



Were Neanderthals Created in God's Image?

What is our human biological heritage? The creation of humans climaxes the scene of the first chapter of the Bible: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule ...'" (Gen. 1:26a, NIV). What does it mean to be made in the image, in the likeness of the Creator? The biblical commentator, John Walton, [John Walton, *Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 131] defines image as "a physical manifestation of divine essence that bears the function of that which it represents; this gives the image-bearer the capacity to reflect the attributes of the one represented and act on his behalf." Assuming that this functional view of God's image (*imago Dei*) applies to modern human beings (*Homo sapiens*), does it also apply to early hominid groups? Were *Homo sapiens* miraculously shaped as a singularity from river-bed mud by the Creator's hands six millennia ago? Or, are *Homo sapiens* the end product of a long lineage of divinely created hominid products, extending back three million years to "Lucy" (*Australopithecus afarensis*) discovered by Donald Johanson in 1974?

Neanderthals (*Homo neandertalensis*) inhabited Europe and parts of the Middle East from 120,000 to 35,000 years ago. Soon after 1856, when the first Neanderthal remains were discovered in Germany, this hominid group was popularized as the primitive ancestors of modern Europeans. Subsequent discoveries demonstrated Neanderthal's large cranial capacity, burial practices, and caretaking characteristics as similar to *Homo sapiens*. Consequently, a "Multi-regional Evolutionary hypothesis" dominated anthropological explanation of human origins.

More recent archeological discoveries and forensic genetics revealed that early modern Europeans, Cro-Magnon, were not descendants of the Neanderthals, but migrated from Africa to Europe 45,000 years ago ("Out-of-Africa hypothesis") and co-existed with European Neanderthals. European *Homo sapiens* were "cousins" to Neanderthals rather than their progeny.

As Christians, who believe the Scriptures are inspired by God and trustworthy, where do we place the role of biblical Adam within the hominid story? Frequently,

diverse views of human origins have initiated harsh debates. Popularly the issue of origins is misconceived as warfare with two ideological battle lines: "biblical creationism" (humans divinely created 6000 years ago) fighting "atheistic evolution" (humans descending from a 20 million-year-old apelike ancestor through evolution). This limited perspective of only two alternatives has become a watershed issue of orthodoxy in many Christian circles. Unfortunately in those debates, the term "evolution" is frequently conflated and becomes a profanity! Too little recognition is given to the multiple Christian voices between these two extremes who are attempting to interpret with integrity the books of nature and Scripture. Why do we viciously debate this cloudy issue characterized by emerging, rather than conclusive evidence? Why are we so certain that our interpretation is the correct one? Can we commit to discovering truth, while holding our favorite theory with humility?

This issue of *PSCF* proposes novel answers to historical anthropological questions. Inspired by the early chapters of Genesis and insights from paleoanthropology, John McIntyre dialogues with respondents, Perry Yoder, James Hurd, and David Wilcox, by divulging an uncommon perspective on the essence and transmission of the Adamic sin nature. George Murphy's article brings a Christocentric perspective to the same topic. By describing Mesopotamia geological characteristics, the two subsequent articles by Carol and Alan Hill provide perspective on the Noachian flood, described in the later Genesis chapters of human history. Subsequent articles on another group of early hominids by Glenn Morton as well as the issue of death before Adam's fall by Perry Phillips contain both interesting and stimulating ideas. These authors may enlarge your perspective on the early chapters of Genesis or challenge basic premises that support your understanding of human origins. ⚙

Stepping cautiously into the fray!

Roman J. Miller, Editor

P.S. The first Neanderthals preceded biblical Adam by 100,000 years!