

Human Nature, Original Sin and Divine Redemption

“How is it that hardly any major religion has looked at science and concluded, ‘This is better than we thought! The Universe is much bigger than our prophets said, grander, more subtle, more elegant’? Instead they say, ‘No, no, no! My god is a little god, and I want him to stay that way.’ A religion, old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the Universe as revealed by modern science might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths.” Carl Sagan¹

Introduction

For Christians, Genesis chapter 3 is a very important part of the Bible, for it describes the ‘fall’ of man and on this chapter the universal doctrine of ‘original sin’ is based.² This doctrine is important because it underlies and explains the universal need for divine redemption by the Redeemer, Jesus Christ. According to this doctrine everyone is born with ‘original sin’ and therefore everyone needs to be redeemed by the sacrificial and atoning death of Christ. But what exactly is ‘original sin’ and in what does redemption, or liberation, from ‘original sin’ consist? Taking the account in Genesis 3 as a starting point, the purpose of this essay is to try to give an answer to these questions, in terms we can understand today.³

The Biblical Account versus the Doctrine of ‘Original Sin’

In Genesis chapter 1, the first account of creation in 6 days gives the impression that everything was created in perfect order and condition, and that the Creator was very pleased with the result (“*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good*”; Gen 1,31). But in the second account of the creation (Gen 2,4b – 3,24), it is described how humans were expelled from the state of goodness, innocence and perfection that the Creator had intended for them, because of their disobedience to the only command that God had entrusted them to observe (Gen 3,17-24).⁴ They took and ate from the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil”,⁵ from which God had commanded them not to eat and, as a result, they were expelled from Paradise and found themselves alone and suffering in various ways.

¹ From his *Pale Blue Dot*, London: Headline, 1995

² The account is often called “the second account of Creation”, and includes Gen 2,4b – 3,24. For the doctrine of ‘original sin’ and the ‘fall’, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, English edition, paragraphs 385-421.

³ Although the word “sin” is not actually mentioned in this passage, the classical sin of disobedience towards God’s command forms the core of the story. Christian theologians would therefore seem to be justified in interpreting this as the account of the first, or rather the ‘original sin’. What follows is not strictly speaking an exegetical study and it is assumed the reader is already familiar with the texts. It is, rather, a theological reflection in the light of modern scientific and psychological findings.

⁴ It is a profound counter-reflection on the first chapter, most probably written during the Babylon exile of the People of Israel, since it appears to transmit the experiences and reflections of that exile: just as the People of Israel had failed to keep God’s commandments and were punished by being exiled from the Promised Land, so the first humans had lost their original innocence by breaking the divine commandment and were punished by being expelled from the Paradise of Eden. The loss of original human innocence seems to have been modeled on the losses suffered by the People of Israel, especially the loss of their homeland and independence in the 6th century BC (cf. *The Pentateuch*, Joseph Blenkinsopp, London: SCM Press, 1992, pp. 63-67).

⁵ The fruit of this tree is likely to be a symbol for divine wisdom, the consumption of which would therefore correspond to the development of the moral conscience, or even the passage from adolescence to maturity, as argued by George Wesley Buchanan in “The Old Testament Meaning of the Knowledge of Good and Evil”, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 75 (1956), 114-120. It is extremely unlikely that the fruit of this tree represents *carnal* knowledge, and eating it corresponds to sexual union, as proposed by some of the earliest

Traditionally, this act of disobedience to God's command has been understood as the 'original sin'. Its original 'inspiration' is said to have been the spirit of evil that resided in the serpent and tempted the first parents to disobey the divine commandment (Gen 3,1-7). Following this act of disobedience, the Christian doctrine of original sin teaches that Adam and Eve then 'fell' from a state of grace and lost their 'original holiness and justice.' More significantly for human life, the 'original sin' spread from generation to generation of their descendants, becoming endemic to human society and accounting for the persistence and prevalence of sin among humankind and, indeed, for all the disorder in creation.⁶

But this doctrine raises as many questions as it attempts to answer. The one that particularly interests us here concerns the original state of the first parents, Adam and Eve. If they were created perfect, in a state of grace and in possession of 'original justice and holiness' as the Church doctrine affirms, how was it possible for them to have been so quickly and easily deceived by the devil; why did they give in to the temptation with so little resistance, and why did they not have the sense to eat first from the permitted "tree of life", before eating from the forbidden "tree of the knowledge of good and evil"?⁷ The attentive reader wonders whether someone with 'original justice and holiness' would ignore God's commandment, without a second thought, just because of a sensual attraction and short-sighted desire for personal gain ("*the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom*"; Gen 3,6). This passage suggests that the first parents were prompted by selfish and sensual desires that would be quite alien to those possessing 'original justice and holiness'. One could say that, already before they sinned, they had a

Christian commentators (cf. *Adam, Eve and the Serpent*, Elaine Pagels, New York: Vintage books, 1989, 27-31), since God himself confirms that it will make the consumer like himself (Gen 3,22).

⁶ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, paragraphs 404-5: (404) "How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? The whole human race is in Adam 'as one body of one man'. By this 'unity of the human race' all men are implicated in Adam's sin, as all are implicated in Christ's justice. Still the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand.... By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a *personal sin*, but this sin affected *the human nature* that they would then transmit *in a fallen state*. It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice. And that is why original sin is called 'sin' only in an analogical sense: it is a sin 'contracted' and not 'committed'—a state and not an act. (405) Although it is proper to each individual, original sin does not have the character of a personal fault in any of Adam's descendants. It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it, subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin—an inclination to evil that is called 'concupiscence'..."

So 'original sin' in the first parents is different to what it is in their descendants: in Adam and Eve it was a rebellious act, but in their descendants it is a state of imperfection that inclines towards evil acts—a simple 'tendency'. How it is propagated is a mystery. It is hoped that the thesis proposed in this essay will throw light on these perplexities.

⁷ One can speculate that this was, perhaps, God's intention. The two trees in the midst of the garden represent the two fundamental aspects of divinity: the fruit of the "tree of life" that gives divine immortality and the fruit of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" that procures divine wisdom. The commandment given to them is to ensure that they first eat from the "tree of life", in order to experience true health (holiness) and immortality. However, by the time they were expelled from the garden, the text indicates that they had not yet eaten from the permitted "tree of life" (cf. Gen 3:22). In fact, up to this day, their descendants have still not eaten from that tree, and so it remains one of the promises for the future consummation of all things (cf. Rev 2,7; 22,14). If they had first taken from the "tree of life", perhaps their moral sense would have been irreversibly strengthened in the direction of divine obedience, and they could then have resisted temptation with ease. The giving of the commandment was therefore not so much a test of obedience, as an instruction to await the proper time, in view of the moral immaturity of the first parents (cf. "To test or preserve? The prohibition of Gen 2.16-17 in the thought of two second century exegetes", Matthew C. Steenberg, *Gregorianum* 86, 4 (2005), 723-741).

strong ‘inclination to evil’ that lowered their resistance to the devil’s temptation, leading them to ignore God’s commandment and eat of the fruit from the forbidden tree.⁸

Apart from this, the biblical text actually gives very few clues about the internal state of the first parents before they sinned, except that they were naked and felt no shame (Gen 2,25). The exposure of their nakedness *without shame* simply speaks of the innocence and acceptance of their natural condition, as with animals and young children.⁹ But rather than confirming a state of ‘original justice and holiness’, it simply suggests their conscience was childlike and immature, still uninformed about what was prudent and was not.¹⁰ All this changed after they sinned and ate from the “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”.

After they had sinned, the biblical text tells us much more about their internal state: they were afraid and clearly felt guilt and shame, for they hid from God and felt naked (Gen 3,8-11). More importantly, however, there was no attempt to apologize for what they had done, even though they were aware of its gravity.¹¹ The effect of eating the forbidden fruit had already taken root: by now the first humans felt like gods and gods do not need apologize to anyone. Instead, Adam blamed Eve and, by implication, also God (*‘the woman you gave me’*), and Eve blamed the serpent (*‘the serpent deceived me’*). Adam was more concerned with defending his own “honour” than defending his wife, and his wife defended herself by blaming the serpent, a mere reptile. They were now at odds with each other, with God and with the rest of creation. Seeing these signs of self-inflation, or selfish pride, in the first humans, God had no choice but to give the requisite antidote, a punishment delivering humiliation. They were promptly expelled from Paradise and punished with internal pain for the woman, external hardship for the man and a serious handicap for the serpent (Gen 3,14-24).

Comparing what we know about the state of the parents before the first sin and after, there is continuity as well as discontinuity. The willful and rebellious self-interest that they showed before the act of disobedience persists, but in a more obdurate, proud and

⁸ The situation is strongly reminiscent of the Jewish doctrine of the ‘two inclinations’: the ‘bad inclination’ (*yezer ha-ra*) with which man was created and everyone is born, and the ‘good inclination’ (*yezer ha-tov*) which becomes active 13 years later, when young men undertake to keep the commandments at their ‘*bar mitzvah*’ ceremony. According to the *Book of Ecclesiasticus* (15,11-14), the ‘bad inclination’ is a sinful desire, impulse, inclination or urge, that was implanted in man, by God, at his creation. The chief antidote against it was the study of the Torah and its chief remedy was repentance. In <I>4 Ezra<I>, we see also that the ‘bad inclination’ is transmitted among the children of Adam: “For the first Adam clothed himself with the evil heart and transgressed and was overcome and not only so but also all who were begotten from him” (4 Ezra 3.21, 4.30f). “However, even the so-called *yezer ha-ra*, which corresponds roughly to man’s untamed natural (and especially sexual) appetites or passions, is not intrinsically evil and, therefore, not to be completely suppressed. Without it, a human being would never marry, beget children, build a house, or engage in trade (*Gen R.* 9:7). It is only when it gets out of hand that it becomes the cause of harm...” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 1971, vol. 8, “Inclination, Good and Evil”, cols 1318-19. “The opportunity or the invitation to sin may come from without, but it is the response of the evil impulse in man to it that converts it into a temptation. It pictures in the imagination the pleasures of sin, conceives the plan, seduces the will, incites to the act. It is thus primarily as the subjective origin of temptation or more correctly as the tempter within, that the *yetzer ha-ra* is represented in Jewish Literature. Since it compasses man’s undoing by leading him into sin, it is thought of as maliciously seeking his ruin, a kind of malevolent second personality...” George Foot Moore, *Judaism*, Oxford, 1927-30, Vol 1, p.489. The correspondence between this doctrine and the analysis of human nature that follows is quite striking.

⁹ Compare the furious reaction of one of their closest descendants, Noah, on learning that his nakedness had been exposed and seen by others (cf. Gen 9,18-27).

¹⁰ Humans are different from the other mammals in that their reproductive organs are not hidden under a tail, or tucked under the abdomen, or concealed by a layer of fur. In whatever position he or she adopts, they are visible and prominent, in such a way that simple prudence dictates the need to cover them.

¹¹ It is interesting to speculate on what might have happened if both Adam and Eve had admitted their error and apologized sincerely to God for this sin. Is not the lack of apology, or repentance, one of the most persistent signs of “original sin”?

unapologetic way. They ‘projected’ the blame for their disobedience externally as a primitive form of psychological defence. Armed with such a proud and impenetrable attitude, there was little doubt that they would carry on sinning and breaking God’s commandments, without concern for the damage they might have caused.

So according to the Christian reading of this passage, the ‘original sin’ described in Genesis 3 is not just a single act of disobedience, which brought physical death into this world.¹² Above all, it is the inevitable result of an inherited and innate disposition, a willful self-centredness, an inclination to rebel against divine authority, to assert personal human will against God’s command, a weakness exploited by the devil in his temptation to disobey God’s command, for apparent personal gain. Upon this foundation, or fertile ground, the commission of the ‘original sin’ generated a psychological attitude of self-justification and proud self-righteousness that isolates and divides men from one another, from creation and above all from God. Furthermore, it is an attitude that attracts others, not only because it is founded on a common and inherited ‘inclination to evil’, but also because it appears to lead to individual success and superiority, and therefore spreads rapidly, through imitation, acquiring followers in human society in every generation.

We can therefore make a distinction: there is ‘original sin’ identified with frank disobedience against the divine commandment, which hardened the primitive human heart in selfish pride and led to a transmissible ‘spirit of rebellion’, but there is also the original weakness, the cause or ‘origin of sin’, the ‘inclination to evil’, which is that self-centered aspect of human nature that preceded the ‘original sin’, but which made it possible and even probable.

We therefore recognize that, although they found themselves in a perfect paradise, the original parents were morally quite immature and not, by any means, morally perfect. It is indeed debatable whether they were in a constant state of grace, or at which level of ‘original justice or holiness’ they found themselves: it appears they suffered not so much a ‘fall’, as a ‘hard lesson’. It is precisely at this point, in the elucidation of the ‘inclination to evil’ that led Adam and Eve to fall into temptation, that the Creation story of Genesis chapter 3 meets modern theories of evolutionary biology. So this is the moment to ask anthropologists and palaeontologists to describe their findings concerning the mental state of primaeval man.

The Psychology of Primaeval Man

¹² As understood in the Jewish Rabbinical tradition (cf. *The Sages*, Ephraim E. Urbach, Cambridge, Mass., US: Harvard University Press, English trans., 1987, 421-22). This view is based on the observation that the word ‘sin’ is not mentioned in these verses, but it is nevertheless difficult to reconcile with the fact that God said to the first humans that they would die *on the day* that they broke the commandment (Gen 2,16), for neither Adam nor Eve actually died, physically, on that day. In fact, Adam went on to have children and live 930 years (Gen 5,5). If he did indeed ‘die’, as the warning in Gen 2,16 implies, the death that he experienced, and presumably his wife as well, was certainly not physical, and so it is unlikely that this passage explains the entrance of physical death into this world. They both eventually died a physical death because they disobeyed God and ate from the forbidden tree (“the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”) before they had eaten from the tree that would have given them eternal life (“the tree of life”; cf. Gen 3,22). From this, it can be inferred that the entrance of physical death into this world was a secondary issue, more a result of not eating from the “tree of life” than from eating from the “tree of knowledge of good and evil”.

The problem is that primaeval man, the biblical Adam,¹³ was not able to express his state of mind in ways that could be transmitted down to the present day. His meagre remains from that time, mainly bone fragments and tools (and some wall paintings from a fairly late period), do not say much about his psychology, his feelings, thoughts or beliefs.¹⁴ Nevertheless, we are not completely without clues, for it has been known for a long time, especially from studies of anatomy and embryology, that “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny”, which is to say that the development of man as an individual (ontogeny) is closely related to man’s development as a species (phylogeny).¹⁵ This “Theory of Recapitulation”, that sees the phylogenetic development of the species repeated at a vastly increased tempo in the ontogenetic development of the individual, was then used as the basis of a theory of psychological recapitulation: the psychological maturation of every individual child repeats the psychological evolution of the human species. The theory receives confirmation by comparing the psychology of children with that of humans who are still living a primitive way of life, as ‘hunter-gatherers’: “the way children behave, think and dream throws light on the psychology of primitive peoples and also on the development of the thought processes of the (human) race.”¹⁶ Leading to the conclusion that the main social, mental and psychological characteristics of human beings were formed during the primaeval period of his development, the hundreds of thousands of years during which he lived as a hunter-gatherer, the ‘flourishing field of evolutionary psychology’ was established.¹⁷

¹³ The non-literal significance of the Genesis Creation account is unambiguously expressed in the names given to the protagonists: “Adam” is Hebrew for “Man” and is probably derived from “Adamah”, “earth”, and “Eve” comes from the Hebrew word “Havvah”, which means “Life”. The non-literal significance of the Creation account is stressed and explored by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in his *“In the Beginning...: A Catholic Understanding of Creation and the Fall”*, Reprint, with Appendix, of T & T Clark’s English trans. 1990, by Grand Rapids, US: Eerdmans, 1995, esp. pp. 25-26.

¹⁴ Cf. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, by Yuval Noah Hariri, London: Harvill Secker, 2011, 40-62 (chapter 3, ‘A Day in the Life of Adam and Eve’).

¹⁵ Also called the Biogenetic Rule and the Theory of Recapitulation, the observation that ‘ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny’ was first formulated by Ernst Haeckel in 1866, although it had been known and described by other scientists and philosophers in the preceding centuries. Still debated and discussed to this day, the ‘Biogenetic Rule’ is accepted in general terms, although it is undoubtedly a mistake to call it a ‘Rule’, because there are so many different ways in which phylogenetic development is expressed in individual development (ontogeny). Attempts to define this observation too narrowly, as a hard and fast rule, seem to explain why some researchers continue to dispute its validity in various areas (see next note).

¹⁶ Quoted from *Psychology and Religion: An Introduction to Contemporary Views*, by G. Stephens Spinks, Boston: Beacon Press, 1963, 202 (Appendix IV Ontogenesis and Phylogenesis and the Theory of Recapitulation, 201-204). As stated in the previous note, the validity of applying the ‘Biogenetic Rule’ to the anatomic (embryological) development of the species is generally accepted, but its relevance to behavioural and/or psychological development is disputed by some, e.g. ‘In contrast to anatomical ontogeny, in the case of behavioral ontogeny there are no empirical indications of behavioral interphenes, that developed phylogenetically from (primordial) behavioral metaphenes’ (‘The Inapplicability of the Biogenetic Rule to Behavioral Development’, by Gerhard Medicus, *Human Development*, 1992; 35 (1): 8, Conclusion). However, the arguments presented by this author presume a definition of the ‘Biogenetic Rule’ that is altogether much too narrow, inflexible and specific, so it is not surprising to find that it falls short, especially in the area of behaviour and psychology, where phylogenetic evidence is indeed sparse. The observation that “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny” is just that, a general observation on the structural and functional development of individuals in a certain species, but the specific ways in which primordial characteristics (phylogeny) are expressed ontogenetically are many and variable, and cannot be forced to conform to a neat and tidy rule.

¹⁷ In his 2011 book on the history of humankind, *Sapiens*, Hariri writes: “The flourishing field of evolutionary psychology argues that many of our present day social and psychological characteristics were shaped during this long pre-agricultural era. Even today, scholars in this field claim, our brains and minds are adapted to a life of hunting and gathering. Our eating habits, our conflicts and our sexuality are all the result of the way our hunter-gatherer minds interact with our current post-industrial environment, with its mega-cities, aeroplanes, telephones and computers. This environment gives us more material resources and longer lives than those enjoyed by any previous generations, but it often makes us feel alienated, depressed and pressured. To

The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, helped to establish this field by describing correlations between the psychology of primitive tribesmen, developing children, certain pathological mental states (neurotic and psychotic) and the conjectured psychology of the primal horde of *Homo sapiens* (the original extended family group or 'band').¹⁸

'Primary Narcissism': Sigmund Freud and Erich Fromm

The main thrust of Freud's work led, arguably, to his proposal of the "Oedipus complex" as the universal foundation of all neuroses, but less noticed, and perhaps more important for speculation on the original mental state of mankind was Freud's concept of "primary narcissism". In his treatise on this concept, he wrote: "The term narcissism is derived from clinical description and was chosen by Paul Näcke in 1899 to denote the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated... Psycho-analytic observers were subsequently struck by the fact that individual features of the narcissistic attitude are found in many people who suffer from other disorders... Narcissism in this sense would not be a perversion, but the libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation, a measure of which may justifiably be attributed to every living creature."¹⁹ Freud's speculations on narcissism were not given the prominence they deserved, according to his student, Erich Fromm, who wrote: "One of the most fruitful and far-reaching of Freud's discoveries is his concept of narcissism. Freud himself considered it to be one of his most important findings, and employed it for the understanding of such distinct phenomena as psychosis ("narcissistic neurosis"), love, castration fear, jealousy, sadism, and also for the understanding of mass phenomena, such as the readiness of the suppressed classes to be loyal to their rulers."²⁰

It is therefore not surprising that some of the most important observations on the expressions of individual and social narcissism affecting the human species have been made by Erich Fromm. "Freud never altered the basic idea that the original state of man, in early infancy, is that of narcissism ("primary narcissism"), in which there are not yet any relations to the outside world, that then in the course of normal development the child begins to

understand why, evolutionary psychologists argue, we need to delve into the hunter-gatherer world that shaped us, the world that we subconsciously still inhabit" (p. 40).

¹⁸ Among Freud's greatest works on this theme is *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (1913).

¹⁹ Quoted from "On Narcissism: an Introduction", standard edition tr. James Strachey, original German Edition 1914, pp. 72-73. And again: "We say that a human being has originally two sexual objects – himself and the woman who nurses him – and in doing so we are postulating a primary narcissism in everyone, which may in some cases manifest itself in a dominating fashion in his object-choice" (p. 88). During human development, the narcissistic elements of man's nature diminish, so Freud writes: "Observation of normal adults shows that their former megalomania has been damped down and that the psychical characteristics from which we inferred their infantile narcissism have been effaced" (p.93). He goes on to explain how psychological mechanisms have led to the formation of an "ideal ego", which then becomes "the target of the self-love which was enjoyed in childhood by the actual ego. The subject's narcissism makes its appearance displaced on to this new ideal ego, which like the infantile ego, finds itself possessed of every perfection that is of value. As always where the libido is concerned, man is here again showing himself incapable of giving up the satisfaction that he had once enjoyed. He is not willing to forgo the narcissistic perfection of his childhood; and when, as he grows up, he is disturbed by the admonitions of others and by the awakening of his own critical judgment, so that he can no longer retain that perfection, he seeks to recover it in the new form of an ego ideal. What he projects before him as his ideal is the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal" (p.94).

²⁰ Quoted from "The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil", by Erich Fromm, New York: Harper and Row, 1964, p. 62.

increase in scope and intensity his (libidinal)²¹ relationships to the outside world, but that in many instances (the most drastic one being insanity), he withdraws his libidinal attachment from objects and directs it back to his ego (“secondary narcissism”). But even in the case of normal development, man remains to some extent narcissistic throughout his life.... Indeed, the development of the individual can be defined in Freud’s term as the evolution from absolute narcissism to a capacity for objective reasoning and object love, a capacity, however, which does not transcend definite limitations. The “normal”, “mature” person is one whose narcissism has been reduced to the socially accepted minimum without ever disappearing completely. Freud’s observation is confirmed by everyday experience. It seems that in most people one can find a narcissistic core which is not accessible and which defies any attempt at complete dissolution.”²²

After describing different forms of narcissism in everyday life, Fromm reflects on the evolutionary significance of this attribute: “Narcissism is a passion the intensity of which in many individuals can only be compared with sexual desire and the desire to stay alive. In fact, many times it proves to be stronger than either. Even in the average individual in whom it does not reach such intensity, there remains a narcissistic core which appears to be almost indestructible. This being so we might suspect that like sex and survival, the narcissistic passion also has an important *biological function*. Once we raise this question the answer comes readily. How could the individual survive unless his bodily needs, his interests, his desires, were charged with much energy? Biologically, from the standpoint of survival, man must attribute to himself an importance far above what he gives to anybody else. If he did not do so, from where would he take the energy and interest to defend himself against others, to work for his subsistence, to fight for his survival, to press his claims against those of others? Without narcissism he might be a saint—but do saints have a high survival rate? What from a spiritual standpoint would be most desirable—absence of narcissism—would be most dangerous from the mundane standpoint of survival. Speaking teleologically, we can say that nature had to endow man with a great amount of narcissism to enable him to do what is necessary for survival. This is true especially because nature has not endowed man with well-developed instincts such as the animal has. The animal has no “problems” of survival in the sense that its built-in instinctive nature takes care of survival in such a way that the animal does not have to consider or decide whether or not it wants to make an effort. In man the instinctive apparatus has lost most of its efficacy—hence narcissism assumes a very necessary biological function.”²³

‘Group Narcissism’: Erich Fromm

Fromm then goes on to ask how, on the one hand, narcissism can be advantageous and necessary for biological survival, but disadvantageous on the other hand by making man indifferent to the needs of others, incapable of subordinating his own needs, asocial and, in extreme cases, even insane? Too much narcissism would therefore put man in conflict with survival, since the individual can only survive as a member of a group: “We arrive then at the paradoxical result that narcissism is necessary for survival, and at the same time it is a threat to survival.” The resolution of this paradox leads in two directions, he concludes: the

²¹ Fromm inserted this word “libidinal” in parentheses because he was unhappy with the Freud’s mechanistic libido concept and preferred to substitute this “energy of the sexual drive” by a more general concept of “psychic energy” (*The Heart of Man*, 64).

²² *The Heart of Man*, 63. After substituting a non-sexualized “psychic energy” for Freud’s “libido” (or “energy of the sexual drive”), Fromm then goes on to enlarge on “the reality and power of narcissism” in a section that is well worth reading.

²³ *The Heart of Man*, 72-73.

first is that it is not *maximal*, but *optimal* narcissism that serves survival, which is to say that the degree of narcissism has to be reduced so as to be compatible with social cooperation. The second direction “lies in the fact that individual narcissism is transformed into group narcissism, that the clan, nation, religion, race, etc., become the objects of narcissistic passion instead of the individual. Thus, narcissistic energy is maintained but used in the interests of the survival of the group rather than for the survival of the individual.”²⁴

After discussing how too much narcissism leads to failure through the ‘distortion of rational judgment’ and the ‘explosive rage of wounded narcissism’, Fromm goes on to describe the phenomenon of the transformation of personal into group narcissism.²⁵ He affirms that any organized group that wants to survive needs to be invested by its members with narcissistic energy, so that for its members the group may become as important, if not more so, than their own lives. This narcissistic investment can be observed particularly among those who are culturally or economically deprived: for these people narcissistic pride in belonging to the group may be the only source of satisfaction or meaning in their lives,²⁶ and “Within the favored group... everybody’s personal narcissism is flattered... Inasmuch as the group as a whole requires group narcissism for its survival, it will further narcissistic attitudes and confer upon them the qualifications of being particularly virtuous.”²⁷

Just as individual narcissism goes back to the prehistoric development of humanity so also does group narcissism: “The group to which the narcissistic attitude is extended has varied in structure and size throughout history. In the primitive tribe or clan it may comprise only a few hundred members; here the individual is not yet an “individual” but is still united to the blood group by “primary bonds”,²⁸ which have not yet been broken. The narcissistic involvement in the clan is thus strengthened by the fact that its members emotionally have still no existence of their own outside of the clan.

In the development of the human race we find an increasing range of socialization; the original small group based on blood affinity gives way to ever larger groups based on a common language, a common social order, a common faith. The larger size of the group does not necessarily mean that the pathological qualities of narcissism are reduced... yet in general we find that in the process of socialization which leads to the formation of larger groups, the need for cooperation with many other and different people not connected among themselves by ties of blood, tends to counteract the narcissistic charge within the group”.²⁹

²⁴ *The Heart of Man*, 73. We would suggest a third mitigating direction for narcissism, which is the attribution of all personal achievements and attributes to a higher being, God, to whom the beneficiary of these gifts offers thanks and praise continuously, accepting no credit for himself that may fuel narcissism on a personal level (“narcissistic supply”). This would be one of the means by which religion brings about a palliation of the worst effects of narcissism, and even, in the case of Christianity, a liberation, or “Redemption” (see below).

²⁵ *The Heart of Man*, 78.

²⁶ As examples, he mentions the people in Hitler’s Germany and in the contemporary American South, for whom racial narcissism was their “only one satisfaction: the inflated image of itself as the most admirable group in the world, and of being superior to another racial group that is singled out as inferior. The member of such a backward group feels: “Even though I am poor and uncultured I am somebody important because I belong to the most admirable group in the world—I am white”; or, “I am an Aryan” (*The Heart of Man*, 79).”

²⁷ *The Heart of Man*, 80.

²⁸ Fromm explains primary bonds in the following way: “They are the ties that connect the child with its mother, the member of a primitive community with his clan and nature, or the mediaeval man with the Church and his social caste. Once the stage of complete individuation is reached and the individual is free from these primary ties, he is confronted with a new task: to orient and root himself in the world and to find security in other ways than those which were characteristic of his preindividualistic existence. Freedom then has a different meaning than it had before this stage was reached” *Escape From Freedom*, Erich Fromm, New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1994, 23-38, quote from 24.

²⁹ *The Heart of Man*, 80. As an example of a large group in which group narcissism is counteracted by other anti-narcissistic forces, Fromm then goes on to describe the Roman Catholic Church: “The elements counteracting narcissism within the Catholic Church are, first of all, the concept of the universality of man and

Fromm proceeds to relate modern European history in terms of a struggle between narcissistic factions, on one side, upholding divisions caused by tribal, national, racial, religious, political, ideological or sexual differences, and humanist factions on the other, promoting the universality of human life and existence. Writing at the height of the Cold War (1964), he concludes by stating that “These various manifestations of group narcissism have brought the world to the abyss of total destruction... Whether the danger of total destruction, the ideas of neo-humanists and the bonds created between all men by the new means of communication will be sufficient to stop the effects of group narcissism is a question which may determine the fate of mankind”.³⁰ In the light of a statement like this, by a renowned social psychologist, one can only stand back and reflect seriously on the significance of the phenomenon that he calls group narcissism, a phenomenon that is leading mankind to the abyss of self-destruction.

He goes on to say “the growing intensity of group narcissism—only shifting from religious to national, racial and party narcissism—is indeed a surprising phenomenon.”³¹ He considers it surprising because it has occurred despite the growth of humanist influence since the Renaissance and the spread of the scientific method through formal education, which demands the total renunciation of the subjective and distorted way of thinking characteristic of narcissism. Nevertheless, he observes, even educated people join groups that express contemporary group narcissism. The reason for this, he suggests, is that science has created ‘technology’ as a new object for narcissistic pride:³² “Man’s narcissistic pride in being the creator of a formerly undreamed-of world of things, the discoverer of radio, television, atomic power, space travel, and even in being the potential destroyer of the entire globe, has given him a new object for narcissistic self-inflation.”³³ So, in essence, nothing has changed except the outward expression of group narcissism. The same problems that beset individual narcissism, also affect group narcissism, namely ‘lack of objectivity and rational judgment’ and ‘rage verging on insanity’, when the opinions of narcissistic groups are offended: “Violation of the flag; insults against one’s own God, emperor, leader; the loss of a war and of territory—these have often led to violent mass feelings of vengeance which in turn led to new wars. The wounded narcissism can be healed only if the offender is crushed and thus the insult to one’s narcissism is undone. Revenge, individual and national, is often based on

of a “catholic” religion which is no longer the religion of one particular tribe or nation. Second, the idea of personal humility which follows from the idea of God and the denial of idols. the existence of God implies that no man can be God, that no individual can be omniscient or omnipotent. It thus sets a definite limit to man’s narcissistic self-idolatry. But at the same time the Church has nourished an intense narcissism; believing that the Church is the only chance of salvation and that the Pope is the Vicar of Christ, its members were able to develop an intense narcissism inasmuch as they were members of such an extraordinary institution. The same occurred in relation to God; while the omniscience and omnipotence of God should have led to man’s humility, often the individual identified himself with God and thus developed an extraordinary degree of narcissism in this process of identification. The same ambiguity between a narcissistic or an antinarcissistic function has occurred in all the other great religions, for example in Buddhism, Judaism, Islam and Protestantism” (*The Heart of Man*, 81).

³⁰ *The Heart of Man*, 82-83.

³¹ *The Heart of Man*, 83-84. In the context of Fromm’s concern with growing ‘group narcissism’ 50 years ago, it is worthwhile quoting from the abstract of a recent research article on the origins of the recent growth of individual narcissism: “Narcissism levels have been increasing among Western youth, and contribute to societal problems such as aggression and violence. The origins of narcissism, however, are not well understood (*sic*). Here, we report, to our knowledge, the first prospective longitudinal evidence on the origins of narcissism in children.” The article is entitled: “Origins of Narcissism in Children” by E. Brummelman et al., in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, March 9, 2015 (online at www.pnas.org).

³² *The Heart of Man*, 84.

³³ *The Heart of Man*, 84.

wounded narcissism and on the need to “cure” the wound by the annihilation of the offender”.³⁴

What is more, says Fromm, is that “the highly narcissistic group is eager to have a leader with whom it can identify itself. The leader is then admired by the group which projects its narcissism onto him. In the very act of symbiosis and identification, the narcissism of the individual is transferred onto the leader. The greater the leader, the greater the follower. Personalities who as individuals are particularly narcissistic are the most qualified to fulfill this function. The narcissism of the leader who is convinced of his greatness, and who has no doubts, is precisely what attracts the narcissism of those who submit to him. The half-insane leader is often the most successful one until his lack of objective judgment, his rage reactions in consequence of any set-back, his need to keep up the image of omnipotence may provoke him to make mistakes which lead to his destruction. But there are always gifted half-psychotics at hand to satisfy the demands of a narcissistic mass”.³⁵

There is therefore no doubt about the importance of narcissism for the biological and social survival of mankind at a local and limited level of existence, especially for those of the same group, the ‘in-group’. However, for those humans outside the group, the ‘out-group’, narcissism is inimical, because it is fundamentally self-seeking, exclusive and divisive. So, from a universal point of view governed by ethical, intellectual and spiritual values, narcissism conflicts with the highest human attributes of reason and love, as Fromm takes pains to explain. To the degree to which it is present, it subjectively distorts the faculty of reason, and prevents the perception of reality objectively. The same self-centred bias affects the individual’s capacity to love others. Although Freud rightly observed that narcissism is a component in all loving human relationships, especially those between the sexes,³⁶ Fromm points out that too much narcissism creates pathological relationships based on mutual narcissism: “Both people retain their narcissism, they have no real, deep interest in each other (not to speak of anyone else), they remain touchy and suspicious, and most likely each of them will be in need of a new person who can give them fresh narcissistic satisfaction. For the narcissistic person, the partner is never a person in his own right or in his full reality; he exists only as a shadow of the partner’s narcissistically inflated ego. Nonpathological love, on the other hand, is not based on mutual narcissism. It is a relationship between two people who experience themselves as separate entities, yet who can open themselves to and become one with each other. In order to experience love one must experience separateness.”³⁷

So from the wider ethical-spiritual point of view, and for the experience of life in its richness, unity and fullness, narcissism is an obstacle, unless it is kept under control and reduced to a minimum. Fromm writes: “The significance of the phenomenon of narcissism from the ethical-spiritual point of viewpoint becomes very clear if we consider that the essential teachings of all the great humanist religions can be summarized in one sentence: *It is the goal of man to overcome one’s narcissism...* Only if man can do away with the illusion of his indestructible ego, only if he can drop it altogether with all other objects of his greed, only then can he be open to the world and fully related to it. Psychologically this process of becoming fully awake is identical with the replacement of narcissism by

³⁴ *The Heart of Man*, 87.

³⁵ *The Heart of Man*, 87, but see also Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, standard edition of James Strachey, translated from the original German Edition 1927, London and New York: Norton and Co, 1961, 16-17.

³⁶ In his treatise “*On Narcissism*” (standard edition tr. James Strachey, pp. 88-91), Freud’s insight into this topic is almost poetic.

³⁷ *The Heart of Man*, 88.

relatedness to the world.”³⁸ Fromm then explains how, in Christianity and Judaism, the central commandments “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev 19,18; Mt 22,39; Mk 12,31; Lk 10,25-37), love the stranger (Lev 19,34) and “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Mt 5,43-48), all lead to the control and conquest of narcissism: “To love the stranger and the enemy is possible only if narcissism has been overcome, if “I am thou”.”³⁹

Human Narcissism and the Biblical Commandments

This example helps us to understand and summarize the essential nature of narcissism, according to Freud and Fromm, and to relate it to biblical teaching: it is nothing less than the orientation of the soul and its energies around the limited sense of self, the ‘ego’, expressing itself in self-love, self-centredness, self-absorption and self-concern, in a way that is closely connected to the survival and procreative instincts of the individual. In terms of the theory of evolution, these instincts are among the strongest forces of human life. They underlie the whole complex of behaviours that contend for the survival of the individual and of its offspring and kin, in an often hostile environment, in what is termed ‘natural selection’. It is therefore unashamedly ‘selfish’, meaning that it is primarily concerned with the preservation and success of its own life and the life of those bonded through kinship, clan, tribe or social group. In its original, primary form, narcissism is, therefore, an extremely potent force acting in favour of the interests of the individual and his or her own group.⁴⁰

In his *Totem and Taboo*,⁴¹ Freud goes further in describing primitive man, and young children, as having a “narcissistic organization” whose main characteristic is an ‘overvaluation of psychical acts to an extraordinary degree’, a condition that he termed “omnipotence of thoughts”. For Freud, primitive man’s overemphasis on the relation between thought and reality explains his animistic worldview (belief in the ubiquity and power of souls and spirits) and, coupled with his desire to change that reality, also the magical practices associated with this worldview: “Primitive men and neurotics, as we have seen, attach a high valuation—in our eyes an *over*-valuation—to psychical acts. This attitude may plausibly be brought into relation with narcissism and regarded as an essential

³⁸ *The Heart of Man*, 88-89.

³⁹ *The Heart of Man*, 89.

⁴⁰ Evolutionary biologists do not speak of human narcissism as such, but speak instead of the “selfish gene” (after a 1976 book with that title by the Oxford Biologist, Richard Dawkins). Their descriptions of the way these “selfish genes” influence the conduct of organisms closely resembles the narcissism described by Freud and Fromm. It is therefore a small step to propose that narcissism is the psychological component of the biological principle that genetic interests are basically selfish, competitive and often ruthless. In *Dark Nature*, Lyall Watson expands on the ‘selfish gene’ theory, by stressing that organisms are not genes and are “also part of kinship groups that put a premium on being nice to close relatives. Genes are primarily concerned with inclusive fitness, with the big picture; but parental and social behaviour require a certain amount of selflessness which gives us, as individuals, the experience of generosity and sympathy. There are distinct advantages to be gained by deception; but the very existence of such wiles produces the need for awareness of them that has made us calculating and intelligent beings with a sense of justice and fair play. Self-interest may be guaranteed; but kinship, individual recognition and extended contact all provide the conditions necessary for altruism to appear in contradiction to the three rules of the genes (*see below*), and once it does there are simple mathematical principles, rules of the universe, in play, to ensure that they increase and encourage cooperation instead of conflict” from *Dark Nature* by Lyall Watson, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995, p.77-78. The author had previously presented ‘the three rules of the genes’ as: 1. Be nasty to outsiders; 2. Be nice to insiders; 3. Cheat whenever possible; p. 48-58).

⁴¹ Cf. the chapter entitled “Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thoughts” in Freud’s *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental lives of Savages and Neurotics*, Authorized translation of James Strachey, original publication in German in 1913, Abingdon, UK: Routledge Classics, 2001, 87-115.

component of it. It may be said that in primitive men the process of thinking is still to a great extent sexualized.⁴² This is the origin of their belief in the omnipotence of thoughts, their unshakeable confidence in the possibility of controlling the world and their inaccessibility to the experiences, so easily obtainable, which could teach them man's true position in the universe".⁴³

Man's 'narcissistic organization', on an individual and on a group level, was undoubtedly important for man's survival in prehistoric times, and it continues to be important for individual development and growth up to the present day. In psychological development, it may be useful to think of primary narcissism as a primitive 'defense mechanism'—one that helps to establish and maintain personal boundaries, sense of identity, self-esteem and self-respect within self-defined limits. But, as stated by Fromm, the problem with narcissism is that it may be excessive, causing distortion in the subject's perception of reality and releasing furiously destructive forces when he, or she, feels threatened. At the extreme, narcissism may cause grandiose self-inflation with a feeling of omnipotence that is best described by the term "megalomania".⁴⁴ It is not surprising, therefore, that the highest human values that we know demand the reduction and restriction of human narcissism. But how is this achieved?

Fromm suggests that, as children develop and grow, their 'primary narcissism' is balanced, at around the age of seven or eight years of age, by the awakening of 'empathy' for others:⁴⁵ "In normal development, this state of narcissism is slowly overcome by a growing awareness of reality outside, and by a growing sense of "I" as differentiated from "thou". This change occurs at first on the level of sensory perception, when things and people are perceived as different and specific entities, a recognition which lays the foundation for the possibility of speech; to name things pre-supposes recognizing them as individual and separate entities. It takes much longer until the narcissistic stage is overcome emotionally; for the child up to the age of seven or eight years, other people still exist mainly as a means for the satisfaction for his needs. They are exchangeable inasmuch as they fulfill the function of satisfying these needs, and it is only around the ages of between eight and nine years that another person is experienced in such a way that the child can begin to love, that is to say, in H.S. Sullivan's formulation, to feel that the needs of another person are as important as his own".⁴⁶

In some children, however, the development of 'empathy' for others does not occur, or occurs only very partially, in which case their narcissism is no longer called 'primary', but 'secondary' narcissism. Secondary narcissism is a component of those disorders and

⁴² I.e. 'invested in libido', or in Fromm's terminology 'invested in psychic energy'.

⁴³ *Totem and Taboo*, 104.

⁴⁴ In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud associates the 'narcissistic orientation' with megalomania, overvaluing of thoughts, belief in spirits (Animism) and the practice of magic.

⁴⁵ Most probably through the maturation of the cerebral pathways that mediate empathy, cf. Simon Baron-Cohen, *Zero Degrees of Empathy: A New Theory of Human Cruelty and Kindness*, London: Penguin, 2012, pp. 20-29.

⁴⁶ Quoted from Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*, Abingdon, UK: Routledge Classics, 2002, 33-34. The age range in which individual differences in narcissism first emerge is between 7-12 years, according to the recent and interesting study by E. Brummelman et al., "Origins of Narcissism in Children", in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, March 9, 2015 (online at www.pnas.org). In the case of human development, therefore, one could say the individual is "rescued" from his or her infantile narcissism by the maturation of the neurological pathways mediating the faculty of 'empathy', a unitive attribute that enables us to read, understand and respond appropriately to the feelings of others, to 'love our neighbour as ourselves'. The reward is the ability to establish meaningful, life-affirming, relationships with others, which is to say, to form true friendships. This view allows psychologists to regard those morally limited and problematic conditions characterized by primary or secondary narcissism, as resulting from a deficiency of 'empathy' and to look for genetic and/or developmental factors causing its absence. Cf. *Zero Degrees of Empathy*, Simon Baron-Cohen.

pathological states in which the individual's attention is concentrated on his or her own needs, thoughts and feelings, very often without care or consideration for the needs, thoughts, feelings, or even the rights, of others. Among the more persistent disorders in which secondary narcissism is a feature, but certainly not restricted to it, is the so called Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD).⁴⁷ In these states or conditions, attention is focused mainly or totally, temporarily or permanently, on personal concerns and interests.

On the basis of the observations presented above, from the works of Freud and Fromm, it is possible to say with some degree of certainty that, through natural selection, primaeval man was endowed with a narcissistic orientation, which men and women of all generations, since primaeval times, have received through genetic and social inheritance. Man's long passage through creation, his evolution through the animal world and ultimately through the hunter-gatherer stage, has invested his nature with a high level of self-love and self-concern, which continue to govern his personal and social life in the ways outlined above. In times past, man's narcissistic orientation enabled primitive man to energetically pursue his own survival and that of his closest kin, especially when there was competition over natural resources from other human bands or groups. It was most probably this aspect of his nature that caused *Homo sapiens* to disperse over the entire surface of the earth, in search of the basic provisions for life, leading to the geographical separation of different bands, tribes or populations of men. There was a time, it seems, when mankind's narcissism served an important biological and social function that was closely linked to his survival, multiplication, migration and prosperity.

Returning to the biblical text with this in mind, we suggest that human narcissism would be enough to explain the confusion of languages that forms the subject of the Biblical Babel narrative (cf. Gen 11,1-9), and, of course, all the other accounts of conflict and divisions that fill the pages of the Old Testament. It would therefore also account for the cultural, ethnic and racial differences among men, due to their dispersal and geographical separation. As an orientation that is innate and inherited, narcissism is found in every individual, to varying degrees, and is therefore ubiquitous and universal among the human species, where it can be recognized as a tendency to exalt and assert oneself against external authority, to give priority to internal suggestions over external demands, and to yield to temptations that result in personal benefits and pleasures. Precisely because of this self-orientation, the 'fall' was inevitable. One could say that it was 'only' natural that the first parents would pay more attention to the internal voice of personal gain, than to any external commandment. Without divine insight and help, the breaking of the divine commandments was, and still is, almost inevitable. So above all, this aspect of man's nature would perfectly account for Adam and Eve's attraction to the fruit of the forbidden tree and, thus, their weakness in the face of the devil's temptation to break God's commandment. It would also explain the hardening of their attitude after they had been discovered by God, their projection of blame, their new-found pride and refusal to apologize. In summary, narcissism in human nature accounts for both the 'origin of sin', the fertile ground on which temptation takes root, and its first fruit, the 'original sin' itself, the breaking of God's command that led to an attitude of selfish pride.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ This is discussed at length in our article entitled 'The Personality of the Antichrist', online at www.newtorah.org.

⁴⁸ One of the main inspirations for this essay has been the excellent book *Dark Nature* by the zoologist and ecologist Lyall Watson, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995, especially the following passage: "It begins to look as though there is something in 'original sin'. There is an inherited, genetically related system that is unrelentingly selfish, ruthless and cruel. And Saint Augustine is right, we are never going to be without it. None of us is innocent, not even as a child. We are congenitally 'bad', along with the rest of nature. It is important that we should be, because natural selection makes no moral judgments. It recognizes only success, and measures this only by the possession of those qualities most necessary to survive. More often than not,

Confronted by the fact of narcissism as an important and universal aspect of human nature, it is difficult to maintain the view that humans were created by God in a perfect state of justice and holiness. They may not have been ‘sinners’ before they broke the commandment and committed ‘original sin’, but they certainly had a strong inclination to sin when they thought their own personal advantage could be served. In many ways, the situation remained much the same throughout the historical period, during which many more divine commandments were added for men to observe. Up to this day, the narcissism that is innate in every man and woman appears to be the most compelling explanation not only for this inclination to sin, but also for the commission of every sin against the commandments of God.⁴⁹

The reason for this may be because the commandments of God were given to mankind precisely to put a limit to, and control, the most socially destructive aspects of human narcissism and so allow men to live together in justice and in peace.⁵⁰ In this way the commandments can be seen as a kind of fence around narcissistic indulgence, preventing it from dividing the Israelite tribes and allowing them to form a tribal confederation. This was an essential step in the formation of the Israelite nation. The law was given by God to Israel precisely to confront their tribal narcissism and limit its destructive potential among the people of God (cf. Deut 5 –11, esp. 9,4-6).

However, the commandments were not the final solution. It was a delusion to think that we humans only have to decide to keep the commandments of God and then all would be well. Even the House of Israel, to whom the commandments had been given, was not able to keep these commandments and avoid repeated punishment and exile. The Israelites and their descendents were exiled once after the onslaught of the Assyrians (722 BC), again after the invasion of the Babylonians (586 BC), and twice again by the Romans after the defeat of their first and second revolts (66-70 and 135 AD). Clearly the problem ran deeper and the presumed solution was not so simple: either the observance of the commandments was not an effective protection against punishment and exile, or humans were unable to observe them. These facts of history and experience had tragically refuted the teaching, attributed especially to the Pharisees, that simply keeping the divine commandments was the way to correct human conduct, create harmonious coexistence between human beings and bring a return of God’s favour.

Human Narcissism and Divine Redemption

St. Paul was among the first of the Jews of his generation to articulate the problem of human sin as an essential aspect of an old, unredeemed aspect of human nature, an indwelling ‘spirit of rebellion’, that could not be overcome by the observance of the commandments alone. The commandments had no power to overcome this ‘spirit of iniquity’, but functioned only to make it conscious, to bring sin to awareness and therefore to divide man against himself (Rom 7). A more powerful remedy was needed to overcome this sinful ‘spirit of rebellion’, and that was the ‘spirit of God’ that had been given through the atoning sacrifice of Christ (Rom 8). Only this ‘Holy Spirit’ could overcome and correct the

these are hard ones, inevitably ignoble” (ibid. p.78, following on immediately from the quote in note 40). For its thought provoking content, however, the entire book is recommended.

⁴⁹ It would therefore explain the “mystery” of the transmission of original sin mentioned in the Catholic Catechism: “Still the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand” (CCC 404-405, quoted in full in note 6 above).

⁵⁰ See the quote by Fromm above (final paragraph of the section ‘Group Narcissism: Erich Fromm’), about the role of ‘the great humanistic religions’ in reducing human narcissism.

effects of the ‘original sin’ in human beings, and bring them to perfection in the eyes of God, a process that St. Paul referred to as justification and sanctification.

After St. Paul, theologians called this process “Atonement”, or “Redemption”, referring to the reconciliation of man with God, a mending of the separation that had come between the two.⁵¹ The explanation of how and why the atoning sacrifice of Christ was effective became the object of theories of “atonement”, which compared this process to the paying of a ransom to the devil, or to being let off divine punishment by the vicarious substitution of an appropriate sacrificial victim, but none of these theories were entirely satisfying or persuasive. Somehow, the real effect of Christ’s voluntary self-sacrifice seemed to penetrate deeper into sinful human “nature” than the relief of a debt or the substitution of a sacrificial victim could achieve. It was acting on something much more fundamental.

C.S. Lewis can be credited not only with recognizing the inadequacy of all the existing theories of atonement, the process whereby God, through Christ, brings human beings back to himself, but also with the proposal of a more compelling explanation, one that happens to fit well with the basic fault in human nature presented and described above: human narcissism. It is necessary, therefore, to quote his explanation in full: “On my view the theories are not themselves the things you are asked to accept.... We believe that the death of Christ is just that point in history at which something absolutely unimaginable from outside shows through into our own world.... You may ask what good would it be for us if we do not understand it. But that can be easily answered. A man can eat his dinner without understanding how food nourishes him. A man can accept what Christ has done without knowing how it works: indeed he certainly would not know how it works until he had accepted it.”

“We are told that Christ was killed for us, that His death has washed out our sins, and that by dying He disabled death itself. That is the formula. That is Christianity. That is what has to be believed. Any theories we build up as to how Christ did all this are, in my view, quite secondary: mere plans or diagrams to be left alone if they do not help us, and, even if they do help us, not to be confused with the thing itself. All the same, some of these theories are worth looking at.”

“The one most people have heard is the one I mentioned before—the one about our being let off because Christ had volunteered to bear a punishment instead of us. Now on the face of it that is a very silly theory. If God was prepared to let us off, why on earth did he not do so? And what possible point could there be in punishing an innocent person instead? None at all that I can see, if you are thinking of punishment in the police-court sense. On the other hand, if you think of a debt, there is plenty of point in a person who has some assets paying it on behalf of someone who has not. Or if you take “paying the penalty,” not in the sense of being punished, but in the more general sense of “standing the racket” or “footing the bill,” then, of course, it is a matter of common experience that, when one person has got himself into a hole, the trouble of getting him out usually falls on a kind friend.”

“Now what was the sort of “hole” man had got himself into? He had tried to set upon his own, to behave as if he belonged to himself. In other words, fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor—that is the only way out of the “hole.” This process of surrender—this movement full speed astern—is what Christians call repentance. Now repentance is no fun at all. It is something much harder

⁵¹ Christians tend to call this process ‘atonement’ and Jews ‘redemption’, but essentially the same process is intended. In broad terms, ‘atonement’, or ‘reconciliation’, or ‘repentance’, regard the process from below, as a movement from man towards God, and ‘redemption’ as a movement from above, from God to man—a divine initiative to rescue him from the grip of his ‘captors’ and ‘slave-masters’ below.

than merely eating humble pie. It means unlearning all the self-conceit and self-will that we have been training ourselves into for thousands of years. It means killing part of yourself, undergoing a kind of death. In fact, it needs a good man to repent. And here comes the catch. Only a bad person needs to repent: only a good person can repent perfectly. The worse you are the more you need it and the less you can do it. The only person who could do perfectly would be a perfect person—and he would not need it.”

“Remember, this repentance, this willing submission to humiliation and a kind of death is not something God demands of you before He will take you back and which He could let you off if He chose: it is simply a description of what going back to Him is like. If you ask God to take you back without it, you are really asking Him to let you go back without going back. It cannot happen. Very well, then, we must go through with it. But the same badness which makes us need it, makes us unable to do it. Can we do it if God helps us? Yes, but what do we mean when we talk of God helping us? We mean God putting into us a bit of Himself, so to speak. He lends us a little of His reasoning powers and that is how we think: He puts a little of His love into us and that is how we love one another. When you teach a child writing, you hold its hand while you forms the letters: that is, it forms the letters because you are forming them. We love and reason because God loves and reasons and holds our hand while we do it. Now if we had not fallen, that would all be plain sailing. But unfortunately we now need God’s help in order to do something which God, in His own nature, never does at all—to surrender, to suffer, to submit, to die. Nothing in God’s nature corresponds to this process at all. So that the one road for which we now need God’s leadership most of all is a road God, in His own nature, has never walked. God can share only what He has; this thing, in His own nature, He has not.”

“But supposing God became a man—suppose our human nature which can suffer and die was amalgamated with God’s nature in one person—then that person could help us. He could surrender his will, and suffer and die, because He was man; and he could do it perfectly because he was God. You and I can only go through this process only if God does it in us; but God can do it only if He becomes man. Our attempts at this dying will succeed only if we men share in God’s dying, just as our thinking can succeed only because it is a drop out of the ocean of His intelligence: but we cannot share God’s dying unless God dies; and He cannot die except by being a man. That is the sense in which He pays our debt, and suffers for us what He Himself need not suffer at all...”

“Such is my own way of looking at what Christians call Atonement. But remember this is only one more picture. Do not mistake it for the thing itself: and if it does not help you, drop it.”⁵²

Lewis identifies the problem at the root of man’s sin and his need for repentance, and shows how this problem necessitated the intervention of God in the form of a perfect man, Jesus Christ. He indicates that the problem is basically due to man’s boastful, self-willed, self-seeking, rebellious nature or, in one word, his narcissism. This is what leads man astray and then makes repentance necessary, while at the same time making it impossible for man to achieve it on his own, because he is unconcerned about anything beyond his own limited self, or ‘ego’. Man’s self-centered narcissistic nature needs to be defeated and overcome before he can truly repent, and only true repentance will lead to forgiveness and reconciliation with God, i.e. ‘atonement’. So first, man needs to surrender, to give up, to die to himself, for only then will he be able to taste the infinite greatness and mercy of God. It is this experience of God’s love that makes men and women truly humble, thankful and even obedient. His human nature will then start to centre itself on God’s will and on the needs of others, rather than on its own selfish concerns. Lewis points out that the only one who can

⁵² *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis, New York: Macmillan (Collier Books), 1960, 58-61.

show him the way to self-renunciation, and to the source of divine mercy and forgiveness, is the one who is a perfect example of this way of life: Jesus Christ, whose atoning mission and core message is indeed centred on self-renunciation and self-donation out of love of others, even strangers and enemies.⁵³ The narcissistic part of his human nature had been totally reformed around its union with God and transformed by God's love. By offering his life and dying in total surrender to God's will, Christ confronts the narcissistic self-love in every man, showing it to be an obstacle on the way to perfection in the love of God. If accepted and followed to the end of life, Christ delivers men from sin by diminishing and defeating the narcissism of their nature, which continues to be the origin of man's sin, the seat of the devil's continuous assaults.⁵⁴ This is the basis of atonement and redemption.⁵⁵ There is no true atonement without the awareness and overcoming of this narcissistic aspect of human nature, initiated, inspired and guided by Christ's self-sacrifice.⁵⁶

According to this understanding of atonement, Christ's forgiveness of sin is not something imposed from without, as if by magic, upon all sinners regardless of their own individual assent and submission. It happens through the turning and transformation of a soul that is frustrated and defeated with its own selfish and limited concerns: a transformation caused by the restoration of the flow of divine grace from deep within the person, through the removal of an obstruction that is caused by his primitive narcissistic orientation. The removal of that obstruction allows divine grace to flow, forgiveness to be experienced in the soul and the re-formation of the soul around the source of forgiveness and grace. The soul is then no longer centred on the 'ego', as in the old narcissistic nature and, furthermore, is prevented from returning to that condition by the adoption of a new life: a life that keeps the soul centred on God with activities such as divine thanksgiving, praise and worship, loving service of others in the community, reading and meditation of sacred Scripture and, of course, personal prayer and ascetic practices.⁵⁷ A life focused on the love of God and on the love of neighbour is the way to prevent a return to old narcissistic ways. This is the difference between the life of a redeemed and an unredeemed person.

Evolutionary Biology and Divine Redemption

Though agreeing about the moral ambiguity of basic human nature, we part company with most evolutionary biologists over the divine plan of redemption. For the average

⁵³ One could list scores of references from the Gospels to justify this, but it may be best simply to recommend a reading of all four Gospels with this theme in mind.

⁵⁴ If it is accepted by the individual, needless to say, i.e. with true repentance. If it is not accepted, the redemption of the person is obviously not so certain, for further sins lie around the corner.

⁵⁵ On the terminology of 'atonement' vs 'redemption', please see above, note 51.

⁵⁶ We are reminded of the refrain repeated many times in the Book of Revelation, "the one who overcomes", about which we wrote, in the Commentary on this site (note 48): "Continuing at the level of the individual, every message concludes with a promise to 'the one who overcomes', or 'conquers' (ὁ νικῶν), a word that implies fighting on behalf of the one making the promises. In the messages themselves, the theme of fighting and 'conquering' is not explained, but it does recur often in the main body of the text (cf. Rev 5,5; 6,2; 11,7; 12,11; 13,7; 15,2; 17,14; 21,7), where it relates to the historical and eschatological struggle of Christ and his followers against the devil and his followers. The followers of Christ 'overcome' the devil through faith in Christ's atoning death (1,6; cf. 1Jn 5,4), 'the word of their witness' and 'loving not their life unto death' (Rev 12,11). Although the term 'conqueror' evidently applies to those who lose their lives as martyrs, it is not restricted to them, since the last phrase can be understood as complete renunciation of self unto death with or without martyrdom (cf. Mk 8,34-35 et par; Jn 12,25). In this case, it includes the saints and confessors." Is it not now possible to say that what they overcame, with the help of Christ, is the narcissistic part of their own human nature, the part of their soul where the devil was once able to overcome them?

⁵⁷ In Freudian terms we could say that "the energy of the libido has been removed from the ego and focused on God, the "father figure", in a process that can be termed "sublimation"..." After substituting "the energy of the libido" by "psychic energy", it is likely that Fromm would agree.

scientist, Divine Redemption and the Word of God mean very little. Nevertheless, authors like Lyall Watson come “close to the kingdom” (cf. Mk 12,34) when they reflect on the process they call “cultural evolution”, which, although itself a product of the “selfish gene principle”, has almost completely replaced the influence of natural selection among *Homo sapiens*. He writes: “Our specific history, though it occupies but 0.01 per cent of life’s whole, has been remarkable. There is no truly objective basis on which to elevate one species above another, but it has become obvious that ours is qualitatively different in at least one important way. We have the power to defy the genes. We have questioned their authority, rebelled against chemical control and, even before we knew who or what they were, set in train a movement that represents a real alternative to their tyranny. We have invented cultural evolution which, compared to the biological process, happens at the speed of light”.⁵⁸ And again: “We have, to a very large extent, liberated ourselves from strict genetic control and put a rival pattern of inheritance in play. We have completed the first step in the campaign incited by Huxley and Williams, and taken the battle directly to the enemy”,⁵⁹ the enemy being “the same process of natural selection that continues to shape the living world around us in ways that are elegant, appropriate and ecologically sound. It is the fount of all that is ‘just right’ and awesomely beautiful in nature. It is all these things, but it is also morally and ethically unsound”.⁶⁰

The moral and ethical ‘deficit’ in natural selection therefore has to be filled by moral and ethical principles arising from human cultural evolution: “It is up to us to provide these moral qualities, to give life on Earth a conscience. We are the world’s first ethical animals, at the mercy still of our biology, but capable also of rising above it. Intelligence helps. It succeeds, at the very least, in widening our view. It gives us access to a whole range of new horizons, new possibilities”.⁶¹ However, Watson admits that the process of cultural evolution is not yet up to the task, it is still losing the battle, for he continues: “We were social long before we became human. And in that long social experience lie the biological origins of virtues such as compassion, empathy, love, conscience, and a powerful sense of justice. All these things now have a firm genetic base and could be seen as natural moral values. ‘That is the good news,’ says Robert Wright in an impressive new look at the science of evolutionary psychology. ‘The bad news is that, although these things are in some ways blessings for humanity as a whole, they didn’t evolve for the “good of the species” and aren’t reliably employed to that end.’ We switch them on and off as it suits us and, thanks to genetic pressures, do so even without thinking. ‘Human beings are a species splendid in their array of moral equipment, tragic in their propensity to misuse it, and pathetic in their constitutional ignorance of the misuse’”.⁶²

Watson continues almost as if he were speaking from a Christian point of view: “The net result of this confusion is conflict between an old set of impulses which are, by design, very strong; and a new set of values which are, inevitably, unnatural. If we choose to be on the side of the angels, then the enemy is on the side of the genes, but the lines are far from clearly drawn. Those same genes and their selfish interests also succeed in creating everything in our nature that appears to be benign. But it is beginning to seem likely that the roots of all that we now regard as evil, weak or strong, lie very firmly in the camp, and in the

⁵⁸ *Dark Nature*, 209.

⁵⁹ *Dark Nature*, 238.

⁶⁰ *Dark Nature*, 238. Elsewhere: “Genes are the enemy only when their selfishness interferes with greater happiness. Evil is undesirable only when it prevents us from being as good as we can be. Trying to rid the world of genetic or evil influences is impossible and as pointless as trying to keep weeds out of a garden. A ‘weed’, anyway, is little more than a flower that happens to be growing in the wrong place.” *Dark Nature*, 258-9.

⁶¹ *Dark Nature*, 263.

⁶² *Dark Nature*, 239, quoting from R. Wright, *The Moral Animal*, Pantheon, New York, 1994.

action, of natural selection. And we must expect to find that attitudes which arise directly from biology will be working in the enemy's service, not in ours."⁶³

"The one weapon that is ours is human speech and the fossils it leaves in the form of the written or printed word. With these, we have a system of information transmission which is a real rival to genetic reproduction. Cultural evolution is very much like genetic evolution in that progress can be tracked by the effects each has on the individuals who receive them... New ideas, new music, new foods, new fashions and new faiths all succeed or fail on their merits. The difference is that, unlike the genes, they do not necessarily have to contribute to fitness in any way".⁶⁴

It takes only a little religious insight to see the function of religion, especially the Christian religion, as a means of inspiring and reinforcing the cultural and religious dimension of human life, while at the same time diminishing the biological and genetic components. This is mediated, of course, by a greater emphasis, indeed reverence, for the speech and written words of those persons whose faith has been proven in one way or another, but usually through martyrdom. So the author of *Dark Nature* appears to be lacking only that particular sensitivity to the Sacred Word, and a certain faith in its power, to be able to grasp the important role of the Christian religion in helping the human 'cultural evolution' in its battle against the selfish 'biological and genetic imperative' built into their nature.⁶⁵

Without this reliance upon the divine Word and promise, and after dismissing genuine support from capitalism, socialism, the legal system, science and organized religion, Watson's prognosis is extremely conditional and therefore somewhat pessimistic: "All we have left, it appears, is ourselves. Our divided selves, fighting individual battles on a very wide front, using what in the end may be our best weapons. Reviving neglected aspects of our own biological inheritance, reanimating the world and rediscovering long-dormant faculties, using ourselves as the ultimate instruments of knowing.... The choice is ours. It is the capacity to choose that makes us special, giving us the ability to select a course for nature, instead of just submitting to the course of natural selection."⁶⁶

Summary

If we accept that the overcoming of human narcissism, through the love of God in Christ, is the basis of redemption, then the whole history of salvation opens up before us: during his pre-historical evolution, man's narcissistic orientation prevailed and dominated his nature, as well as the whole character of his society. This powerful trait governed his personal survival and reproductive success, while at the same time ensuring his global diffusion and geographically-separated development. However, as men from different regions started to multiply, migrate and confront their rivals in other regions, this narcissistic orientation led to selfish and destructive types of conduct that were against the common good, that is to say, against the will of God. At this point, the laws of God were given to man to control his narcissistic conduct and bend it towards the common good. These laws, however, had no power to change man's narcissistic nature, but only to control it, so narcissism continued to be the dominating force in human life, from the individual to the

⁶³ *Dark Nature*, 240.

⁶⁴ *Dark Nature*, 240.

⁶⁵ More emphatically, the same could be said for Prof. Richard Dawkins, whose argument against Christianity seems focused entirely on his facile interpretation of the doctrine of Atonement (*The God Delusion*, 284-87). He can find nothing there to make sense of, so he mocks. But it is precisely the selfish aspect of "Natural Selection", which he has helped to define in his book *Selfish Gene*, which, in human nature, constitutes the 'origin of sin', as defined above. Perhaps the arguments in this essay will help in understanding why human nature has been, and still is, in need of Christ's "Redemption", and how.

⁶⁶ *Dark Nature*, 264-65.

tribe, from the nation to the empire, up to the present day. It causes men to compete instead of to co-operate, to destroy instead of to build and create, to kill each other instead of to embrace and share. If man cannot be delivered from this divisive and combative aspect of his nature, he will certainly destroy himself and much of the life around him. It has a long and bloody past, but no future.

And so a deliverer appeared at the appropriate point in time: Jesus Christ, a man whose mission was to shatter and transform primitive man's narcissism, and the divisive aggression associated with it, and to open up the way to co-existence through forgiveness and love for others. There was no other way by which men could live together and co-operate in the presence of all their racial, cultural and linguistic differences. In subsequent centuries, a truly universal society began to emerge and grow, based on the preaching and evangelizing mission of his Church. The vision of the perfect universal society began to appear as a future possibility, a project in progress, under the guidance of Christ's Spirit and his Church. But not all could accept this emphasis on self-renunciation and self-donation; narcissistic human nature continued to rebel and assert itself, refusing to forgo its hold on the souls of many. It inspired counter-reactions: false Christs and persecutions of Christ's followers. Finally, it is the inspiration behind the great apostasy (the abandonment of Christ's Church and her evangelizing mission), which, according to Christian prophecy, will be followed by the final rebellion, when human narcissism will raise its ugly head again in a final struggle for world dominion, under a supremely narcissistic leader, called the Antichrist.⁶⁷ This ultimate rebellion of unredeemed man will then be forever vanquished by the final judgment of God, after which the promised new world of eternal peace and righteousness will supervene. Up until this end, there will be war between man's primitive (old) narcissistic nature, concerned only with his own limited self-interest, and his transformed and 'divinized' (new) nature that ardently desires the best for all men and all creation, the common good, including the best for the environment. It is a battle that rages not only internally in every individual, but also externally between individuals, groups, tribes, nations, races, empires and religions. It is the old, primitive, unreformed, unredeemed nature of man against his new, universal, redeemed and transformed nature, inspired and led by Christ.⁶⁸

Christ, then, forgives sin, and especially original sin, by reforming and transforming primitive, narcissistic human nature around God, his merciful and forgiving Father. This is the very same part of the human soul that was used by the devil, to tempt and corrupt humans. This 'enemy territory' is now returned to God.⁶⁹ But those who resist until the final

⁶⁷ Again (as at note 47) we refer to our article entitled 'The Personality of the Antichrist', online at www.newtorah.org.

⁶⁸ Cf. "The on-going argument about nature and nurture, about inheritance and learning, genes and culture, is no longer one just of academic interest. It has become personal, a divide with which every one of us has to deal in our own lives" Watson, *Dark Nature*, 243. The argument is brilliantly presented and advanced, in favour of 'nature', by Steven Pinker in *The Blank State: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, London: Penguin, 2002.

⁶⁹ One of the most precious outcomes of the scientific quest is an accurate portrait of the "devil within" every human being, a portrait of the human "shadow" that is useful for everyone: "Especially now when it is becoming obvious that the enemy we face is not a chill wind or a fire-breathing demon, but something already inside us, pulling us apart. That understanding makes evil more of a psychological problem than a theological one.... It can be frightening, even shocking, to come face to face with a dark side in these ways; but it is necessary. We need to leaven the single-mindedness of our unconscious attitudes with conscious flexibility. We have to confirm the dark shadow and confront its genetic troops with the light of day. We must acknowledge the beast and harness our new intellect to its old raw power. Together, we could be formidable. Apart, we are condemned to unending cycles of personal destructiveness and collective violence – unchecked evil in action.... For a long time demons have served as scapegoats and repositories for all sorts of unacceptable and threatening impulses and actions; but most, if not all, of these seem now to be more sensibly equated with intrusions from our own unconscious processes. The recent reappearance of the devil as a force in our lives

judgment, without repenting and reconciling with God in the way of Christ, will pay a high price: they will be excluded forever from the future that Christ is building among men: the 'new heavens and the new earth'. How can they be included if, for purely selfish reasons, they continue to resist and oppose this divinely willed and perfect society of mankind?

This brings us to reflect on the whole issue of human narcissism. As in the developing child, it was a stage in the evolution of man: In conditions of small populations and low population density, this orientation provided the necessary motivation to succeed, reproduce and flourish, especially in harsh and challenging conditions, or where essential resources were limited. However, as human populations grew and coalesced, and as personal and group survival became more assured by specialization of labour and surplus food production, narcissistic traits became a major cause of social division and tension. When individual narcissism is transferred to larger and larger groups, the resulting 'group narcissism' can then become a problem of much greater proportions, one that even now threatens the survival of mankind with devastation from nuclear war.⁷⁰ And so, for the human population to survive and thrive, human narcissism must concede and allow itself to be transformed: humankind has already conquered the earth and ensured his survival as a species. In a situation of human overpopulation and superfluity, narcissistic concern about human survival is a bizarre anachronism. On the contrary, by a twist of irony, human survival now depends upon the defeat and submission of human narcissism, or in religious terms, upon the divine redemption of mankind, through Christ, from his primitive narcissistic nature.

The findings of modern evolutionary biology tend to confirm what has been said, by Freud and Fromm, about the narcissistic nature of man, especially when this is understood as the psychological expression of an inherited and genetically determined pattern of conduct that is profoundly self-centered, concerned with personal and kin survival, but almost totally lacking in concern, if not charged with aggression and suspicion, for members of the same species coming from different origins. Science has indeed revealed the origins of *Homo sapiens* through evolution, but just like every other product of natural selection, the human being that science has identified is morally imperfect, according to universal moral and ethical standards. Furthermore, an attentive reading of the biblical account of the 'fall' in Genesis 3 gives ample room to see Adam and Eve in a similar light, as morally immature humans with a basically "narcissistic orientation". In a rare show of solidarity, the Bible, modern psychologists and evolutionary biologists seem to be in agreement about the basic narcissistic nature of *Homo sapiens*.

On this note of agreement, it is apt to mention a formula proposed by the Harvard biologist Stephen Jay Gould, which would allow further cooperation, and possibly further agreement, between science and religion. He called it NOMA, for 'non-overlapping magisteria': whereas science is fundamentally concerned with the question of origins and mechanisms (answers to the question "how?"), it was, and still is, the role of religion to be concerned with the future, which is to say, with the purpose and finality of the great drama of Creation (answers to the question "why?"). There is, it seems, a 'division of labour', a 'separation of roles', in the activities of science and religion, so that both may serve the truth

seems to be the result of a lack of any more psychologically accurate, integrating and meaningful myth. The convenient old timeworn symbol of the devil slides easily into such a vacuum. We need something to counter the dismay we feel at the violence and evil which appear to be epidemic in these well-newsed days" *Dark Nature*, Watson, 256-57.

⁷⁰ It is worth repeating here the quotation, cited above, from Fromm's *Heart of Man*, 82-83: "These various manifestations of group narcissism have brought the world to the abyss of total destruction... Whether the danger of total destruction, the ideas of neohumanists and the bonds created between all men by the new means of communication will be sufficient to stop the effects of group narcissism is a question which may determine the fate of mankind."

of the human condition, past, present and future.⁷¹ Through faith in divine redemption, in the prophetic Word of God and in the faculty of human reason inspired by that Word, the Christian religion specifically relates to the future, and to the attainment of the vision of eternal righteousness and peace on earth (Rev 21–22).

One dare suggest, perhaps, that ‘human narcissism’ is the “missing link”, that is to say, the link that has been ‘missing’, or simply overlooked, in restoring the connection between man’s brutal, inglorious and narcissist prehistoric past (as determined by scientific research), his growing historical awareness of God’s will (his religious faith) and his glorious and divine future in the presence of God (religious faith informed by scientific research).⁷²

John Ben-Daniel,
Whitsun, 2015

⁷¹ “The net, or magisterium, of science covers the empirical realm: what is the universe made of (fact) and why does it work this way (theory). The magisterium of religion extends over questions of ultimate meaning and moral value. These two magisteria do not overlap, nor do they encompass all enquiry (consider, for example, the magisterium of art and the meaning of beauty). To cite the old clichés, science gets the age of rocks and religion the rock of ages; science studies how the heavens go, religion how to go to heaven...” S.J. Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*, New York: Ballantine, 1999. This formula for resolving the acrimonious debate between scientific and religious authorities is peevishly criticized by Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*, London: Transworld, 2006, 77-85) on the basis that scientists can and should comment on God (“Why shouldn’t we comment on God, as scientists?”, *ibid.* p 78); he seems to miss the point that Gould is not referring to what scientists can and cannot do, but rather to what is the realm of science and what is the realm of religion. Scientists can say what they want, but if they speak on religion they are speaking for themselves, and not for their profession.

⁷² As noted by Steven Pinker, Sigmund Freud wrote: “‘humanity has in the course of time had to endure from the hands of science three great outrages upon its naïve self-love’: the discovery that our world is not the center of the celestial spheres but rather a speck in a vast universe, the discovery that we were not specially created but instead descended from animals, and the discovery that often our conscious minds do not control how we act but merely tell us a story about our actions. He was right about the cumulative impact, but it was cognitive neuroscience rather than psychoanalysis that conclusively delivered the third blow”, *The Blank State*, pp. 43-44. To us, this seems to confirm that it is our own human narcissism, often ignored, that blinds us to seeing the whole reality of creation, neutrally, as the result of two complementary and parallel movements: 1. The “evolution” of the natural form (the realm of science), and 2. The “involution” of the divine “Word” (the realm of religion and culture). The second process, often called “cultural evolution”, should in fact be called “cultural and religious evolution”, since a people’s religious belief and expression is inseparable from their culture. It is generally regarded as the main form of “human evolution” in these days.