

Who Is a God Like Thee?

MARTIN FRANZMANN

The Theses Of Agreement
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Creation And Evolution:
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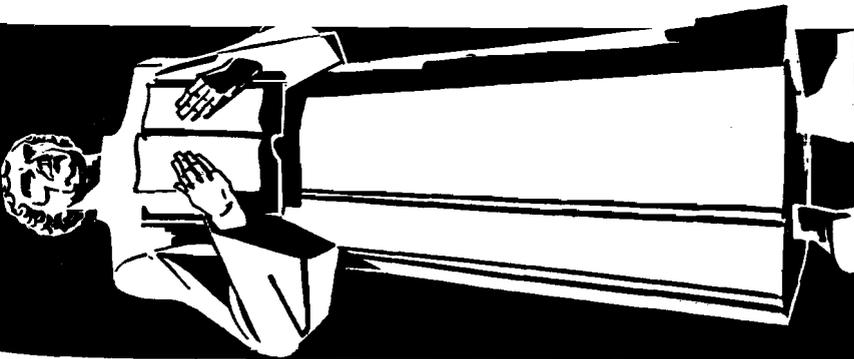
The Beginnings

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The Gospel Is What
Lutherans Care About

NORMAN E. NAGEL

Book Reviews



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The Beginnings

A "beginning" treatise to examine the Christian, the evolutionary and the Christian evolutionary constructs of the origin of the universe, of life and of man.

JOHN D. FRITZ

AN EXPLANATION OF TERMS

Spontaneous generation: Different forms of life were constantly being formed from the earth itself. Originated in the ancient world long before the time of Christ and was still prevalent in the 18th century. Beginning in the 17th century, however, scientific experiments showed that neither vegetation nor any other form of life could be generated spontaneously. Thus developed one of the principal laws of biology: "All life comes from pre-existing life." But this law does not purport to state how life came to be initially. Neither Christians nor scientists today accept spontaneous generation as an answer to origins.

Special creation: All living things were created by God at some time after God created the earth. Species do not change, but reproduce after their own kind. This explanation has been abandoned by most scientists and some Christians, since studies in fossil remains and concurrent advances in biology, geology and related sciences suggested inevitably that life on earth has undergone slow progressive changes over a long period of time. Such changes incorporated the appearance of new life forms and the disappearance of others.

Natural selection: Individuals of a species differ and both vegetation and animals tend to reproduce at such a high rate that not all can survive. It is not so much the survival of the fittest, but the survival of the fit. "Only the lucky ones make it."

Creatio ex nihilo: All things were created by God out of nothing. This is in direct contrast to evolution's insistence that only matter is infinite. This is scientifically unacceptable.

Orthogenesis: A philosophical term which means that evolution was instituted for the purpose of creating man. It is teleological (goal-directed) and scientifically unacceptable.

Hominid: A colloquial version of the technical term *Hominidae*, the family to which men belong. Man's closest "relatives" within the order Primates are the living anthropoid apes. These belong in the family *Pongidae*, which together with *Hominidae*, is included within the superfamily *Hominioidea*. To simplify matters of reference, the evolutionist generally uses the term *pongid* to designate anything which is more ape-like than man-like, while the term hominid is generally used to mean that "being" included in the family which harbors man himself.

The initial specimen, *Australopithecus africanus*, has given its name to a whole group of what are variously called "ape-men," "man-apes," "near-men," or even "primitive men." These include the Transvaal finds by Dart, Broom, Robinson and others, and the category can also be extended to include the so-called *Meganthropus* finds of Java, *Zinjanthropus* and pre-Zinj of Olduvai Gorge and the Koro Toro find from the southern Sahara.

I. N. J.

"PEOPLE INVARIABLY ARE FASCINATED by the investigation of the skeletons in their closets, and in the field of human evolution one could say that this is literally the case." So wrote C. Loring Brace in an excellent summary review of the stages of human evolution.

The Christian Church itself quite often returns to the examining of closetal skeletons, some of them clothed in cassock, surplice and stole, and some of them in scientific white, clutching the yardsticks and measuring devices of the ichnologist, anthropologist, biologist and paleontologist.

That skeleton which refuses to be laid to rest and continues to rattle its bones to the delight of the inquiring scientist and to the dismay of the Church is the theory of evolution. It has again clattered its way, if not to the forefront, then at least to the immediate sidelines of the controversies which have to do with the historical-critical method of Scriptural study and interpretation. At stake for many Christians is the faith which, declaring the Christ to be Lord and Savior, declares also that the Holy Bible, the Word (through which in spoken, written, or any other transmitted form, the Holy Spirit has brought them to faith) remains their only sole norm and rule for faith and life.

Does the Bible mean what it says and say what it means? Dare we take as literal, that is, as historical and factual, for example, what the Scriptures say about the Christ in regard to His conception, birth, life, words, death and resurrection and ascension? Or shall we assume that many of the "facts" so stated were interpolation or interpretations of a primitive Church attempting to stress one or the other facets of the One they claim as Kyrios? That such questions are raised at all is the natural result of serious and intellectually honest Christian study of the Word, as much as it is the result of serious and intellectually honest non-Christian study of the Word which regards that Word as merely words of men. To question the recorded Word's comments about the Christ is a natural parallel or result of the questioning that continues to exist concerning the facticity, historical accuracy and meaning of the Scriptures in other areas, particularly in the area before us in this treatise, the origin of the universe, life and man.²

It is in the area of human origin that the "traditional" Christian begins to feel in the minority group. "Few educated men and no serious scholars doubt that man has evolved by natural means from a creature which today would not be considered man."³ Since many Christians are educated men and serious scholars, they indeed might be labeled among the few if they continue to believe in a *creatio ex nihilo* on the basis of the recorded Word of God, and if in particular they continue to believe, hold, profess and teach that Adam and Eve were indeed the first humans who came into being, not as the result of a long process of evolutionary development, but through the direct and immediate creative activity of God.

Being in the minority, whether educated or not, is hardly the supreme problem for the Christian. Christians have been in the minority before, and that is a fact of the Christian life with which most are content to live. But that a moderate theory of evolution in the teaching Church has been permitted, if not condoned,⁴ is a source of concern, rather than embarrassment, for at the least it poses problems in other areas of Church teaching.⁵

For the present company we may assume a thoroughly familiar

grasp of those passages on which the Christian Church traditionally has based its teaching concerning the origin of the universe, life and man.⁶ While certain churchmen or groups within the Christian Church have differed in terms of interpretation of such passages from time to time, the Church's teachers were generally in agreement concerning the origin of all matter and living things until acceptance of the theories of evolution forced its way upon the thinking world and began inroads into the thinking Church in the middle 1800's. This is not to say that the Church did not speak to the issues of the age of the earth or the origin of things prior to this time.

In the year 1700 the earliest recognition of a human fossil was accorded a skull fragment at Canstatt, near Stuttgart in western Germany. At that time, however, no one suspected that modern living forms, including man, would one day be believed to have evolved by natural means from earlier forms quite different in appearance. Most of the world at that time accepted the Canstatt skull as evidence of human existence in ancient times, but its form was quite like that of modern man's skull, and ancient times were measured in terms of 6000 years from that particular point in history. No evolutionist can quite forget the chronology of James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, who, computing from the named generations in the Bible, arrived at the conclusion that creation had occurred in the year 4004 B.C. To this, the Reverend Dr. John Lightfoot, vice-chancellor of Cambridge University added the pronouncement that ". . . heaven and earth, centre and circumference, were created all together in the same instant, and clouds full of water. This work took place and man was created by the Trinity on October 23, 4004 B.C. at nine o'clock in the morning."⁷

By the end of the eighteenth century, accumulating knowledge of the structure and strata of the earth, together with appraisals of geological processes, began leading some people to suspect that the earth was much older. Fossil remains of extinct animals were discovered and the die was cast. From that time on, gathering impetus from Darwin, Cuvier, de Parthes, Dubois, and many others to the remarkable finds of Dr. and Mrs. L. S. B. Leakey at Olduvai Gorge, (in what is now Tanzania in East Africa) in the late 1950's, the evidence has been accumulating scientifically that man indeed is a product of evolution.

What exactly do the proponents of evolution say? Evolutionists are agreed that man has evolved from a creature which today would not be considered man. From that initial point of agreement they are the first to admit that the thinking of qualified evolutionists diverges to such a degree that many feel there is no basis at all on which adequately to pinpoint the course of human evolution on the basis of the arrangement of the prehistoric evidences.⁸ A. L. Kroeber, long recognized as the dean of American Anthropology, insists that answers are not easy to arrive at. He speaks of the fact that in his field "beclouding results from the bad transference of biologically legitimate concepts into the realm of the history of human society and culture, or viewing these as unfolding according to a simple scheme of progress."⁹

Basically the evolutionist holds that only matter has existed from eternity and that the concept of a beginning for matter from nothing at all is incomprehensible and unacceptable to man. Further it is held that the universe evolved from pre-existent matter which is infinite in respect to beginning and end; that the universe and all that it contains evolved in a slow and gradual process involving at least hundreds of millions of years; that life in the form of one-celled organisms evolved from non-living matter, and animals and plants from one-celled organisms; that at some point about 30 million years ago the evolutionary species that led to man separated from the series that leads to modern apes; that man evolved in the Pleistocene period (2 million years ago to 10,000 years ago) concurrently with other hominids; and that it is impossible to determine exactly from which early manlike creature man himself descended. It is further admitted that the origin of life remains a mystery.

The Christian evolutionist retains all of the above with the obvious exceptions that a) he believes that only God has existed from eternity, b) that God "in the beginning" created matter and stuff, c) that God set up the evolutionary processes to develop in course of time all plants and animals, d) that at some point in time God chose *homo sapiens* to be the recipient of "the image of God," and finally e) that to accept such a moderate theory of evolution does no violence to the interpretation of Scriptural accounts and passages relevant to origins, to original sin, to the soul, to man's relationship to Creator-God, or to the redemptive act in Christ Jesus.

There are, of course, a number of responses expected to the above. We cannot in the scope of this paper respond to them all. In responding to any of them at all we inevitably repeat things which others have suggested. Not being a biologist, paleontologist, or experienced scientist in any field, it would be obviously foolhardy to attempt to criticize that with which we have not dealt in scientific detail. In science and in theology it is the neophyte who sometimes poses the greatest problems. But it remains true, of course, that while the scientist claims not to be a theologian it is often difficult for him to restrain himself from expostulating on theological problems and conundrums. The same is true of the theologian who fearlessly invades the scientific field. Shoemakers we all are, who refuse to stick to our last.

But let us at least admit, that if there be any such being as a Christian evolutionist, our concern primarily ought to be over the fact that he is Christian and if he is we owe each other the mutual debt of strengthening in the faith. Let us also admit that if we believe that God provides a soul for every human being conceived, God could provide a soul and "insert" it into the body of that being, hominid in structure and form, but animal-like in being, and thus "create" man. But that is really not the end of the matter.¹⁰

If the above should be true, then the question which ought to be asked is: **Doesn't this indicate a direction to evolution?** If one accepts the Christian evolutionary concept, the evolution of all living things was instituted by God for the purpose of creating the human

species. This is called orthogenesis and is a teleological point of view. But strange to say, the Christian evolutionist knows that orthogenesis is not scientifically acceptable.

Stanley Beck has pointed out that if the evolution of man is viewed from the standpoint of orthogenesis, then every step in the evolutionary process was directed toward the ultimate goal of the creation of man.

“But this would mean that the appearance of man was not the final effect of a long series of casual events. Instead, it would mean that the creation of man was the original cause of the whole sequence of evolutionary events. Such an interpretation involves a complete reversal of the scientific attitude toward natural phenomena, because we would be required to say that the effect (man) was the reason for the causes (evolution). This we cannot do legitimately; we must maintain that the effect is the product, not the goal of natural previous causes.”¹¹

Since orthogenesis is not acceptable to science, the Christian evolutionist find himself unacceptable to those with whom he should like to affiliate.

Further, orthogenesis could not be called a Christian concept. Whatever the Scriptural accounts or passages say in regard to the “beginnings”, either poetically, mythologically or factually, they all describe the beginnings as orderly and systematic, as well as miraculous, and they do not lend themselves in any way, shape or form, to a series of casual or even cataclysmic developments which God utilized in order to “create” man. Orthogenesis is based on presuppositions that are foreign to the Christian understanding of God as He has revealed Himself, that is, as a God of order.

Could a Christian evolutionist on the other hand opt for the idea that evolution is without purpose, is directed purely by chance, and that the world as we know it and man himself are the products of blind, random, natural forces? That also is a philosophical interpretation and thus involves suppositions that are not scientific. As Beck points out:

“The assumption is that there is a scientific basis for determining the presence or absence of purpose in natural phenomena . . . But science cannot deal with the question of ultimate purpose. Thus the interpretation of evolution as being without purpose has no more scientific merit than has the idea of orthogenesis.”¹²

Science deals in terms of measurable relationships, with cause and effect, but not with ultimate purpose. If the Christian evolutionist adopts the foregoing premise, he is again outside the realm of pure science.

Furthermore, he is also outside the realm of the Christian concept of a purposeful God, demonstrated from the election of the believer in Christ before the foundation of the world to the denouement of the final coming of the Son of Man.

What acceptable interpretation may be given which is based on a minimum of speculation, a maximum of observable fact and on the firm basis of the acceptable scientific theory? Here is Beck's answer:

. . . We know that the universe has the capacity to produce a variety of creatures. Man is a product of that universal capacity; his evolution is an expression of the capacity of the universe to create just such a living being . . . Philosophical speculation as to whether man appeared by design or by chance is not scientifically meaningful. We need remember only that we are here in this place at this time because of the very nature of the universe in which we live, move, and have our physical being. And the mystery of existence is not only that man has been created, but also that such a universe, so ordered with natural law, should be capable of the progressive expression of life that is to be seen in the evolutionary process.¹³

Our answer to that will be stated in the conclusion of the treatise.

Meanwhile we ought ask whether the teaching of the Bible is consistent with the idea of the Christian evolutionist that God put a soul into a hominid to make man.

Genesis 2:7 says that the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground; breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and that thus man became a living soul.

Would not the Christian evolutionist understand this passage (even with a mythological or poetical interpretation) to indicate that this is the "point" at which man was created? Added to this, the word "dust" would therefore refer to a hominid. Now the word dust appears scores of times in the Old Testament and it has a variant enough meaning to make it impossible to decide whether or not dust can actually refer to a hominid-type animal.

Maatman has suggested that it might be best to conclude that something about man's body must be different than animal counterparts. The body of man shall rise on the day of judgment. Man's body shall rise because it is the body of man. This Bible teaching (I Corinthians 15:35 ff.) states that man's body shall rise (either to everlasting life or everlasting torment) and it provides a consideration of the fact that nothing else in the universe is quite like the body of man. Is this relevant to our discussion? It is indeed relevant when considering the nature of man's body to discuss its destiny. This is the same type consideration the Christian evolutionist applies to the body of the hominid whose destiny it is claimed was to become the body of man—and therefore a different kind of body, for it would house the image of God Himself!¹⁴

We return again to Genesis 2:7. On the basis of this passage, whether it is interpreted poetically or literally, the Christian evolutionist ought maintain that the passage describes the moment when God inserted the *nephesh* into the body of the hominid to make man.

Nephesh, meaning living creature, may be applied to men or animals. Whatever it means, however, it means that according to

this passage it was precisely at this time that man received life. Note that twice in one verse we are told that man received life.

If the Christian evolutionist is right about a hominid being used by God to create a man, shouldn't the hominid already have had life prior to becoming man? If so, then we have the problem of deciding how God "operated" to make man. God must have slain the hominid prior to making man otherwise there would have been no sense to the passage which says that God inserted life at this time. Or should we assume that God used a living hominid and inserted into the living hominid another life, a different life (a soul?), to accompany the life that was already there? But, as Maatman has pointed out, there is no evidence in this verse that God used already living matter to make man. There is evidence, however, that God created man from non-living material.¹⁵

We move now from the problem of "life" to the problem of "death".

Both the Christian and the Christian evolutionist agree that death came upon man as the curse of God upon man's sin. The wages of sin is death. While all creation "groans" under the curse of God upon the sin of man, sin cannot be associated with the body of an animal. The Christian and Christian evolutionist also agree that the description of man involves at least both body and soul. Sin came into this world through one man and death by sin (Romans 6:12). Sin did not come into the world through a hominid.

Death is necessary in the whole theory of evolutionary progression. Therefore the Christian evolutionist faces another problem. Before the fall man had not sinned and therefore was not subject to death. But man's so-called hominid ancestors had not sinned either. They could not for they were not human. Yet they died and had to die. Both the evolutionist and the Christian evolutionist would have to agree on that otherwise the theory of evolutionary progression would not hold. If, therefore, a hominid body was used by God to "create" man, that hominid was already subject to death and not because of sin. The question therefore must be asked whether God therefore granted a "temporary" immortality to the hominid prior to using that hominid to create man. If that were so, would it not be indicated in some passage which teaches that the death of man was because of sin? But nowhere is any indication given that immortality was temporarily given. Immortality is only mentioned as being taken away. The Christian evolutionist therefore has another unsolvable problem.

There are indeed other aspects of Christian evolution to be considered. But that quite obviously would entail another treatise.

In summary shall we say that the Christian and the evolutionist are diametrically opposed to each other in world view, in anthropology, as well as in philosophy and/or theology. The Christian evolutionist finds himself opposed by both the Christian and the evolutionist, since the Christian evolutionist has attempted the impossible—the bridging of the insurmountable gap between the Christian concept and belief in origins and the evolutionary construct. In doing so, the Christian evolutionist is not scientific as he has so

often believed, for he must view God as miraculously intervening in the process of evolution in order to create man. Science will not accept that posture, for miracles do not exist for the pure scientist.

Moreover, the Christian evolutionist finds himself opposed by fellow Christians as well, for he has denied the miracle of the immediate creation of man in his totality and substituted for it a miracle of his own making.

That God guided in a special way jumps across evolutionary gaps between kinds, is an unprovable idea, both on the basis of science and on the basis of the Scripture, and in reality unprovable also according to the assumptions of Christian evolution itself.

The concept of origins is of supreme theological importance, most especially the origin of man. Whether or not man appeared by design or chance is significant. We must remember that we are here in this place at this time because of the very nature of the God of love in whom we live and move and have our being. The mystery of our existence is answered with this: that not only has He chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be His own, but in accord with that same gracious will He has made it possible for us to be His own through the vicarious atonement worked by His Son; and by the power of the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament He has made possible for us the progressive expression of life lived in His grace and by His power which one day will culminate in the resurrection of our bodies and the life of the world to come.

It ought be apparent by now that the author of this treatise still believes that God created all things, inanimate and animate, out of nothing, by the Word of His power. It is admittedly a belief. It is a belief which has arisen out of faith in the Christ as Lord and personal Savior, the pre-existent Christ who made all things and without whom nothing came into being.

There may be theologians in the 20th century church who have so thoroughly studied the natural sciences and have mastered them to such an extent that they may claim inerrancy in judgments in the entire matter of origins. From the scientific standpoint the author of this treatise is not one of such. But he does believe that being a 20th century Christian calls for honest study and honest appraisal of Scriptural and scientific evidence concerning the origins of the universe, of life and particularly of man.

He also trusts that no Christian will simply accommodate his theology to include a moderate theory of evolution, called Christian evolution, or will interpret the Scriptures on the basis of accommodation to scientific theory in the hope of making the Christian faith seem more relevant and up-to-date. A theology of expediency or compromise is not the answer to the problems the Church faces in the 20th century world, nor is it the avenue to follow in being all things to all men in order to save some.

The foregoing treatise is only a "beginning" to discuss beginnings. It is by no means the final answer. Much work must yet be done to deal with current problems as they now exist. Following are questions which might be pursued:

a) Why can't a Christian accept the evolutionary concept in

terms of the development of all things EXCEPT man, and thus accept both the theory of evolution and the Bible teaching of the God who creates? Must we fall into the "hominid trap" in explaining man's origin?

- b) Can the stated concept of the difference of man's body over against animal bodies be supported by Scripture? What about 1 Cor. 15:35 ff.?
- c) Death is necessary in the whole theory of evolutionary progression. Is it legitimate to consider this aspect in terms of Christian evolution? Was death in the world before man fell into sin? Does the fact that God made "coats of skins" to clothe Adam and Eve mean that death did not occur in the animal world before man fell into sin? If that is so, what was Adam and Eve's "reference point" in respect to death?
- d) Is it possible that the six creation days were not immediately successive? Could long periods of time have elapsed between each creation day? Supposing a Christian believes that between each day of creation there were long periods of time in which living things evolved and developed—is this "acceptable belief"? Would this be as "open" a question as for example, creationism or traducianism?
- e) Does Genesis 1:24 indicate spontaneous generation? If so, what about the fowl in Genesis 1:20-21, or did they arise from the water? If spontaneous generation is not indicated in this passage—is *creatio ex nihilo*?
- f) Does Gen. 2:18 ff. emphasize Adam's "pre-eminence" or his "pre-existence" in regard to Eve? Which? Why? Or were they really equal? Did Adam really "rule over" Eve prior to sin and God's curse?
- g) Are there significant variations between the Christian and the Christian evolutionist's approach to or belief in origins? If so, what are they and why are they significant?

With thanks to men who walked this way before,¹⁶ we end as we began, in the name of Jesus.

FOOTNOTES

1. C. Loring Brace, *The Stages of Human Evolution*, Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1967, p. 4.
2. Questions about the "inerrancy" of the Bible continue to plague the Christian Church. The following is adapted from Maatman, Russel W., *The Bible, Natural Science and Evolution*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970, p. 21.

To clarify the use of the term "inerrant," herewith follow some of the possible errors which might be attributed to the Scriptures.

1. The Bible might teach incorrectly how man can meet with God's favor.
2. The Bible might give incorrect information about life after death.
3. The Bible might give incorrect information about the nature of God.
4. The Bible could record the acts of God incorrectly.
5. The Bible could record human history incorrectly.
6. The Bible in one part might incorrectly interpret another part of the Scriptures.

7. The Bible might incorrectly identify the physical environment incidental to the recorded events.
8. The Bible might provide incorrect answers to scientific-philosophical problems, such as whether or not the universe is finite with respect to age and size.

The meaning of Biblical inerrancy is that the Bible cannot make either or any of these errors, or any other error which might be supposed.

3. Brace, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
4. Karl Rahner, *Hominisation: The Evolutionary Origin of Man as a Theological Problem*, Herder and Herder, New York, 1965, pp. 62ff.
5. That God utilized the processes of evolution for the creation of all things, including man, would seem to call into question immediately the teachings about: original sin, facticity of the Scriptures themselves, the soul, resurrection of the body, eschatology—and all passages in the New Testament where the first Adam is contrasted with the second Adam, Christ. That these come into play is seen from the fact that the Christian evolutionist bothers to defend himself in these areas.
6. Gen. 1-11; Job 26:5-14; Job 38, 39; Psalms 8; 19; 33:4-19; 65:5-13; 90:1-6; 95:1-7; 102:25-27; 104; 136:1-16; 139:1-18; 147; Isaiah 40:12-17; 21-31; 45:18-19; John 1:1-14 et. al.
7. Brace, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
9. A. L. Kroeber, *Anthropology: Biology and Race*, Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1963, p. 7.

Kroeber says: ". . . it is just as well to realize that in matters like this the best experts will differ, because evidence on ancient days is always incomplete and gaps in knowledge have to be bridged over by opinion" p. 54.

In a discussion of the clash in classifying Hominidae and Simiidae, he says, "Of course, such a clash does not make us lose faith in the authenticity of "science," as soon as we realize that in this case both genealogy and taxonomy rest partly on admitted facts, but partly also on construal of fact—in other words, on opinion" p. 56.

In a discussion of the differences among the races and explanations of these differences the statement is made, "This is working by indirect evidence, it is true; but sooner or later that is the method to which science always finds itself reduced" p. 79.

10. Cf. Rahner's work, *op. cit.*, pp. 94ff.
11. Stanley D. Beck, *Modern Science and Christian Life*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, Minn., 1970, pp. 139 ff.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
14. We are indebted for these constructs to Maatman, *op. cit.*, pp. 148 ff.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
16. Especially to R. W. Maatman whose volume proved invaluable in this study.

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