



In the previous two essays in this series on evolution and Christian faith, we examined the theological and the scientific data that need to be reconciled by faith and reason if we are to remain faithful both to divine revelation and to authentic scientific inquiry. In this essay, I propose a theological narrative that seeks to do precisely this by bringing together themes that we have explored throughout this series.

From all eternity, the Triune God willed to share his life with other persons who were not god. God chose to create angelic and human persons in his image, *i.e.* as knowers and lovers.

As pure spirits, the angelic creatures were created immediately. At their creation, some of them chose God while others rejected Him.

The former we call the angels; the latter we call the demons. As spirit-matter composites, human creatures were created and are still being created over time. It was fitting for God, as we discussed in an earlier essay, to produce not only human beings but also all living beings through an evolutionary process that better revealed His glory. It was then and remains now a process that is moved and directed by divine providence.

From a theologian's perspective, biological evolution was a 3.5 billion year process, directed by God, to advance living matter until it was apt to receive a rational soul. This critical point in evolutionary history occurred 100,000 years ago in southern Africa among a group of anatomically modern human beings when a handful of individuals evolved the neurocognitive capacity to serve as a basis for abstract thinking and language.

How exactly this happened will always be a matter of speculation. If the biological capacity for language presupposes the acquisition of a package of pro-language mutations in the human genome, as biologists assume, then I can imagine

a scenario where two anatomically modern humans, each with a subset of these pro-language genetic mutations, mate and conceive children. Marriage partners are often exchanged between groups of hunter-gatherers dispersed over larger areas of land so I can imagine that the two mates would have come from two somewhat distinct but related gene pools each carrying distinctive language-related genes.

Their children would have inherited the complete package of pro-language genes, bringing together the genetic advantages of each of their parents, and thus, would have acquired a novel

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capacity for language. With God's infusion of the human soul, they would be the first instances of behaviorally modern human infants surrounded by a tribe of closely related anatomically modern relatives who would not have full language capacity.

Growing up together in the tribe, these infants would have spontaneously developed a new language that only they could speak and understand. A similar phenomenon was observed when fifty or so young deaf children were first brought together at a center for special education in Nicaragua in 1977. Within five years, the deaf children enrolled in this school and another school close by had invented a pidgin-like sign language that in time was taken to a higher level of complexity by the younger students. This more complex sign language is now known as the *Idioma de Señas de Nicaragua*.

When they attained their maturity, it is likely that these behaviorally modern humans, these speaking bipeds, would have preferentially mat-

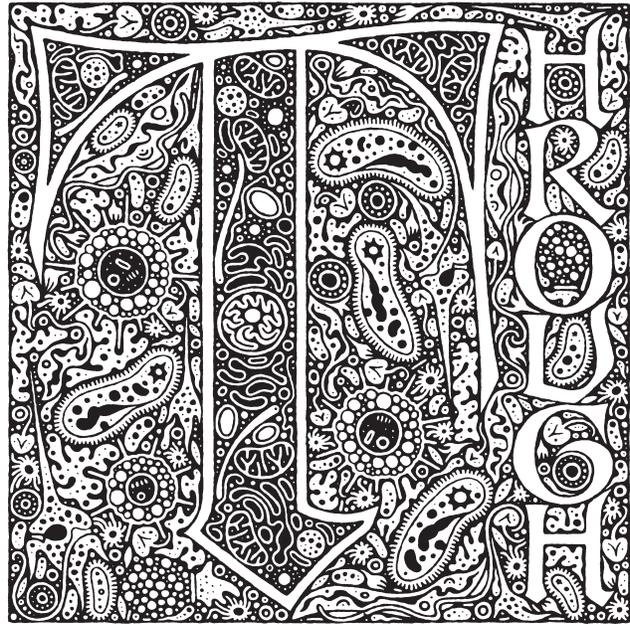
ed with each other because of their shared ability to speak a common language. Their children in turn would not only have inherited the capacity for language but would also have actually learned their mother tongue. Since language is clearly a beneficial trait for the survival of the species, it would not have taken long for these speaking bipeds to dominate and outcompete their non-speaking anatomically modern relatives. These speaking bipeds would migrate out of southern Africa and would eventually populate the rest of the continent and the globe.

As I have noted in earlier essays in this series, it would be fitting for God to have given the original speaking bipeds—our original parents—the grace and preternatural gifts that they would have needed to attain their destiny of sharing in the life of the Triune God. They would have been conceived in a state of original justice. However, once these infants had attained their maturity, they would have been given the opportunity to choose or reject God as the angels before them had been given the same opportunity. Tragically, they rejected Him, forfeiting the gifts they had been given, not only for themselves, but also for their progeny.

In the fullness of time, these original speaking bipeds and all their descendants would be redeemed by Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, so that they would be able, once again, to share in the inner life of the Trinity, and so, to live forever.

I am often asked three questions in response to this theological narrative. First, does the narrative presuppose single or multiple original parents? Neither. It suggests that both possibilities can be reconciled with the theological data because there could either have been one contemporaneous original couple or a handful of original contemporaneous and even related members of a family. In the same way that Eve led Adam to sin, if there was in fact a first community, one or more of the original speaking bipeds could have led his or her relatives to do the same.

Second, does this account not endorse sibling incest? This problem is not a new one. As St. Thomas recognized, any theological account of a single original couple would have entailed sibling marriage to ensure the survival of the human race. Thus, he acknowledges that only



parent-child relationships are excluded by the natural law. Brother-sibling relationships, though excluded today by law, would have been necessary early in the history of our species (see *Summa theologiæ* III.54.4). Now, if there was a first community, then this problem is lessened or even eliminated.

Third, how should we understand the interbreeding that took place between behaviorally modern humans and their archaic hominin contemporaries, the Neanderthals and the Denisovans? Theologically understood, these would be instances of bestiality, which still occurs today. However, because of the similarities in appearance and behavior among these closely-related hominin species, it is likely that it would have occurred more frequently in the past than it does today. The genetic similarity would have also made these matings fruitful in a way not possible today. T&E

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