



A Long Way East of Eden 7: Roots

Pete Lowman

A Long Way East of Eden by Pete Lowman was first published in 2002. We are grateful to the author for his work in preparing it for publication on **bethinking.org**.

Roots

understanding the breaking-point

[Back to Contents]

Postmodern culture is a stranger to profundity.

We've seen the 'modern/postmodern' story: generation succeeds generation, pursuing (at least till recently) one 'god-replacement' after another; and none of it quite meets our needs. Meanwhile, however, the fundamental value-structure of our whole 'civilization' is under very serious strain, and our physical environment still more so; but we seem incapable of dealing with, or even facing, the issues. Something is going badly wrong, but we seem unable to ask what it is. Postmodern culture is desperately shy of such seriousness.

Surface, immediacy, image: this is postmodernity. And it isn't enough. Yet to find 'profundity' you have to dig deep, beyond the surface – and to know where to dig. But we no longer know where to look; and one place in particular that we've closed off is the past. The postmodernist is sure of nothing about the past; history is a mass of conflicting interpretations. Sooner or later, it means nothing for us at all.

Yet we remain hungry. A mark of postmodern culture is the wistful yearning after tradition; we mix and match and come up with things bearing

little relation to past reality. But we hunger for a story that gives us roots.

There is a contender. In previous sections, we've explored the pressure points we face in *identity* (who am I? what is my worth?); *purpose* (what am I living for?); *ethics* (how do we know what to do?); *truth* (why should we believe anything at all?); and *love* (why do our relationships fail? what could help make them work?). We've seen how many of these issues link in with the loss of God from our culture's heart.

Perhaps we need to listen again to the oldest story of all, because it unifies these themes, and suggests what's gone wrong.

Here it is, from the book of Genesis...

Proud to be human

Genesis opens the Bible with a brief narrative depicting our world's origins and creation. (It's a good section to read with the question, 'What is God like?') But that's only the book's very first chapter. It then moves on to present the arrival of humankind.

And what it gives us here is an extremely important statement. It describes humanity, our identity and concerns, 'as we were meant to be', before everything went wrong. It offers a confident, attractive vision of fourteen aspects of what it means to be truly human – a confidence we badly need amid all the depersonalizing forces of postmodernity. Human beings, we can read, are:[1]

§ part indeed of the animal creation; yet their coming also marks a radical break in our planet's story (see Genesis 1:24-26.[2]) So, we're kin indeed to the animals; yet that's not all. We're not just 'naked apes', 'nothing but mammals'.

§ created 'in the image of God' (1:26-27). Now there is an astounding phrase; if we dare to believe it, it offers a highly significant element for our identity. So, every human being has absolute, intrinsic worth and dignity.

§ responsible before God to steward and care for the environment (1:26-28).[3]

§ called to 'be fruitful and increase in number' (until the earth is 'filled'; we must be close to that now? – 1:28). Family life and growth, then, are basic to being human; they aren't just a biological

drive that gets prettified by our sentiment.

§ marked by an aesthetic sense – enjoying what is *'pleasing to the eye'* or *'good for food'* (2:9). So the love of artistic beauty (or good Chinese food!) isn't just an accidental by-product of the evolutionary process; it correlates to something deeply human.

§ explorers and adventurers (look at the interests expressed in 2:10-14).

§ beings capable of making use of the earth's wealth for artistic and practical purposes (2:12).

§ workers, whose nature is fulfilled in purposeful, creative labour (see 2:15). We recall again Brunner's remark: both Marxism and capitalism tend to see work as an unfortunate necessity, a means only to the acquisition of material goods. The Bible regards creative, caring work as an activity (and hence a need) intrinsically bound up with being human; even if its nature has been changed by the problems arising from the Fall. (Such a view has major implications for how we approach the urgency of the unemployment issue, of course.)

§ in real relationship with God; God is not hidden from them (2:16).

§ marked by genuine and responsible freedom; they know the commands of God and can obey or ignore them (2:16-17).

§ built for friendship and companionship – lovers, sexual beings (2:18, 22-24).

§ scientists! (2:19) – called to discern and define the nature of each member of the animal creation.

§ artists with words (2:19-20 again) – capable of taking language and using it to create something new, that will give expression to what is present in God's created reality.

§ poets – watch how Adam bursts out in exuberant song as he encounters his lover (2:23)!

Here are things worth living for – things we were *made* for. And when we respond to the skilled craftsman, the Arctic explorer, the brilliant guitarist, the creative developer of natural resources, the campaigner for the environment, the loving parent, the innovative microbiologist, the imaginative novelist, the good cook or the exuberant lover – when we sense joy at seeing the glory of the human being expressed in these ways, we aren't just being sentimental. We're relating to reality.

Nor is this an idealism that should fade before hard sociobiological dogma, that insists we are

machines sublimating in apparently 'human' acts our genetic drives and biochemical impulses. Rather, our gut reaction is an accurate perception of truth: of what it is to be authentically human as God made us.

It is good to be human! And that needs saying in our century....

This is such a relevant statement that it's tragic to find Genesis 'out of reach' for many people because of non issues. *'Surely you can't think Genesis worth reading?'* Why not? *'Well, surely you don't believe in Adam and Eve?'* But how does one go about *'believing in Adam and Eve?'* The word *'Adam'* is simply the Hebrew for *'Man'*, and *'Eve'*, as Genesis states, comes from *'Mother of all the living'* (3:20). So *'believing in Adam and Eve'* simply means believing that at some point there came a first-ever couple who could be described as truly human, which is obviously true. Logically, they're called *'The Man'* and *'The Mother of All the Living'*. What Genesis then offers is the idea that our history was shaped by a fundamental crisis occurring to this couple (rather than later on).

'But you really can't think Genesis worth reading? What about science?' Again, it's a tragedy to miss this profound narrative because of such a red herring; the whole question misses the point. Genesis isn't a scientific textbook, so it doesn't speak to questions we might find intriguing: like, To what extent did God make use of evolution in creation? And 'the Man' and 'the Mother': did other humanoids exist before their creation, similar yet lacking God's gift of that invisible 'spirit' which marks truly human life? Genesis simply doesn't tell us.[4]

'But doesn't it insist that the world was made in a week?' No, it certainly doesn't. It structures its story around six 'days' of creation, but it isn't concerned to spell out what it means by 'day' either. Indeed it puts a question-mark over the matter; for the 'great light' of the sun, marking day and night, isn't part of the story till halfway

through the process (the fourth 'day', 1:14-18). So we may read these 'days', if we choose, as 24-hour periods; or, as elsewhere in the Bible[5], far longer ones. In fact the Hebrew original, unlike our English Bibles, describes these days as 'day one', 'day two', etc; or, 'a first day', 'a second day'. So if this issue is getting in our way, we may recall that the text offers the option of five enormous gaps of millions of years of process, each of which follows and precedes 'a day' of God's intervening initiative, God's special creative action.

'But can you take Genesis seriously now we know about evolution?' In practice we evidently can, and do. Large numbers of practising scientists (eg. members of *Christians in Science* in Britain, or of the *American Scientific Affiliation*) have no difficulty believing both in the Genesis accounts and in evolutionary theory. Clearly, learning from one doesn't rule out learning from the other.[6]

It would be tragic for such things to rob us of the vital input from this profound, primal narrative...

The Fall

It is good to be human! And that needs saying in our century. However, the story goes on. Something went wrong...

'Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the Man he had formed' (2:8). But into that garden[7] – this is Genesis 3 now – enters the serpent.

'The serpent' is an image we find in other biblical writers representing a spirit-power of conscious evil, utterly opposed to God.[8] As westerners we have a knee-jerk reaction against the notion of spirit-powers, but to a large extent this is a matter of packaging. Set the same notion in a context of Tibetan Buddhism, Latin American 'magic realism', or Native American or Australian Aboriginal belief, and many westerners find it easier to cope with.[9] Multiculturalism is eroding our easy assurance that we know how the

universe works. But be that as it may, in the next verses the whole narrative comes right home. These are supposedly ancient myths; yet anyone with a code of right and wrong who has experienced temptation to depart from it will recognise the psychological realism of what follows in the primal catastrophe.

Temptation, step one: the serpent *'said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"* It was the one command God had given these two first human beings – to prove, and enable them to express, their love and, especially, their trust. The attack is 'epistemological', challenging our grasp of truth: Did God *really* say? Do we have access to his words? Is it really so annoyingly clear what's right in the particular issue I'm facing?

How can we know what's right? This has been a prime question ever since the Enlightenment – but we've probably heard that voice whispering in our own moral lives too. But there's probably another issue here. Did God *really* say... could his word to humankind *really* pivot on such a matter as food? Could so small an action really be important?[10] (*'It's only a minor tax detail, and the taxman already takes enough.' 'It's only a white lie.' 'I'll only sleep with her once – it will do their marriage good.' 'Yes, we did fix the accounts, but it was for a good purpose.'*)

The point is immediately recognisable: temptation is powerful when it comes pretending to be so – extremely – minor. It's interesting that Jesus repeats this whole struggle (but in a desert, not a garden), at the start of his ministry; and again, the first temptation comes in these apparently 'minor' terms of food.[11] (His way of handling it also repeats Genesis: immediately he affirms the accessibility of God's commands with *'It is written...'*[12], confronting the truth-issue, the *'Did God really say...?'*) Jesus' teaching was that ethics speaks directly to the detail of everyday existence, as well as to the major struggles: *'Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.'*[13] The Genesis tempter urges the opposite: we can cheat on the small change and still hope to have the ethical muscle to do what is right when the major issues come (and perhaps our job is on the line).

Maybe there's a third issue here too. The tempter's *'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'* caricatures the divine command as something stricter than it was. This, too, is a recognizable undermining of ethics – the lure of legalism, which triggers the reaction of abandoning restraint altogether. The woman makes the correction as the narrative continues: *'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, "You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'* The first part of the serpent's reply – *'You will not surely die'* – again is so true to our experience of temptation. There will be no penalty; it's alright; nothing will go wrong (or, theologically, God won't judge us). And finally comes the most important sentence in the story: evil adds, *'God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'*

Here is the central decision from which everything will follow. To obey God, or not; to try to have your *'eyes opened'* in apartness from God; to hope for autonomous self fulfilment, to seek to *'know good and evil'* in apartness from God; in the end, to attempt to be *'like God'*, determining and setting the rules for our own universe. *'Choose for yourself', 'dare to know'* – the watchword of the *'modern'* world, according to Kant. If autonomy was the hallmark of *'modern'* western culture^[14] – *'man come of age'*, functioning apart from God – then here is its image. If there is a God, that choice is the crucial issue for us, both as a race and as individuals.

The irony in the text is, of course, that they already knew what was good and evil: God had told them what, in his love, he wanted them to do. The issue was whether they trusted him. So to seek to *'know good and evil'* was to deny that *'good and evil'* were the same as *'what God desires or rules out'*. It was to seek to be Nietzsche's Superman, fabricating your own ethics, deciding how your world should be run. As we have seen, dislodging God from the heart of our ethics has led in the long run to a moral vacuum. This fundamental question – Who is to run the world, to decide what is right and wrong? Who is to be the ultimate Lord: I or God? – finally determines life's direction for each of us, and for our culture.

The tragedy was that they lost the very thing they were reaching out to seize. The vital issue in life, says St Paul, is to *'live by faith'*; so it's not surprising that faith, trust, is the question here. The first humans didn't trust God to love them totally; they thought there was something better to be grasped at than what he would give them. (Again, for many of us, that choice, that untrusting temptation, is quite familiar.) The New Testament sets out the wonder of what God had in mind: he desires to share all his glory with us, to live within us and transform us from within, until ultimately, unimaginably, we actually grow transfigured into the *'image of his Son'*, Jesus. This is central to the radiant vision inspiring St Paul; learning to know God means, eventually, all that is his becomes ours: all that love, peace, joy, gentleness, glory, and power for goodness can one day stream out through our personalities, as they did from Christ's.^[15] The glory of the God of love is that he shares all he has with us.^[16] But it is by entering into that loving process that we will *'be like God'*; not (like the first humans) by snatching pitifully at control of our own universe. Yet we all do it: it's *my* life; this is *my* world; *'I'll do it my way'*.

We know what happened next. The *'declaration of autonomy'* tied in with a prioritizing of physical gratification (it often does). Man and woman rejected God's rule. And a total change of consciousness indeed followed. *'When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked...'* And then come the tragic words: *'Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees...'*

Immeasurable loss. Throughout the millennia that have followed, saints, sages, mystics and outright cranks have done almost everything imaginable in quest of recovered communion with the Eternal One. And here, in the dawn of human history, he had taken on human form and was walking in the evening coolness to meet the people he loved. They knew the relationship had irrevocably

altered: they hid.

Hid among the trees: God's gifts, *'pleasant to the eye and good for food'* (2:9). Maybe we've been doing it ever since; hiding from the loss of ultimate transcendence among all kinds of inadequate, substitute, alternative desires. Hiding too from that disturbing voice among the gifts God has given us, among so many of the things we saw in Genesis 2 that are basic to our humanness; hiding from our sense of loss with the I-Pod, the packed schedule, the urge for power or achievement, acquisition, sexual ecstasy, the family unit.[17] Nonetheless the voice comes to the man: *'Where are you?'*

Not, of course, because God didn't know. A Being that a human writer could call God would not need to wonder where his people are. But for the humans, it was the key question that needed to be faced (so too, perhaps, today): Where are we? Why are we in this position?

'Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?' The man is faced with another crucial choice. Confession and repentance were possible. Who knows what mercy might have followed? But no: what we read is again familiar and realistic, the rapid passing of the buck...

'The man said, "The woman you put here with me"' (it is God's fault, my environment's, the woman's, anything but my own), *"she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."*

'Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"'

'The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."'

Paradise lost... Yet at this point the utterly unforeseeable possibility of redemption enters the story. The judgment God pronounces on the demonic power that has contrived the whole catastrophe concludes, *'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.'* Throughout the centuries that followed, expectation of this *'offspring'* who would break the power of evil was a longing that haunted humankind; Christians believe it was when Christ himself was born to a woman, and then – in his death – was struck by the worst the

Enemy could do, that evil was finally broken. In which case there could be no clearer picture of the unsearchably loving nature of the God we worship. Here, in the moment of treachery, he guarantees his own identification with this deceived and ruined rabble to the point where he himself, God in Christ, will hang on a cross to solve their problem, crying out in anguish and horror: *'My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?'*[18]

...Now it begins

But now the wheels have begun to turn; the processes are underway that will lead to the world we know. The next verses record a spreading breakdown of relationships. The vertical, God/human relation is broken; the horizontal relationships begin to follow suit. It is as if we are disconnected from the power-source for love that would make them work; like an electric fire disconnected from the mains, still glowing now but slowly turning cold. We've already watched the man try to shift his guilt to the woman, instead of standing by her in mutual care and protection. A few verses later comes God's prophetic warning of the results in sexual relationship – *'Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you'*: desire and domination replace the liberty of love that God had planned.

And it spreads. The relationship between humankind and nature also now changes: *'Cursed is the ground because of you'* (meaningful enough words in today's environment); *'through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you.'* How different could it have been? We don't know; we are outside Eden. *'So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth, to guard the way to the tree of life.'* Banished from Eden; shut out from the heart of life.

Where does the break lie in our 'loss of God'? We sometimes view things (this book may have done so) as if our culture has somehow sent the Almighty packing. That would of course be a foolish thing to have done; and it might explain the difficulties we face. But the notion is

arrogantly absurd. We sent the Almighty packing? The issue raised by Genesis is the same one raised at the end of the Bible, where the full, catastrophic consequences of our failed autonomy are repeatedly 'released'.^[19] It is the one expressed by French sociologist Jacques Ellul (better known for his acclaimed *The Technological Society*) in the title of his book *Hope in a Time of Abandonment*. Perhaps that is how we should think of our poisoned oceans, our repetitive but increasingly destructive conflicts, our ruined ozone layer; it may not be we who have abandoned God, it may be he who, provoked beyond endurance, has abandoned us to our self-destruction. (Or to quote the refrain of rock poet Steve Turner's catalogue of humanly-created evils in 'I Looked Down': *'And I'm turning my face from you.'*^[20])

But the breakdown of relations continues: the next verses introduce the first murder.

The Outsider

The fundamental human problem, according to Marx, can be defined in terms of alienation. Marx was right – though his diagnosis (and hence his solution) didn't go deep enough. Jesus insists that the most fundamental thing in our lives, determining our experience of alienation, is not our work (as Marx suggested). Rather, the ultimate focal point must logically be our relation with our Maker – if he exists. If he does, and if our relationship with him is broken, then the inevitable result must be alienation spreading into our other relationships in ever-widening circles: intra-familial crisis, marital crisis, class struggle, ethnic, racial, tribal and communal tension.

Something of this is what happens in Genesis 4. To this reader, the realism is again striking.

Outside Eden, the issue that causes the first murder is worship. (Does that seem strange? If religion is where we seek to link into the universe's heart, then it's going to matter to us; and in our state of alienation, it will trigger major emotional storms as we find we 'can't make it work'.) Cain brings God a sacrifice of what grows naturally. Abel, the shepherd, sacrifices a sheep. Abel's offering is accepted; Cain's is not.

What is the point here? Is Abel to be seen as

learning from what God did earlier (3:21); is he remembering that death was the inevitable consequence of our rebellion (2:17), and that somehow this must be taken into account – that (as the New Testament puts it, looking to Jesus' ultimate sacrifice^[21]) *'without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness'*? Is the acceptance of Abel's offering over Cain's simply educational,^[22] teaching both brothers the way to approach God, challenging them to reflect on the reasons? We don't know. What we do read is that Cain wasn't having it, and murdered Abel. So the breakdown of relationships moved a step further.

What happens then? God asks: *'Where is your brother Abel?'* *'I don't know'*, replies Cain. *'Am I my brother's keeper?'* The answer, of course, is Yes; love involves each of us in unlimited responsibility for the wellbeing of one another (*'Love your neighbour as yourself'*). Cain denies that (just as we do, particularly when faced with global poverty); alienation is the inevitable result.

The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth..."

'The ground... the ground... the ground... the earth... the land... the earth': the bond between ourselves and our environment is repeatedly stressed, strangely to western ears. But westerners aren't always right (and what have we done to the world from which we've separated ourselves?). It wouldn't be so strange to other cultures – 'First People', Australian Aboriginals, Native Americans – who sense much more intimate relationship binding us (and our right- or wrong-doing) to the land.^[23] Still, Cain is alienated, egocentric man, and what he really worries about is not his loss of God's presence, nor 'the land', but his own physical safety...

"...I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

But the Lord said to him, "Not so..." Then the Lord

put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Wandering, east of Eden.

Homelessness, alienation. Cut off from the presence of God;[24] alienated from the land, and from his work; denying his brother; a *'restless wanderer on the earth'*, lost in the waste land, a long way east of Eden. What does Cain do? (What do any of us do, struggling with our own sense of wandering?) Cain seeks shelter, in family and community; he *'lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch.'* Putting down roots in his loneliness: seeking something he could rely on. But as many of us know too well, if you seek shelter by hastening into relationship, you may just bring your alienation into it... And as for the city, alienation can await us there too.

Do the next verses offer us a final way of thinking about our own culture's wanderings? Cain's family are creative, and a mini-renaissance takes place. There are breakthroughs in agriculture (Genesis 4:20), music (verse 21), and metal-working (verse 22). Unfortunately, progress doesn't help if it's built on the wrong foundation;[25] the section draws to a close with Lamech (himself an innovator, the inventor of bigamy (verse 19) – relational breakdown carried a step further) boasting openly of the murder he has carried out. The dark deepens; technical progress built on bad foundations leads merely to greater violence. By 6:11 the earth is *'full of violence'*. The eventual result is the obliteration of much of humanity in an ecological catastrophe (chapters 6-8).[26]

So the story goes. The central relationship breaks down through our declaration of autonomy and our determination to deify ourselves, run our own universe, determine our own 'good and evil'. The loss of God leads to ever-widening relational powerlessness and breakdown, then to increasing violence. We hide from alienation in sexual and familial relations and the flight to the city. Technical progress is built on bad foundations and so leads to yet more violence and final environmental disaster.

And if the ancient narratives really were the Word

of the living God, setting out a paradigm of what happens when a culture builds its life on exclusion of God; what 'way home', what possibility of healing and renewal, might they also offer?

[Go to Chapter 8]

© 2009 Pete Lowman

This article is used with the kind permission of Pete Lowman.

References:

[1] Parts of what follows on Genesis 2-4 owe an enormous amount to the insights of David Gooding of Queen's University, Belfast, and John Lennox and Peter Elwood of Cardiff.

[2] The creation of humankind is presented within the sixth section of Genesis 1, that is, as part of the animal creation; but it is clear from verse 26 that it also marks a radical break in the story.

[3] The word *'rule'* in Genesis 1:26 obviously doesn't have the sense of egocentric exploitation, since that whole spirit of *'domination'* is presented precisely as a consequence of the Fall in chapter 3, as we'll see. (In fact the right meaning of caring and fatherly *'rule'* is a major theme in the early parts of the Old Testament; see, for example, Samuel's deep discomfort at Israel's move from 'judges' to more authoritarian 'kings' in 1 Samuel 8.)

[4] This isn't to deny that it includes comments we can take as hints; but these aren't its main theme, and evidently, from the interpretative debates that take place among scientists who are Christians, they can be read in more than one way.

[5] Eg. 2 Corinthians 6:2 or 2 Peter 3:8.

[6] This writer, as a Christian, has assumed the correctness of evolutionary theory out of personal inability to assess the debates around it. But it should be added that our present construct of evolutionary theory isn't something complete and 'proven'. (Scientific theories never finally are, of course.) Some huge and fascinating problems do remain unsettled; see particularly Phillip Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* (1991); Stephen Jay Gould's extended review in the July 1992 *Scientific American*; Johnson's response in his second edition of 1993; Michael Behe's *Darwin's Black*

Box (1996); John Lennox's *God's Undertaker* (2007). (As Berlinski remarked in Commentary, scepticism regarding Darwinian orthodoxy seems now to have erupted out of the ghetto.) It's evident that a number of theorists affirm Darwinian orthodoxy quite consciously because they are determined not to believe in God; but if you don't have a problem with God, then the turmoil generated by these challenges becomes intriguing. A particularly interesting issue is the possibility that evolutionary theory, to work, may even necessitate intelligent design underlying it.

As Johnson's and Behe's work are the current 'storm centre', it's worth noting how this whole design issue was raised earlier entirely outside the Christian context by the renowned cosmologists Fred Hoyle (the father of steady-state theory, described by the Sunday Times as 'Britain's best known astronomer') and Chandra Wickramasinghe. They asserted (in *Evolution from Space* (1981)) that the whole evolutionary process is so problematic, and the chance against random processes producing the complexity of life so high, that it becomes necessary to postulate a controlling intelligence watching over it. 'It is not hard', they say, 'to find writings in which the myth is stated that the Darwinian theory of evolution is well-proven by the fossil record. But one finds that the higher the technical quality of the writing the weaker the claims that are made' (p.147). 'The evolutionary record leaks like a sieve'; yet 'nobody seems prepared to blow the whistle decisively on the theory. If Darwinism were not considered to be socially desirable ... it would of course be otherwise' (p.148). The traditional theory, like pre-Copernican astronomy, survives because 'the issue is dominated more by sociology and religion than by science. More precisely, by anti religion' (p.2). Hoyle and Wickramasinghe are definitely not Christians, and are anxious to say that their 'clear cut view' that 'there is a purpose' in the evolutionary process 'is not the old concept of special creation' (p.147). They suggest the possibility of an extra-terrestrial 'non carbonaceous intelligence' at work 'which by no means need be God, however', for instance 'an extremely complex silicon chip' (p.139). But the intelligences postulated are to be responsible not merely for designing 'the biochemicals' and giving rise to carbonaceous life but also for creating some at least of the physical laws (p.143). To say that mere physical laws (or 'Nature') necessitated the emergence of life on

earth, they argue, is only a short step from saying that a God made the laws; so the 'obvious escape route' (an interesting phrase) 'is to look outside the earth... The advantage of looking to the whole universe is rather that... it offers the possibility of high intelligence within the universe that is not God' (p.31). It's fascinating that the desire to avoid God should be such a motivating force behind their thinking. Of course their theories met with a chilly reception (the idea of cosmic intelligence 'sends shudders down the spine of orthodox scientists', commented the Sunday Times; 'It is rather like the arrival of an illegitimate child in a respectable Victorian family.') But it was significant to see internationally renowned, non-Christian cosmologists insisting that evolutionary theory, far from 'disproving creation', actually implied belief in a higher, guiding intelligence. Thus the idea that evolution rules out believing in a Creator – or learning from Genesis – is a total red herring.

[7] This is an odd verse. In what sense can there be a 'garden' if the entire environment is a perfect creation? The Old Testament writers speak of other intelligences besides humankind in the universe, whose rebellion against God predates ours. Is the text hinting that there is already a problem in the world outside Eden? Is that why the word 'subdue' is used for the humans' task (1:28)? Is Eden envisaged as a special, divinely-created bridgehead from which a whole new order could flood out into the surrounding disharmony, bringing it to new life? Who knows?

[8] Eg. Revelation 12:9 or 20:2. Serpent-worship was of course important for much ancient paganism.

[9] *Star Trek* plots repeatedly present non-physical entities very similar to spirits, but call them 'sub-space beings', an image that circumvents the knee-jerk.

[10] The best commentary on the issues at stake here and throughout the Fall narrative (for those who enjoy science fiction!) is arguably C.S. Lewis' novel *Perelandra*.

[11] Matthew 4:3. Soon afterwards he teaches his disciples a prayerful expression of faith where they consciously recognize that their dependence on God extends to the mundanities of food: 'Give us this day our daily bread' (Matthew 6:11).

[12] Matthew 4:4, 7, 10.

[13] Luke 16:10.

[14] The link is often explicit. Erich Fromm titled one of his books *You Shall Be As Gods*, using the

1611 King James translation of this Genesis verse. Edmund Leach wrote, *'Men have become like gods. Isn't it about time that we understood our divinity? Science offers us total mastery over our environment and our destiny... All of us need to understand that God, or Nature, or Chance, or Evolution, or the Course of History, or whatever you like to call it, can't be trusted any more. We simply must take charge of our own fate.'* (Quoted in Colin Chapman, *Christianity on Trial* (1981), p.233. Note Leach's reference to the issue of trust here.) And there is Sartre: *'If I've discarded God the Father, there has to be someone to invent values... It's up to you to give [life] a meaning.'* (*Existentialism*, p.54). New Age often makes the same move: *'Know that you are God'*, commands Shirley MacLaine in *Dancing in the Light* (1985), p.350.

[15] See Romans 8:29, among many other passages: 1 John 3:1-2, Galatians 4:19, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 2 Thessalonians 2:14, Revelation 21:11, etc.

[16] The end point is Revelation 3:21, that in our ultimate unity with God we will *'share his throne'*.

[17] Cf. St Paul on our attempts to *'suppress'* the sense of God, Romans 1:18, 28. He describes the result as a tendency to *'worship and serve created things rather than the Creator'* (v.25). We have seen that throughout this study.

[18] Jesus' words on the cross in Matthew 27:46. In Kurosawa's cinematic epic *Ran*, there is a moment when the fool upbraids the gods: *'Are you so bored up there that you must crush us like ants? Is it such fun to see men weep?'* Another character responds: *'It is the gods who weep. They see us killing each other. Over and over since time began. They cannot save us from ourselves.'* But the message of Genesis is different: God did step in, at enormous cost, to offer us the possibility of being *'saved from ourselves'*.

[19] The concept is repeated several times in the apocalyptic style of Revelation; for example, Revelation 9:1-2, 9:13-16, 16:8, 20:7-8, and probably 6:1, 3, 5, 7 and 7:1-3. We find the idea also in St Paul's more sober style, when he foresees the emergence of an ultimate evil dictatorial force but adds to his readers, *'Now you know what is holding him back so that he may be revealed at the proper time'* (2 Thessalonians 2:3-7).

[20] Steve Turner, *Up to Date* (1983), p.162.

[21] Hebrews 9:22.

[22] As perhaps 4:7 suggests.

[23] Nor, indeed, to Old Testament Jews: see, for example, the effect of human wrongdoing on the land in Leviticus (26:34-35, 42-43), Jeremiah(3:1, 12:4, 23:10), or at the close of 2 Chronicles. In this worldview, ecological collapse is directly linked to people's moral behaviour; *'the land'* is very literally *'polluted'* by bloodshed or sexual perversion, and *'vomits out its inhabitants'* (Leviticus 18:24-28, Numbers 35:32-34). Cf. also Paul's linkage between the repentance of people and the transformation of the entire creation in Romans 8:19-23.

[24] Even though it is still only by God's mercy (the 'mark') that Cain survives.

[25] For example, in a totalitarian state matters become even worse if dictatorship can monitor its citizens continuously with highly advanced technology.

[26] Jesus had an additional comment to make about this narrative, that that generation were so preoccupied with the everyday activities of *'eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage'* that they ignored the spiritual crisis of their culture and were completely taken by surprise when catastrophe swept down upon them (Matthew 24:37-39). (Even the flood sounds less un contemporary now we have maps listing the cities and island-nations due to go underwater through global warming!)

[Go to Chapter 8]

© 2009 Pete Lowman

This article is used with the kind permission of Pete Lowman.