fields of hard and soft science alike. At points it opposes Christian assumptions about man and creation, often under the guise of theoretical neutrality. As Christians, we frankly admit that we reflect on our race with assumptions that are transparently generated from the Bible, God’s infallible and authoritative Word, which alone provides the absolute standard for what we are to believe concerning the nature of God and the nature of his image-bearer, man. This is not the place to defend such assumptions, but it is the place to acknowledge them.

The idea of a process guided by chance originating with preexisting life-forms does not reconcile well with the doctrine of God’s creating all things by the spoken word of his power. Scripture attributes the origin and historicity of Adam and Eve exclusively to God’s supernatural word: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man’ ” (Gen. 1:26) and “the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature” (2:7). The Bible also presumes that the antiquity

and unity of the human race derives from Adam and Eve as our “first parents,” or from the “one man” Adam as our race’s covenantal representative.¹ Before all other matters that surround the doctrine of creation or “first things,” the great presupposition is the Christian belief that man owes his origin to God the Creator, and to him alone.

Created Male and Female

In *The Diary of Adam and Eve*², Mark Twain anticipates one modern trend, which emphasizes the differences between men and women over their similarities (even to the comic suggestion that they are from different planets). Such a view does not encourage peaceful relations between genders or spouses; in fact, it fuels agendas that derive their livelihood by fostering competition, suspicion, and alienation between male and female. Although the Bible clearly recognizes God-given differences between genders, it assumes the underlying and fundamental unity of the human race. When God determined to create man, he said, “‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . .’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:26–27). Notice that God’s making “man” in his image parallels God’s making “them”—that is, “male and female”—in his image. Both male and female are equally made to fellowship with God. Both male and female are created with the knowledge of God’s moral will. Both Adam and Eve were created with a sinless nature that reflected God’s holiness and righteousness.

The creation account goes on to stress how both Adam and Eve share equally in the mandate to rule the earth, tend the garden, and guard the sanctuary of Eden: “And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the

birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth' ” (Gen. 1:28).

Neither Adam nor Eve was called to subdue the earth or rule the garden without a companion. When their Creator surveyed what he had made, he assessed it as “good.” But when he saw solitary Adam, he said, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). So God paraded all the animals he had created past Adam so that Adam would name them and exercise his rank and dominion over them—but also, and more importantly, to show Adam that among them “there was not found a helper fit for him” (2:20). The world was yet without sin, but Adam was yet without a partner. None of the creatures could correspond to him, understand him, or communicate with him. God was setting the stage for Adam to appreciate the one who would be created like him.

God put Adam into a deep sleep and created the woman from his side. As God conducts the newly created Eve to her husband, Adam immediately recognizes that Eve is both related to and different from him. She is of the same kind and yet has her own unique position. She is dependent on him, yet free. She is from Adam, yet owes her existence to God alone. She is his helper, yet not his slave.³ She is presented first as his wife and lover. Adam cannot contain his relief and joy as he breaks into poetry: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen. 2:23). He recognizes that a part of himself was taken away in order to make him complete. As John Milton put it:

Man-like, but different sex, so lovely fair
That what seemed fair in all the world seemed now
Mean, or in her summed up, in her contained
Grace was in all her steps, heav'n in her eye.⁴