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Humanity as God's Image in Evolutionary Perspective

The biblical notion that humanity is created in the image of God is usually understood to imply a static concept of humanity: Humans were created in the image of God; they deviated from this image through the fall and subsequent sinfulness; and, by the grace of God, they will be restored to their original goodness. Such a concept, of course, runs counter to evolutionary thought which is convinced of a gradual ascent of humanity from pre-human beings, an ascent that perhaps will move us even beyond our present evolutionary stage, and that implies a *dynamic understanding* of the imago Dei.

1.

A *static notion* of humanity would also *contradict* the biblical promise of a new humanity. For instance, in Rom. 5:12–21 Jesus Christ is seen as the anti-type to Adam. Yet Christ does not simply alleviate and make undone that which happened with Adam. Adam was already the type of the one who was to come. But now the envisioned one has arrived and through him, namely Christ, we obtain life eternal. Since Christ corresponds to Adam we could perceive redemption simply as a return to the days of old. Yet Paul tries his best to convince us that in this last and final time the demise of the primeval time is not just superseded by the gifts of grace. Through Christ's redemptive action God by far surpasses the initial catastrophe and therefore overcomes it.

The redemptive goal is not a return but an advancement to a newly created state of being with unprecedented possibilities. The image of this new creation is foreshadowed in the resurrection of Christ. Claiming Christ on our side, or, as Paul says, in our dying and rising with Christ, we become new creatures. We are able to walk in the newness of life. Since we have been united with him in a death like his, Paul tells us, "we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6:5). Yet attaining the status of new human beings is not just an eschatological goal of the distant future. Paul admonishes us to yield ourselves already now to God "as men who have been brought from death to life" (Rom. 6:13). This means that now we are participating in the new creation. Such participation, however, is not an automatic process. Therefore Paul continuously shifts in his letters from the indicative of the new creation to the imperative of showing forth this new creation. Only a life-style that anticipates proleptically this new life can expect "sanctification and its end, eternal life" (Rom. 6:22). Humanity's status is therefore not static, it rather moves from existence in alienation to the overcoming of alienation. This move enables humanity to proleptically anticipate the new creation and its final fulfilment. But humanity cannot accomplish this on its own. Only through the divine invitation to participate in the new creation can it realize its own potential and strive towards its envisioned goal.

When we remember the statement in the priestly creation account that humanity was created in God's image we may wonder whether such dynamic interpretation of human existence does not do violence to the Old Testament understanding of humanity. "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness", commences the account of the creation of humanity, and then it concludes: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him" (Gen.1:27).

Two points are noteworthy in this statement: (1) The plural form "let us make" suggests that perhaps even the priestly writer felt uncomfortable with the daring statement that God created humans in his own image. Thus the plural form implies that humans are created in the image of God and all the heavenly beings associated with God. This sentiment coincides with the observation in one of the creation psalms that God has made humanity "little less than God" (Ps. 8:5). Again with reference to God and his heavenly court, Elohim, the plural form for God is used. (2) In Gen. 1:26 two different Hebrew words are used (*zelem* and *demūt*) to express that humanity is created in the image of God. Both Hebrew words are not identical. The second tries to qualify the idea that an image could mean a replica.

Some theologians attempted to interpret the different use of words with reference to the fall. Irenaeus, for instance, claimed that through Adam's fall the God-intended development of humanity, through which it was to become immortal, was interrupted.¹ Humanity lost its similitude, i.e. its relationship with God, while it retained its image, being a reasonable and morally free agent. This distinction enabled Irenaeus to affirm that humanity did not change physically but only relationally once it had become sinful.

The danger of distinguishing between similitude and image was that it could easily be interpreted in such a way that sinfulness only affected part of humanity, while the other part continued in a state of original integrity. This hazard is especially noticeable when Augustine uses neoplatonic terminology and talks about evil as a deficiency of the good that results from a deficient cause or from a defect.² Such train of thought could lead to the notion that humanity only needs to improve in order to be no longer sinful.

In late medieval theology the deficiency aspect of sin was even more developed. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, stated that "original sin in its material sense is indeed concupiscence, while in its formal sense it is certainly a defect of the

¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.16.2; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1, p. 544; cf. G. von Rad, *ikon: Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2 (1964), pp. 390 f., who also remarks very interestingly: "In Gen. 5:1 ff. reference is made to the physical progeny of the first man, and it is said of Seth, Adam's son, that he was begotten in the image and likeness of Adam. This statement is most important. It ensures the theological actuality for all generations of the witness of the divine likeness." Cf. further P. Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit. Lehrbuch der Dogmatik* (1959), pp. 336 ff., for his very perceptive treatment of the issue of humanity being created in the image of God.

² Augustine, *City of God*, 11.22 and 12.7: Transl. by M. Dods (1950), pp. 365, 387.

original justice”.³ Original justice which Adam once enjoyed is now missing and therefore humanity was plagued with sin. This “corrupt disposition”, namely the privation of original justice, is now called original sin.⁴ But it can be corrected through a supernatural gift which achieves a sublimation of the rational creature beyond the human nature.⁵ Human nature no longer needs a conversion but an addition or a sublimation. Grace was then understood as something supernatural in humanity or a supernatural quality.⁶

To perceive grace as a supernatural addition to humanity's natural state is as dangerous as the idea that a human being is not a totally corrupt and sinful entity, but only lacks the supernatural gifts of the similitude, i.e., original justice and integrity.⁷ But the church thought differently. Therefore the Council of Trent decided in the “Decree on Justification” that through God's grace humanity can assent, cooperate, and dispose itself to God's salvific activity.⁸ This meant that the church did not hold that humanity's sinful nature was really changed. Its properties as an image of God were still thought to be integral so that the lost similitude could be achieved through a supernatural addition.⁹

When we come to the Reformers, we notice that the distinction between image and similitude has been abandoned. “Man must be an image”, we hear Luther say, “either of God or of the devil, because according to whom he directs his life, him he resembles.”¹⁰ Humanity is perceived as an entity and if it is sinful, all of humanity is sinful. This reminds us of Luther's statement in *The Bondage of the Will* that a human being resembles an animal that is either driven by God or by the devil.¹¹

John Calvin, though asserting that there is nothing left in humanity of which it could boast, claimed that there are “some remaining traces of the image of God,

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a 2ae. 82.3: Blackfriar Edition, 26, p. 38.

⁴ Thomas (n. 3), 1a 2ae. 82.2: *ibid.*, p. 36.

⁵ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, 1a 2ae, 110.3: Transl. by Fathers of the English Dominion Providence, 8 (1942), p. 352. Thomas says here that human virtues dispose man fittingly “to the nature whereby he is a man; whereas infused virtues dispose man in a higher manner and towards a higher end, and consequently in relation to some higher nature, i.e., in relation to a participation of the Divine Nature”.

⁶ Thomas (n. 5), 1a 2ae. 110.2: *ibid.*, p. 350.

⁷ Cf. for the following the perceptive analysis by H. Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 1 (1966), pp. 197–211, to the issue of the Roman Catholic ontological perception of humanity being created in the image of God. When he states that “Roman Catholic thinking is profoundly ontological, Reformation thinking profoundly personalistic”, then this is true for the time of the Reformation, but as we will see, it is no longer true in this exclusive sense for our present time.

⁸ Decree on Justification, 5: H. Denzinger (ed.), *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (engl. transl. 1957), 797, p. 250.

⁹ So Thielicke (n. 7), p. 207. Since he does not distinguish between image and similitude, he rightly says that the “*imago* qualities of man” are not affected through the fall.

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *Über das 1. Buch Mose*. Predigten (1527): Weim. Aufl. 24, 51, 12 f., in his exegesis of Gen. 1:27.

¹¹ Martin Luther, *On the Bondage of Will: Luther and Erasmus, Free Will and Salvation* (1969), p. 140.

which distinguish the entire human race from the other creatures".¹² Perhaps a little more cautious this was the line of thinking that Lutheran Orthodoxy took. John Gerhard, for instance, maintains that "with regard to these most minute particles . . . the image of God was not utterly lost".¹³ These "most minute particles", however, are inborn moral principles, humanity's dominion over other creatures, its intelligence, and its free will concerning the things which are under its control. We must agree here with Paul Althaus that something important was emphasized here, but with inadequate conceptuality.¹⁴ Humanity certainly did not suddenly become stupid, lazy, and unreliable once it was drawn into universal sinfulness.

Karl Barth was right when he emphasized that the fact that humanity was created in the image of God did not get lost through sin. Even as sinner a human being is still God's creature and related to God.¹⁵ The psalmist captured this insight very precisely when he exclaimed: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" (Ps. 139:7). As we have noticed, Gen. 1:26 does not talk about an ideal state of the distant past.¹⁶ Still today humans are called to be God's administrators. To fulfill this task they are still endowed with the same gifts they always possessed. This does not mean that Luther was wrong when he stated that humanity has totally lost its status as being created in the image of God. We must remember that Luther was attacking the idea that some features in humanity were still integral while others were contaminated by sinfulness. Thus he insisted that the total human being was a corrupt entity. Emil Brunner seems to make the same point when he says: "The breaking of man's relation to God means that the image of God in man has also been broken. This does not mean that it no longer exists, but that it has been defaced."¹⁷ The same stand is taken by G. C.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John T. McNeill, 2.2.1 and 2.2.17: *The Library of Christian Classics*, 20 (1960), pp. 255, 277. Cf. also T. F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (1957), pp. 88 ff., in his excellent analysis of this evident dichotomy. Torrance rightly claims that it is important to be aware of Calvin's distinction between the natural and the spiritual. While humanity is deprived of its spiritual gifts, it is only corrupted in its natural gifts. He also admits that though "it is difficult to see how there can be any ultimate reconciliation between Calvin's doctrine of total perversity and his doctrine of a remnant of the *imago dei*, though the very fact that he can give them both in the same breath seem to indicate that he had no difficulty in reconciling them".

¹³ Johann Gerhard, *The Image of God*: H. Preus & E. Smits (eds.), *The Doctrine of Man in Classical Lutheran Theology* (1962), p. 62.

¹⁴ Althaus (n. 1), p. 340.

¹⁵ So rightly K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3.2 (engl. transl. 1960), p. 324, who opts for an analogy of relationship instead of an analogy of being between God and humanity.

¹⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3.1 (engl. transl. 1958), p. 200, who arrives at the same conclusions in his excellent comments on the *imago dei* issue. Cf. also W. Zimmerli, *Grundriss der alttestamentlichen Theologie* (1972), pp. 27 f.

¹⁷ E. Brunner, *Man in Revolt. A Christian Anthropology* (engl. transl. 1967), p. 136; cf. also Thielicke (n. 7), p. 167, esp. n. 18.

Berkouwer when, in attacking any cooperative view of humanity, he emphasizes the total corruption of humanity.¹⁸

2.

Today most Roman Catholic theologians have abandoned an ontological understanding of humanity being created in the image of God which so easily led to the misunderstanding that part of a human being is still intact while the other part is corrupt. Michael Schmaus, for instance, mentions that according to the Genesis accounts the statement that humanity is created in the image of God should be understood in a *functional* way.¹⁹ Humans are called to exercise dominion over the world. Only with regard to the new creation in the eschaton can we talk about an ontological understanding of the image of God when we will fully participate in Christ's being, made in the image of God (cf. Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). Very interestingly, Schmaus also mentions that according to the Fathers the statement that humanity is created in the image of God means that God reflects himself in humanity.²⁰ So we may conclude that a human being can only realize itself if it realizes itself as image of God.

This is exactly what the priestly writer intended to convey. Humanity is not only created in the image of God. But together with being created in God's image the command is given to "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 air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen. 1:28). The priestly writer was not much interested in defining what the image of God entails, but rather emphasized the purpose for which it is given. As soon as God decided to create humans, he destined them to have a special relationship with the animals that were created before them. They are to have dominion over the animals. Similarly, the Yahwistic writer, who did not mention humans being created in the image of God, knew that God conferred upon humanity certain responsibilities (Gen. 2:15-17) and that God wants it to make certain decisions regarding the creation (Gen. 2:19 f.; cf. the significance of naming somebody or something). Humans are therefore placed in a special position within God's creation. Being called to have dominion over the animals, to subdue the earth, to till the garden, and to name the animals, also implies that humans are confronted with the creator. It is God who has called them to do these things and created the animals and the world.

Perhaps we can even determine more clearly in which respect humans ought to function in God's image, when we consider the Near Eastern custom of setting up

¹⁸ G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (engl. transl. 1962), esp. pp. 145 ff.

¹⁹ Cf. for the following M. Schmaus, *Der Glaube der Kirche. Handbuch katholischer Dogmatik*, 1 (1969), p. 336.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 650.

images of earthly rulers.²¹ In the ancient Near East the erection of a picture or a statue of a king always indicated that the area in which the replica of a king was erected was the domain of the king who ruled over it (Dan. 3:1. 5 f.). If humans are introduced into God's creation as being created in the image of God or as God's image, this could then mean in analogy to this ancient practice of erecting symbols of authority that humanity exercises and symbolizes God's dominion over the world. Humanity's dominion over the world reminds everyone that God is in control of creation and also reminds us that we exercise this dominion on God's behalf.

One might wonder what kind of people can fulfill the demand to have authority over God's creation. Do the creation accounts envision absolute rulers who have a special gift for exercising authority? The answer is not surprising when we remember that the dominion aspect is always connected with the plural "let them have dominion" (Gen. 1:26. 28). The focus is not upon a charismatic leader, but upon the human community.²² Each one of us is asked to act as God's administrator. That the administration of God's creation is not delegated to exceptional people is reaffirmed by the psalmist. For instance, in Psalm 8 he rejoices that God has given us dominion over the works of his hands. But then he continues by asking: "What is man that thou art mindful of him" (Ps. 8:4). It is not an inherent quality coming to expression in exceptional people that justifies the insight of human beings made in the image of God. It is simply God's will that wants us to be in the position of being God's administrators.

It is significant for our understanding of the human position that the statement: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him" is immediately followed in the creation accounts by the remark: "Male and female he created them." Neither the strong physical power of a man nor the reproductive faculty of a woman better resembles the human position of being created in God's image. It is only man and woman together, representing the human community, who exercise the privilege and obligation which this position entails. Very appropriately Gerhard von Rad observes: "The idea of man, according to P (priestly writer), finds its full meaning not in the male alone but in man and woman."²³ This would mean that neither man nor woman can obtain their full personhood without the other partner. It would be wrong, however, to understand this as an emphasis on sexuality or the procreative power. God's blessing upon man and woman and his command to be fruitful and multiply is referred to in a separate word. It is not given simultaneously with humanity's creation in God's image and with its creation as male and female. The procreative faculty is not a consequence of being created in the image of God; it is a gift of God to be used responsibly.

²¹ Cf. H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (engl. transl. 1974), pp. 160 ff., who also adduces evidence of Egyptian analogies to the understanding of humanity being created in the image of God.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²³ G. von Rad, *Genesis* (engl. transl. 1961), p. 58, in his exegesis of Gen. 1:26–28.

Emil Brunner is right when he observes that the statement: "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them", is such a simple assertion "that we hardly realize that with it a vast world of myth and gnostic speculation, of cynicism and asceticism, of the deification of sexuality and fear of sex completely disappears".²⁴

Most animals seek out their sexual partners only for copulation and the procreative process, and after the young ones mature the "marriage" is dissolved. Humans, however, live always in the context of sexual differentiation. Once they reach their adult stage, they are never oblivious of their sexual status. Some behavioral psychologists emphasize that the peculiarity of this differentiation is not just a biological and physiological differentiation, but one that finds expression in the spiritual and attitudinal realm. Cultural imprinting can reinforce this differentiation by relegating most men and women to clearly defined occupational and behavioral patterns, or it can seek to obliterate the differentiation by attempting to overcome them. Attempts to reinforce this differentiation often segregate men and women and therefore make the realization of full personhood through mutual interdependence more difficult. Tendencies to obliterate the differentiation regard men and women not as equal but as identical and consequently bereave man and women of the mutual enrichment through which they become fully human. While efforts to reinforce the sexual differentiation are often associated with a so-called male-dominated culture, tendencies to obliterate the differentiation are sometimes associated with the so-called women's liberation movement. This movement, however, is much too multi-faceted to arrive at such a simple equation; to some extent it is only a countermovement to a so-called male-dominated culture.²⁵

3.

We have seen that the insight that humans are created in God's image can only be realized in the mutuality of the man-woman encounter. When they jointly approach their own being and the world that surrounds them, they can best exercise the dominion to which they are called. Yet there are some features in the understanding of humans being created in the image of God that can raise doubts whether they are *actually fit* to be God's administrator.

²⁴ Brunner (n. 17), p. 346.

²⁵ For a good introduction to the so-called women's liberation movement cf. the carefully researched and informative book by Maren Lockwood Carden, *The New Feminist Movement* (1974). Very rightly she sees as one of the causes of the new feminist movement in the United States the highly mechanized household which made homemaking unsatisfactory and the high emphasis in society on personal development through remunerative work (p. 158). It is significant, however, that according to her the new feminists usually do not want to be men-like, but want to make the work world of men more human (pp. 166 f.).

First of all, one must ask whether the understanding that humans were created in the image of God does not overestimate their potential.²⁶ It may be true that humans can discern between good and evil, yet knowledge and will, reflection and action seem to go separate ways. The Old Testament history is a history of human disobedience, a history that seems to belie the assumption that humans were created in God's image.

When we consider today's scene, the validity of the assertion that humans are created in God's image primarily to have dominion over the earth becomes even more questionable. We are confronted with threatening or actual overpopulation in many parts of the world, with the rapid depletion of our natural resources, with a tremendous ecological imbalance. Knowing these facts, how can we still take seriously that we should be "fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it"? Many responsible people today claim emphatically that our number one problem is a comprehensive and total population control. However, the priestly writer seems to demand the exact opposite.

Furthermore, discerning people point out that, because of the tendency in the Genesis accounts to elevate humans above the rest of creation, humans have understood themselves as pitted over against nature. Lynn White, for instance, observes:

Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen . . . Man shares, in great measure, God's transcendence of nature. Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.²⁷

We could, of course, attempt to argue that Christianity or the Israelite religion are no longer very influential in today's "post-Christian" world. Lynn White, however, rightly counters that our daily habits of action

are dominated by an implicit faith in perpetual progress which was unknown either to Greco-Roman antiquity or to the Orient. It is rooted in, and is indefensible apart from, Judeo-Christian teleology. The fact that Communists share it merely helps to show what can be demonstrated on many other grounds: that Marxism, like Islam, is a Judeo-Christian heresy.²⁸

When we remember that the understanding of God the creator finds its larger context in God as the author of history, we realize that humanity's creation in the image of God implies that humans are both historical and history making beings. The ethical optimism, derived from the biblical understanding that humans are created in the image of God, therefore finds its continuity in an historical opti-

²⁶ So M. Hengel, *Was ist der Mensch? Erwägungen zur biblischen Anthropologie heute: Probleme biblischer Theologie*. G. von Rad zum 70. Geburtstag (1971), p. 118.

²⁷ Lynn White, Jr., *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis* (1967): D. & E. Spring (eds.), *Ecology and Religion in History* (1974), p. 24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

mism that history will continuously evolve and will necessarily evolve towards the better. The basically optimistic assessment of the human potential that we can observe in both Eastern Communism and Western Capitalism largely evolved within and emerged from the Judeo-Christian context. Can we therefore blame Arnold Toynbee when he claims:

If I am right in my diagnosis of mankind's present-day distress, the remedy lies in reverting from the *Weltanschauung* of monotheism to the *Weltanschauung* of pantheism, which is older and was once universal. The plight in which post-Industrial-Revolution man has now landed himself is one more demonstration that man is not the master of his environment – not even when supposedly armed with a warrant, issued by a supposedly unique and omnipotent God with a human-like personality, delegating to man plentipotentiary powers. Nature is now demonstrating to us that she does not recognize the validity of this alleged warrant, and she is warning us that, if man insists on trying to execute it, he will commit this outrage on nature at his peril.²⁹

What Lynn White, Arnold Toynbee, and others demand here of us is that we abandon our preferred position and perceive ourselves as fully integrated into the context of nature. While we agree fully with the diagnosis of the problem – our exploitative and self-glorifying attitude, we must disagree with the proposed solution which advances a pantheistic world view and therefore a divinization of nature, plus our integration into the context of nature.

Since animate and inanimate nature are fundamentally interrelated, solipsistic beings cannot sustain themselves. We are doomed if we would try to live as if we were gods created in our own image. Yet today's problems cannot be solved if we go to the other extreme and resign ourselves to the natural. Our existence is vitally related to nature and its structures, which allow for our existence. But behavioral psychologists rightly warn us that our instinctive drives are not strong enough to dominate our behavior and to guide us in our complex industrial society.

As humans we are *reasonable beings* and no longer fundamentally natural (instinct driven) beings. Here we must remember Hegel's reminder to link the eternal with the accidental in our thinking. There is something eternal that comes to expression in us. The Old Testament refers to this phenomenon when it tells us that we receive our existence as human beings through participation in God's life-giving *spirit*. It would be wrong to limit the Spirit only to its animating function. It is also the spirit of all wisdom and truth to whom both the Old and the New Testament attest.³⁰ Since we depend with our whole existence on the participation in the Spirit, the Old Testament rightly understood humanity as theomorphic,

²⁹ A. Toynbee, *The Religious Background of the Present Environmental Crisis* (1972): Spring (n. 27), pp. 148 f.

³⁰ For the understanding of the Spirit, especially in its life-giving and sustaining functions, cf. the thought-provoking article by W. Pannenberg, *The Doctrine of the Spirit and the Task of a Theology of Nature: Theology* 75 (1972), pp. 8 ff.

created in God's image.³¹ This means that the cause for today's uncertainty and bewilderment lies in abandoning our position as being created in the image of God. Therefore we weakened our participation in God's spirit both in terms of right judgment and full participation in (divine) life.

At this point the biblical understanding of humans as persons becomes crucial.³² Persons live in conformity to God and as his representatives. This notion evolved to the characteristic Judeo-Christian and therewith Western idea of freedom to govern the world and to regulate the affairs of society and interhuman relationships. Freedom, however, was not understood to mean "do as you please". It carries with it the obligation to exercise dominion in accordance with God's life-giving spirit to further that which is good, true, and beautiful, and help to alleviate and eliminate that which is distorted and self-centered.

Since we always obtain meaning of our existence through the object matter whom we serve³³, there are basically two possibilities for us to acquire such meaning:

(1) If we serve God as his administrators, our existence gains meaning from God and our actions are done to glorify God. Glorification of God through overpopulation (Gen. 1:28 says: "fill the earth", it does not say "overpopulate it", and this is the point at which the command to multiply has its limits), exploitation of natural resources, and universal pollution are self-contradictory. Our experience of God as a caring and loving God, however, becomes normative for the way in which we as his administrators should be experienced by others. Being created in God's image would then call for a life style of authority yet in humility, of determination yet with compassion, of faithfulness yet in dignity.

(2) If we, however, serve as our own administrators, our existence must gain meaning from ourselves, and our actions are done to glorify ourselves. We must perform heroic deeds, continuously triumphant over nature and over our own kind. We are then pitted against nature or against other people for short-term gains. Solitary humanity, as it emerges more and more today, may serve as a warning of the consequences if we abandon our position as God's administrators. Neglecting our responsibility to foster and cultivate God's creation, we consider it our own dominion and destroy its natural context. Erosion, climatic changes, overpopula-

³¹ Hengel (n. 26), p. 117, and G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1 (engl. transl. 1962), p. 145.

³² For the understanding of personhood cf. the excellent remarks by H. Thielicke, *Der Evangelische Glaube. Grundzüge der Dogmatik*, 2 (1973), 123–139, pp. 138 ff. Cf. also the penetrating analysis by W. Pannenberg, *The Question of God: Basic Questions in Theology*, 1 (1973), pp. 227 ff.; and *Der Mensch: Ebenbild Gottes?: Glaube und Wirklichkeit*. Kleinere Beiträge zum christlichen Denken (1975), pp. 66 ff. Pannenberg pointed out here that the idea of a person originates in the phenomenology of religious experience. Therefore one can talk only about a human being as a person in the full sense, if one recognizes a personal God. So also in *The Idea of God and Human Freedom* (engl. transl. 1973), esp. pp. 92 f.

³³ H.-J. Schoeps, *Was ist der Mensch? Philosophische Anthropologie als Geistesgeschichte der neuesten Zeit* (1960), p. 16.

tion with certain animals and epidemics for humans, animals, and plants are some of the consequences. Attempting to gain the world for our own, we are about to lose it.³⁴

If we try to summarize our findings concerning the compatibility of an evolutionary understanding of humanity with the biblical assertion that humanity is created in God's image, we reach the following *conclusions*:

Christianity has often been tempted to understand the assertion that humanity is created in the image of God as a historical point of departure to whom we are allowed to return through the redemptive work of Christ. Yet actually this assertion stands for God's creative intention, for a criterion for human conduct, and an (eschatological) goal. Similarly, the concepts of redemption and sanctification do not indicate a return to a state of primordial innocence, but the promised ascent to a new level of humanity. Thus the evolutionary understanding of humanity and the *imago Dei* concept are not opposed to each other. They rather enlighten each other with regards to the possibilities, limits, and goals of a new creation.

Evolutionary thought describes the material basis and limitation of the ascent of humanity. The Christian concept of a new humanity, inspired and enabled through the life and destiny of Jesus Christ, transcends the material basis and limitations without neglecting them. It shows avenues along which humanity must create itself and be recreated to become more than just an extension of the past and to reflect genuine novelty and newness. Since a strictly evolutionary interpretation of our past perceives this past largely as an aggregate of historical accidents, such view of the past does not suffice to give us reliable guidance for the future. Such guidance, however, is more needed than ever, since we have come to realize how limited, finite, and outright depressing the future can become if it is seen only under the aspect of the past. Thus the understanding of humanity as God's image is a necessary presupposition for our mastery of the future, even in an evolutionary context.³⁵

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³⁴ Cf. the accurate analysis by Schoeps (n. 33), p. 23.

³⁵ For an extensive treatment of some of the issues raised in this essay cf. H. Schwarz, *Our Cosmic Journey. Christian Anthropology in the Light of Current Trends in the Sciences, Philosophy and Theology* (1977).