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What's So Special about Mankind?

By Tal Davis

"What is man that You magnify him,
And that You are concerned about him?" (Job
7:17 NASB)

"Shadows and dust..." So muses Proximo, the leader of a band of rebellious gladiators, as he faces his inevitable death at the hands of the evil Roman emperor Commodus' soldiers. Maybe you remember that scene in Ridley Scott's Academy Award winning movie *Gladiator*, in 2000. Proximo was reflecting the philosophical position of Marcus Aurelius, the Roman Emperor who had liberated him. The saying simply means that humans are nothing more than dirt encasing a mind that will cease to exist when the body dies. The implication is that humanity has no ultimate meaning, but life is to be lived to its fullest until death – then nothing.

One of the great philosophical questions that intelligent people have wrestled with for thousands of years is, "What is MAN?" That issue still intrigues philosophers, theologians, anthropologists, biologists, as well as poets and artists. The answer is a key ingredient for a worldview and has significant impact on other issues like human rights, law, justice, economics, etc.

Nonetheless, numerous answers have been proposed. For instance, German philosopher Ludwig Fierbach (1804-1872) asserted, "You are what you eat!" I heard that saying when I was in *Weight Watchers* to encourage us to eat a healthy diet. That was not what Fierbach meant. He meant it literally: all man is, in reality, is the sum total of the chemical components he puts in his body. This

totally materialistic view says we all evolved from non-life to a point of self-awareness, yet we are essentially nothing beyond the physical. When taken to its logical conclusion it leaves us in despair.

For most people the answer is often just: "Man is simply man. We are what we are. We just have to do the best we can." That, of course, is an intellectual cop out, not really an answer at all.

This is obviously counter to the Christian concept of mankind. In this essay we will look at the Christian's answer to the question, "What's so special about mankind?" To find the answer we must go back to the beginning. The opening chapter of Genesis tells us of our origin. There we learn two critical facts that help us understand the Biblical answer to the question.

First, we see that God created all living things and declared them all good.

In the early section of Genesis is recorded how God created the universe and the earth, and prepared it all for life.

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind"; and it was so. God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1: 24-25 NASB)

When we look at the universe and the world we cannot but be awed by its complexity and beauty. In my last article (see: *Back to the Future!: A Christian Reflection on the Nature of Time*) I explained how scientists have discovered solid evidence that the universe had a

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beginning. Likewise, they have also provided evidence that the universe is perfectly designed for life to exist on earth.

Canadian Christian astronomer Hugh Ross, over the past several decades, has meticulously cataloged all the necessary factors for life to exist on earth. These factors include the size of the earth, the size of the sun, earth's distance from the sun, the tilt of earth's axis, our location in the Milky Way Galaxy, and hundreds more). Ross calculated the probabilities for all necessary factors to be present at one time and place at less than 1 chance in 10282. That is 10 followed by 282 zeroes, odds regarded by mathematicians as a virtual impossibility.

These coordinated factors all point to the conclusion that divine intervention was needed for life of any kind to exist on earth. For mankind, Genesis goes even further.

Second, we learn that God created mankind in a very special way at a categorically higher level than anything else.

The book of Genesis tells us that after God finished preparing the world with plants and animals, He then did His greatest work. Here we learn just who and what we are. Clearly, this is one of the most important passages in the Bible.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule

over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1: 26-28 NASB)

Note that God says, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness..." We might ask just who was God speaking to? Why did God use the plural terms "Us" and "Our"? Several possible answers have been suggested for this usage.

One idea is that God may have been communicating within Himself as a Trinity of three persons: Father, Son, & Holy Spirit. That is a reasonable possibility in light of the New Testament.

Others have suggested that God was including in His conversation the angelic hosts. This is unlikely because there is no Scriptural evidence that angels are made in God's image.

Many scholars believe God was speaking in what is called the "Third Person of Majesty." To illustrate this principle consider how the Queen of England always speaks in the third person when speaking of herself. She will say, "We (i.e.: I) agree with the Prime Minister..." or "It interests us (i.e.: me) what the Prime Minister said..."

Regardless of how we interpret that part of the passage, verse 27 seals the deal: "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." This is the heart and soul the Christian view of humanity.

A couple of years ago, I visited a man from the church I was then pastoring just hours before he passed away. Seeing him in those final moments reminded me of the fragility and shortness of earthly life. That very same night our second grand-daughter was born. I witnessed the miracle of a new life as her mother held her in her arms. He was, and she is, two of the most

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precious and sacred things in creation: human beings "made in the image of God."

This begs the question: what do we mean by this Christian doctrine of the "image of God" (Latin: Imago Dei)? It means we humans are unique among all creatures in that we have some attributes like God. Now, obviously, we are not omnipotent, omnipresent, or omniscient. And, since God is not physical (John 4:24), it cannot be a reference to our physical body. (Note: God did become physical in Jesus' incarnation and the Bible does say our bodies are sacred temples of the Holy Spirit). Nonetheless, our divine-like attributes do include our self-awareness of who and what we are, our moral sense, our ability to reason, and, perhaps most significant, our possession of a spiritual dimension like no other creature. Above all, being made in God's image means all human life is sacred and loved by God. Furthermore, God made us stewards of His world.

That being said, what does it insinuate for us practically? For one thing, since all human life is of ultimate importance in God's view, all life should be important to us as well. This principle is the transcendent basis for human dignity, freedom, and personal rights. Western law is framed on that presupposition. Remember what the Declaration of Independence says... "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights..."

This is in contrast to secular humanism or other naturalistic philosophies which claim to place high value on human rights yet have no transcendent basis for them. Rights are defined by whatever definition is the current secular trend or what is politically correct. In many cases, those rights are determined by raw political

power. For instance, Nazis in Germany had no qualms about killing Jews because their ideology declared they were not real humans anyway (many Muslims have the same perspective today).

The "image of God" also clearly signifies that the most important human right is the right to life itself.

For You formed my inward parts;
You wove me in my mother's womb.
I will give thanks to You, for I am
fearfully and wonderfully made;
Wonderful are Your works,
And my soul knows it very well.
(Psalm 139:13-14 NASB)

It never ceases to amaze me how some people talk passionately about human rights yet see no problem denying an unborn child's right to live. In the United States, since the 1973 Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision (42 years ago this month), more than 57 million unborn children, formed "in the image of God", have been destroyed. We must ask: How long will God allow such an abomination to continue? We are in desperate need of a recovery of Bible truth and moral standards or our society faces grave consequences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, if you are not a Christian, consider this: you are made in the image of God. You have infinite worth in God's eyes. God loves you and has a plan for your life. But you have a dire problem. You are separated from Him by sin and cannot know His plan. Only Jesus Christ is the solution for your sin problem. Because God loved and valued you, He sent Jesus to die on the cross to pay your penalty and give you the free gift of eternal life. To receive that gift, you must repent (turn away) of your sins and receive Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior. That makes us all very special, indeed!

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