

## Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople

BY TIM KELLER

### WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Many secular and many evangelical voices agree on one 'truism'—that if you are an orthodox Christian with a high view of the authority of the Bible, you cannot believe in evolution in any form at all. New Atheist authors such as Richard Dawkins and creationist writers such as Ken Ham seem to have arrived at consensus on this, and so more and more in the general population are treating it as given. If you believe in God, you can't believe in evolution. If you believe in evolution, you can't believe in God.

This creates a problem for both doubters and believers. Many believers in western culture see the medical and technological advances achieved through science and are grateful for them. They have a very positive view of science. How then, can they reconcile what science seems to tell them about evolution with their traditional theological beliefs? Seekers and inquirers about Christianity can be even more perplexed. They may be drawn to many things about the Christian faith, but, they say, "I don't see how I can believe the Bible if that means I have to reject science."

However, there are many who question the premise that science and faith are irreconcilable. Many believe that a high view of the Bible does not demand belief in just one account of origins. They argue that we do not have to choose between an anti-science religion or an anti-religious science.<sup>1</sup> They think that there are a variety of ways in which God could have brought about the creation of life forms and human life using evolutionary processes, and that the picture of incompatibility between orthodox faith and evolutionary biology is greatly overdrawn.<sup>2</sup>

For example, there have been a number of efforts to argue that there may be evolutionary reasons for religious belief. That is, it may be that capacity for religious belief is 'adaptive' or is connected to other adaptive traits, passed down from our ancestors because they supported survival and reproduction. There is no consensus about this among evolutionary biologists. Nevertheless, its very proposal seems to be completely antithetical to any belief that God is objectively real. However, Christian philosopher Peter van Inwagen asks:

Suppose that God exists and wants supernaturalistic belief to be a human universal, and sees (he would see this if it were true) that certain features would be useful for human beings to have—useful from an evolutionary point of view: conducive to survival and reproduction—would naturally have the consequence that supernaturalistic belief would be in due course a human universal. Why shouldn't he allow those features to be the cause of the thing he wants?—rather as the human designer of a vehicle might use the waste heat from its engine to keep its passengers warm.<sup>3</sup>

Van Inwagen's argument is sound. Even if science could prove that religious belief has a genetic component that we inherit from our ancestors, that finding is not incompatible with belief in the reality of God or even the truth of the Christian faith. There is no logical reason to preclude that God could have used evolution to predispose people to believe in God in general so that people would be able to consider true belief when they hear the gospel preached. This is just one of many places where the supposed incompatibility of orthodox faith with evolution begins to fade away under more sustained reflection.

However, many Christian laypeople remain confused because the voices arguing that Biblical orthodoxy and evolution are mutually exclusive are louder and more prominent than any others. What will it take to help Christian laypeople see greater coherence between what science tells us about creation and what the Bible teaches us about it?

## **PASTORS AND THE PEOPLE**

In my estimation what current science tells us about evolution presents four main difficulties for orthodox Protestants. The first is in the area of *Biblical authority*. To account for evolution we must see at least Genesis 1 as non-literal. The questions come along these lines: what does that mean for the idea that the Bible has final authority? If we refuse to take one part of the Bible literally, why take any parts of it literally? Aren't we really allowing science to sit in judgment on our understanding of the Bible rather than *vica versa*?

The second difficulty is *the confusion of biology and philosophy*. Many of the strongest proponents for evolution as a biological process (such as Dawkins) also see it as a 'Grand Theory of Everything.' They look to natural selection to explain not only all human behavior but even to give the only answers to the great philosophical questions, such as why we exist, what life is about, and why human nature is what it is. Doesn't belief in the one idea—that life is the product of evolution—entail the adoption of this whole 'world-view'?

The third difficulty is *the historicity of Adam and Eve*. One way to reconcile what current science says about evolution is to propose that the account of Adam and Eve is symbolic, not literal, but what does this do to the New Testament teaching of Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 that our sinfulness comes from our relationship with Adam? If we don't believe in an historical fall, how did we become what the Bible says we are—sinful and condemned?

The fourth difficulty is *the problem of violence and evil*. One of the greatest barriers to belief in God is the problem of suffering and evil in the world. Why, people ask, did God create a world in which violence, pain, and death are endemic? The answer of traditional theology is—he didn't. He created a good world but also gave human beings free will, and through their disobedience and 'Fall', death and suffering came into the world. The process of evolution, however, understands violence, predation, and death to be the very engine of how life develops. If God brings about life through evolution, how do we reconcile that with the idea of a good God? The problem of evil seems to be worse for the believer in theistic evolution.

I have been a pastor for almost 35 years, and during that time I've spoken to many laypeople who struggle with the relationship of modern science to orthodox belief. In the minds of most laypeople, it is the first three difficulties that loom largest. The fourth difficulty—the problem of suffering and death—has not been posed to me as often by parishioners. Yet in some ways the problem of suffering goes along with the third question regarding the historicity of the Fall. Without the traditional view of the historicity of the Fall, the question of evil would seem to become more acute.

Therefore, below I will lay out three basic problems that Christian laypeople have with the scientific account of biological evolution. Nothing here should be seen as meeting the need for rigorous, scholarly arguments in answer to these questions. These are popular-level pastoral answers and guidance. As a pastor I have had to draw heavily on the work of experts. The first question, about Biblical authority, requires that I draw on the best work of exegetes and Biblical scholars. To answer the second question, about evolution as a 'Grand Theory of Everything,' I need to draw on the work of philosophers. When we come to the third question regarding Adam and Eve, I must look to theologians.

In short, if I as a pastor want to help both believers and inquirers to relate science and faith coherently, I must read the works of scientists, exegetes, philosophers, and theologians and then interpret them for my people. Someone might counter that this is too great a burden to put on pastors, that instead they should simply refer their laypeople to the works of scholars. But if pastors are not ‘up to the job’ of distilling and understanding the writings of scholars in various disciplines, how will our laypeople do it? This is one of the things that parishioners want from their pastors. We are to be a bridge between the world of scholarship and the world of the street and the pew. I’m aware of what a burden this is. I don’t know that there has ever been a culture in which the job of the pastor has been more challenging. Nevertheless, I believe this is our calling.

### THREE QUESTIONS OF CHRISTIAN LAYPEOPLE

**Question #1:** *If God used evolution to create, then we can’t take Genesis 1 literally, and if we can’t do that, why take any other part of the Bible literally?*

**Answer:** *The way to respect the authority of the Biblical writers is to take them as they want to be taken. Sometimes they want to be taken literally, sometimes they don’t. We must listen to them, not impose our thinking and agenda on them.*

#### **Genre and authorial intent.**

The way to take the Biblical authors seriously is to ask ‘how does this author *want* to be understood?’ This is common courtesy as well as good reading. Indeed it is a way to practice the Golden Rule. We all want people to take time to consider whether we want to be taken literally or not. If you write a letter to someone saying, “I just wanted to strangle him!” you will hope your reader understands you to be speaking metaphorically. If she calls the police to arrest you, you can rightly complain that she should have made the effort to ascertain whether you meant to be taken literally or not.

The way to discern how an author wants to be read is to distinguish what genre the writer is using. In Judges 5:20, we are told that the stars in the heavens came down and fought against the Syrians on behalf of the Israelites, but in Judges 4, which recounts the battle, no such supernatural occurrence is mentioned. Is there a contradiction? No, because Judges 5 has all the signs of the genre of Hebrew poetry, while Judges 4 is historical prose narrative. Judges 4 is an account of what happened, while Judges 5 is Deborah’s Song about the theological meaning of what happened. When you get to Luke 1:1ff., we read the author insisting that everything in the text is an historical account checked against the testimony of eyewitnesses. That again is an unmistakable sign that the author wants to be taken ‘literally’ as describing actual events.

This does not mean that the Biblical author’s intent and the genre are always clear. Genesis 1 and the book of Ecclesiastes are two examples of places in the Bible where there will always be debate, because the signs are not crystal clear. But the principle is this--to assert that one part of Scripture shouldn’t be taken literally does not at all mean that no other parts should be either.

### Genre and Genesis 1.

So what genre is Genesis 1? Is it prose or poetry? In this case, that is a false choice. Edward J. Young, the conservative Hebrew expert who reads the six-days of Genesis 1 as historical, admits that Genesis 1 is written in "exalted, semi-poetical language".<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, it is a narrative that describes a succession of events, using the *wayyigtol* expression characteristic of prose, and it does not have the key mark of Hebrew poetry, namely parallelism. So for example, in Miriam's Song of Exodus 15 we clearly see the signs of poetic recapitulation or restatement that is poetic parallelism:

"Pharaoh's chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea;  
The best of Pharaoh's officers are drowned in the Red Sea.

The deep waters covered them;  
They sank to the depths like a stone." (Exodus 15:4-5)

On the other hand, as many have noted, Genesis 1's prose is extremely unusual. It has *refrains*, repeated statements that continually return as they do in a hymn or song. There are many examples, including the seven-time refrain, "and God saw that it was good" as well as ten repetitions of "God said", ten of "let there be", seven repetitions of "and it was so," as well as others. Obviously, this is not the way someone writes in response to a simple request to tell what happened.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the terms for the sun ("greater light") and moon ("lesser light") are highly unusual and poetic, never being used anywhere else in the Bible, and "beast of the field" is a term for animal that is ordinarily confined to poetic discourse.<sup>6</sup> All this leads Collins to conclude that the genre is:

"...what we may call *exalted prose narrative*. This name for the genre will serve us in several ways. First, it acknowledges that we are dealing with prose narrative...which will include the making of truth claims about the world in which we live. Second, by calling it exalted, we are recognizing that... we must not impose a 'literalistic' hermeneutic on the text."<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the strongest argument for the view that the author of Genesis 1 did *not* want to be taken literally is a comparison of the order of creative acts in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. Genesis 1 shows us an order of creation that does not follow a 'natural order' at all. For example, there is light (Day 1) before there are any sources of light--the sun, moon, and stars (Day 4). There is vegetation (Day 3) before there was any atmosphere (Day 4 when the sun was made) and therefore there was vegetation before rain was possible. Of course, this is not a problem *per se* for an omnipotent God. But Genesis 2:5 says: "When the Lord God made the earth and heavens--and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, **because** the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth, and there was no man to work the ground." Although God did not have to follow what we would call a 'natural order' in creation, Genesis 2:5 teaches that he did. It is stated categorically: God did not put vegetation on the earth before there was an atmosphere and rain. But in Genesis 1 we *do* have vegetation before there is any rain possible or any man to till the earth. In Genesis 1 natural order means nothing--there are three 'evenings and mornings' before there is a sun to set! But in Genesis 2 natural order is the norm.<sup>8</sup>

The conclusion—we may read the order of events as literal in Genesis 2 but not in Genesis 1, or (much, much more unlikely) we may read them as literal in Genesis 1 but not in Genesis 2. But in any case, you can't read them *both* as straightforward accounts of historical events. Indeed, if they are both to be read literalistically, why would the author have combined the accounts, since they are (on that reading) incompatible? The best answer is that we are not supposed to understand them that way. In Exodus 14-15 (the Red Sea crossing) and Judges 4-5 (Israel's defeat of Syria under Sisera) there is an historical account joined to a more poetical 'song' that proclaims the meaning of the event. Something like that may be what the author of Genesis has in mind here.

So what does this mean? It means Genesis 1 does not teach that God made the world in six twenty-four hour days. Of course, it doesn't teach evolution either, because it doesn't address the actual processes by which God created human life. However, it does not preclude the possibility of the earth being extremely old.<sup>9</sup> We arrive at this conclusion not because we want to make room for any particular scientific view of things, but because we are trying to be true to the text, listening as carefully as we can to the meaning of the inspired author.

**Question#2: *If biological evolution is true—does that mean that we are just animals driven by our genes, and everything about us can be explained by natural selection?***

**Answer: *No. Belief in evolution as a biological process is not the same as belief in evolution as a world-view.***

Today every effort is being made to insist that belief in the process of biological evolution leads necessarily to belief in 'perennial naturalism' (to use Alvin Plantinga's term),<sup>10</sup> the view that everything about human nature—our ability to love, act, think, form beliefs, use language, have moral convictions, put faith in God, and do art and philosophy—can all be understood as originating in random genetic mutation or some other source of variability, and prevailing in the human race today only because of natural selection. We may feel that some behaviors are universally right and should be performed, and some things universally wrong and should not be done, whether those behaviors promote your survival or not. But perennial naturalism insists that those feelings are there *not* because they are universally true, but only and entirely because they helped your ancestors survive.

One of the cardinal principles of the 'new atheists' is that perennial naturalism automatically flows from belief in the biological evolution of species. A great example was Sam Harris' recent castigation of Francis Collins, after he was nominated to be head of NIH. Harris was deeply troubled that Collins as a Christian believer understood that human nature had aspects (such as intuition of God's Moral Law) which science could not explain. Collins was denying, therefore, that science could provide 'answers to the most pressing questions of human existence.' This troubled Harris. He wrote:

"As someone who believes that our understanding of human nature can be derived from neuroscience, psychology, cognitive science and behavioral economics, among others, I am troubled by Dr. Collins's line of thinking... Must we really entrust the future of biomedical research in the United States to a man who sincerely believes that a scientific understanding of human nature is impossible?"<sup>11</sup>

The argument here is clear. If you believe human life was formed through evolutionary biological processes (from here on, referred to as EBP), you must therefore believe in the Grand Theory of Evolution (from here on, referred to as GTE) as the explanation for every aspect of human nature. Collins, he says, should see that human beings have no ‘immortal soul, free will, [knowledge] of the moral law, spiritual hunger, genuine altruism’ based on our relationship with God.<sup>12</sup> Evolution, Harris claims, has shown that these things are illusions. All features of human life have a natural, scientifically explicable cause. If you believe in EBP, you must believe in GTE.

GTE is fast becoming what Peter Berger calls a ‘plausibility structure’. It is a set of beliefs considered so basic, and with so much support from authoritative figures and institutions, that it is becoming impossible for individuals to publicly question them. A plausibility structure is a ‘given’ supported by enormous social pressure. The writings of the new atheists here are important to observe because their *attitudes* are more powerful than their arguments. The disdain and refusal to show any respect to opponents is not actually an effort to refute them logically, but to ostracize them socially and turn their own views into a plausibility structure. They are well on their way.

This creates a problem for the Christian layperson if they hear their teachers or preachers telling them that God could have used EBP to bring about life forms. Evolution as a ‘Grand Theory’ is now being used at the popular level to explain nearly everything about human behavior.

Many Christian laypeople resist all this and seek to hold on to some sense of human dignity by subscribing to ‘fiat-creationism.’ This is not a sophisticated theological and philosophical move; it is intuitive. In their mind ‘evolution’ is one big ball of wax. It seems to them that, if you believe in evolution, human beings are just animals under the power of their inner, genetically-produced drives. I have seen Christians in a Bible study on Genesis 1-2 read the following quote and become confused:

"If 'evolution' is...elevated to the status of a world-view of the way things are, then there is direct conflict with biblical faith. But if 'evolution' remains at the level of scientific biological hypothesis, it would seem that there is little reason for conflict between the implications of Christian belief in the Creator and the scientific explorations of the way which--at the level of biology--God has gone about his creating processes."<sup>13</sup>

Atkinson is saying that you can believe in EBP and *not* GTE. I have seen intelligent, educated laypeople really struggle with the distinction Atkinson has made. Nevertheless, this is exactly the distinction they *must* make, or they will never grant the importance of EBP.

How can we help them? I believe that Christian pastors, theologians, and scientists who want to argue for an EBP account of origins must put a great deal of emphasis at the same time on arguing against GTE. Christian philosophers have paved the way here and there are many good critiques of philosophical naturalism. Many know about Alvin Plantinga’s ‘Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism’ in which, much like C.S. Lewis in his book *Miracles*, he argues that “Evolution is interested (so to speak) only in adaptive behavior, not in true belief. Natural selection doesn’t care what you believe; it is interested only in how you behave.”<sup>14</sup> The argument goes like this. Does natural selection (alone) give us cognitive faculties (sense perception, rational intuition about those perceptions, and our memory of them) that produce true beliefs

about the real world? In as far as true belief produces survival behavior—yes. But who can say how far that is? If a theory makes it impossible to trust our minds, then it also makes it impossible to be sure about anything our minds tell us—including macro-evolution itself-- and everything else.<sup>15</sup> Any theory that makes it impossible to trust our minds is self-defeating.

Another very important area where we must ‘push back’ against GTE is in its efforts to explain away moral intuitions. An excellent recent volume where, again, Christian philosophers take the lead is Jeffrey Schloss, ed. *The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Reflections on the Origin of Religion* (Oxford, 2009.) See especially Christian Smith’s chapter “Does Naturalism Warrant a Moral Belief in Universal Benevolence and Human Rights?” (By the way, his conclusion is ‘no.’)

So what does this mean? Many orthodox Christians who believe in EBP often find themselves attacked by those Christians who do not. But it might reduce the tensions between believers over evolution if they could make common cause against GTE. Most importantly, it is the only way to help Christian laypeople make the distinction in their minds between evolution as biological mechanism and as Theory of Life.

**Question #3: *If biological evolution is true and there was no historical Adam and Eve how can we know where sin and suffering came from?***

**Answer: *Belief in evolution can be compatible with a belief in an historical fall and a literal Adam and Eve. There are many unanswered questions around this issue and so Christians who believe God used evolution must be open to one another’s views.***

My answers to the first two sets of questions are basically negative. I resist the direction of inquirer’s thought. I *don’t* believe you have to take Genesis 1 as a literal account, and I don’t think that to believe human life came about through EBP you necessarily must support evolution as the GTE.

However, I find the concerns of *this* question much more well-grounded. Indeed, I must disclose, I share them. Many orthodox Christians who believe God used EBP to bring about human life not only do not take Genesis 1 as history, but also deny that Genesis 2 is an account of real events. Adam and Eve, in their view, were not historical figures but an allegory or symbol of the human race. Genesis 2, then, is a symbolic story or myth which conveys the truth that human beings all have and do turn away from God and are sinners.

Before I share my concerns with this view, let me make a clarification. One of my favorite Christian writers (that’s putting it mildly), C.S.Lewis, did not believe in a literal Adam and Eve, and I do not question the reality or soundness of his personal faith. But my concern is for the church corporately and for its growth and vitality over time. Will the loss of a belief in the historical fall weaken some of our historical, doctrinal commitments at certain crucial points? Here are two points where that could happen.

### ***The trustworthiness of Scripture.***

The first basic concern has to do with reading the Bible as a trustworthy document. Traditionally, Protestants have understood that the writers of the Bible were inspired by God and that, therefore,

discerning the human author's intended meaning is the way that we discern what God is saying to us in a particular text.<sup>16</sup>

What, then, were the authors of Genesis 2-3 and of Romans 5, who both speak of Adam, intending to convey? Genesis 2-3 does not show any of signs of 'exalted prose narrative' or poetry. It reads as the account of real events; it looks like history. This doesn't mean that Genesis (or any text of the Bible) is history in the modern, positivistic sense. Ancient writers who were telling about historical events felt free to dischronologize and compress time frames – to omit enormous amounts of information that modern historians would consider essential to give 'the complete picture.' However, ancient writers of history still believed that the events they were describing actually happened.

Ancient writers also could use much figurative and symbolic language. For example, Bruce Waltke points out that when the Psalmist says, "you knit me together in my mother's womb" (Ps 139:13) he was not saying that he hadn't developed in the perfectly normal biological ways. It is a figurative way to say that God instituted and guided the biological process of human formation in his mother's womb. So when we are told that God 'formed Adam from the dust of the ground' (Gen 2:7), the author might be speaking figuratively in the same way, meaning that God brought man into being through normal biological processes.<sup>17</sup> Hebrew narrative is incredibly *spare*—it is only interested in telling us what we need to know to learn the teaching the author wants to convey.

Despite the compression, omissions, and figurative language, are there signs in the text that this is a myth and not an historical account? Some say that we must read Genesis 2-11 in light of other ancient creation myths of the Near Eastern world. Since other cultures were writing myths about events like the creation of the world and the great flood, this view goes, we should recognize that the author of Genesis 2-3 was probably doing the same thing. In this view, the author of Genesis 2-3 was simply recounting a Hebrew version of the myth of creation and flood. He may even have believed that the events did happen, but in that he was merely being a man of his time.

Kenneth Kitchen, however, protests that this is not how things worked. The prominent Egyptologist and evangelical Christian, when responding to the charge that the flood narrative (Genesis 9) should be read as 'myth' or 'proto-history' like the other flood-narratives from other cultures, answered:

The ancient Near East did *not* historicize myth (i.e. read it as imaginary 'history'.) In fact, exactly the reverse is true—there was, rather, a trend to 'mythologize' history, to celebrate actual historical events and people in mythological terms....<sup>18</sup>

In other words, the evidence is that Near Eastern 'myths' did not evolve over time into historical accounts, but rather historical events tended to evolve over time into more mythological stories. Kitchen's argument is that, if you read Genesis 2-11 in light of how ancient Near Eastern literature worked, you would conclude, if anything, that Genesis 2-11 were 'high' accounts, with much compression and figurative language, of events that actually happened. In summary, it looks like a responsible way of reading the text is to interpret Genesis 2-3 as the account of an historical event that really happened.

The other relevant text here is Romans 5:12ff, where Paul speaks of Adam and the fall. It is even clearer that Paul believed that Adam was a real figure. N.T. Wright, in his commentary on Romans says:



Paul clearly believed that there had been a single first pair, whose male, Adam, had been given a commandment and had broken it. Paul was, we may be sure, aware of what we would call mythical or metaphorical dimensions to the story, but he would not have regarded these as throwing doubt on the existence, and primal sin, of the first historical pair.<sup>19</sup>

So we arrive at this point. If you hold to the view that Adam and Eve were not literal, and you realize the author of Genesis was probably trying to teach us that Adam and Eve were real people who sinned, and that Paul certainly was, then you have to face the implications for how you read Scripture. You may say, “Well, the Biblical authors were ‘men of their time’ and were wrong about something they were trying to teach readers.” The obvious question is, “how will we know which parts of the Bible to trust and which not?”

I am not arguing something so crude as “if you don’t believe in a literal Adam and Eve, then you don’t believe in the authority of the Bible!” I contended above that we cannot take every text in the Bible literally. But the key for interpretation is the Bible itself. I don’t believe Genesis 1 can be taken literally because I don’t think the author expected us to. But Paul is different. He most definitely wanted to teach us that Adam and Eve were real historical figures. When you refuse to take a Biblical author literally when he clearly wants you to do so, you have moved away from the traditional understanding of the Biblical authority. As I said above, that doesn’t mean you can’t have a strong, vital faith yourself, but I believe such a move can be bad for the church as a whole, and it certainly can lead to confusion on the part of laypeople.

### ***Sin and salvation.***

Some may respond, “Even though we don’t think there was a literal Adam, we can accept the teaching of Genesis 2 and Romans 5, namely that all human beings have sinned and that through Christ we can be saved. So the basic Biblical *teaching* is intact, even if we do not accept the historicity of the story of Adam and Eve.” I think that assertion is too simplistic.

The Christian gospel is not good advice, but good news. It is not directions on what we should do to save ourselves but rather an announcement of what has been *done* to save us. The gospel is that Jesus has done something in history so that, when we are united to him by faith, we get the benefits of his accomplishment, and so we are saved. As a pastor, I often get asked how we can get credit for something that Christ did. The answer does not make much sense to modern people, but it makes perfect sense to ancient people. It is the idea of being in ‘federation’ with someone, in a legal and historical solidarity with a father, or an ancestor, or another family member or a member of your tribe. You are held responsible (or you get credit) for what that other person does. Another way to put it is that you are in a covenant relationship with the person. An example is Achan, whose entire family is punished when he sins (Joshua 7.) The ancient and Biblical understanding is that a person is not ‘what he is’ simply through his personal choices. He becomes ‘what he is’ through his communal and family environment. So if he does a terrible crime—or does a great and noble deed—others who are in federation (or in solidarity, or in *covenant* with him) are treated as if they had done what he had done.

This is how the gospel salvation of Christ works, according to Paul. When we believe in Jesus, we are ‘*in Christ*’ (one of Paul’s favorite expressions, and a deeply Biblical one.) We are in covenant with him, not because we are related biologically but through faith. So what he has done in history comes to us.

What has all this to do with Adam? A lot. Paul makes the same point in 1 Corinthians 15 about Adam and Christ that he does in Romans 5:

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For *as in Adam* all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Cor 15:21-22)

When Paul says we are saved ‘*in Christ*’ he means that Christians have a covenantal, federal relationship with Christ. What he did in history is laid to our account. But in the same sentence Paul says that all human beings are similarly (he adds the word ‘*as*’ for emphasis) “in Adam.” In other words, Adam was a covenantal representative for the whole human race. We are in a covenant relationship with him, so what he did in history is laid to our account.

When Paul speaks of being ‘*in*’ someone he means to be covenantally linked to them so their historical actions are credited to you. It is impossible to be ‘*in*’ someone who doesn’t historically exist. If Adam doesn’t exist, Paul’s whole argument—that both sin and grace work ‘covenantally’—falls apart. You can’t say that ‘Paul was a man of his time’, but we can accept his basic teaching about Adam. If you don’t believe what he believes about Adam, you are denying the core of Paul’s teaching.

If you don’t believe in the fall of humanity as a single historical event, what is your alternative? You may posit that some human beings began to slowly turn away from God, all exercising their free wills. But then how did sin spread? Was it only by bad example? That has never been the classic teaching of the Christian doctrine of original sin. We do not learn sin from others; we inherit a sin nature. Alan Jacobs’ great book on *Original Sin: A Cultural History* says that anyone who holds to the classic Augustinian view of original sin must believe that we are ‘hard-wired’ for sin; we didn’t just learn sin from bad examples. The doctrine also teaches that it was not originally in our nature to sin, but that we have fallen from primal innocence.<sup>20</sup> Another problem arises if you deny the historicity of the fall. If some human beings began to turn away from God, why couldn’t some human beings resist so that some groupings would be less sinful than others? Alan Jacobs in his book on original sin insists that the equal sinfulness of the entire human race is foundational to the traditional view.

### ***A model.***

If Adam and Eve were historical figures could they have been the product of EBP? An older, evangelical commentary on Genesis by Derek Kidner provides a model for how that could have been the case. First, he notes that in Job 10:8-9 God is said to have fashioned Job with his ‘hands’, like a potter shaping clay out of the dust of the ground, even though God obviously did this through the natural process of formation in the womb. Kidner asks why the same potter-terminology in Genesis 2:7 could not denote a natural process like evolution.<sup>21</sup> Then, Kidner goes on to say that:

“Man in Scripture is much more than *homo faber*, the maker of tools: he is constituted man by God’s image and breath, nothing less....[T]he intelligent beings of a remote past, whose bodily and cultural remains give them the clear status of ‘modern man’ to the anthropologist, may yet have been decisively below the plane of life which was established in the creation of Adam....Nothing requires

that the creature into which God breathed human life should not have been of a species prepared in every way for humanity...<sup>22</sup>

So in this model there was a place in the evolution of human beings when God took one out of the population of tool-makers and endowed him with ‘the image of God’. This would have lifted him up to a whole new ‘plane of life’. On this view, then what happened?

“If this...alternative implied any doubt of the unity of mankind it would be of course quite untenable. God...has made all nations ‘from one’ (Acts 17:26)...Yet it is at least conceivable that after the special creation of Eve, which established the first human pair as God’s vice-regents (Gen 1:27,28) and clinched the fact that there is no natural bridge from animal to man, God may have now conferred his image on Adam’s collaterals, to bring them into the same realm of being. Adam’s ‘federal’ headship of humanity extended, if that was the case, outwards to his contemporaries as well as onwards to his offspring, and his disobedience disinherited both alike.”<sup>23</sup>

Here Kidner gets creative. He proposes that the being who became Adam under the hand of God first evolved but Eve did not. Then they were put into the garden of Eden as representatives of the whole human race. Their creation in God’s image and their fall affected not only their offspring, but all other contemporaries. In this telling, Kidner accounts for both the continuity between animals and humans that scientists see, and the discontinuity that the Bible describes. Only human beings are in God’s image, have fallen into sin, and will be saved by grace.

This approach would explain perennially difficult Biblical questions such as--who were the people that Cain feared would slay him in revenge for the murder of Abel (Gen 4:14)? Who was Cain’s wife, and how could Cain have built a city filled with inhabitants (Gen 4:17)? We might even ask why Genesis 2:20 hints that Adam went on a search to ‘find’ a spouse if there were only animals around? In Kidner’s approach, Adam and Eve were not alone in the world, and that answers all these questions.

But there is another question that looms over the others. In this model, how could there have been suffering and death before the fall? Some answer may be in the second verse of the Bible, where we are told that ‘the earth was without form’ and was filled with darkness and chaos. Most traditional interpreters believe that God initially made the world in this ‘formless’ state and then proceeded to subdue the disorder through the creative process of separation, elaboration, and development depicted in Genesis 1.<sup>24</sup> However, even this traditional interpretation means that there was not perfect order and peace in creation from the first moment. Also, Satan seems to have been present in the world before the Fall. What makes us think that Satan and demons were not in the world before the moment the serpent appears? One of the biggest unanswered (and unanswerable) theological questions is—what was Satan doing there? By definition, if Satan was somewhere in the world, it was not all a perfect place.

Traditional theology has never believed that humanity and the world in Genesis 2-3 was in a glorified, perfect state. Augustine taught that Adam and Eve were *posse non peccare* (able not to sin) but they fell into the state of *non posse non peccare* (not able not to sin). In our final state of full

salvation, however, we will be *non posse peccare* (not capable of sinning.) Eden was not the consummated world of the future. Some have pointed out that in the Garden of Eden that there would have *had* to be some kind of death and decay or fruit would not have been edible.

It could be that Adam and Eve were given conditional immortality and, in the Garden, a foretaste of what life in the world would be like with humans in the image of God living in perfect harmony with God and his creation. It was offered to them to work with God to ‘subdue’ the earth (Genesis 1:28.) On any view, the idea of ‘having dominion’ and ‘subduing’ the earth meant that creation was at least highly undeveloped. Even before the Fall, the world was not yet in the shape God wanted it to be. Human beings were to work with God to cultivate and develop it.

The result of the Fall, however, was ‘spiritual death’, something that no being in the world had known, because no one had ever been in the image of God. Human beings became, at the same time, capable of far greater and far worse things than any other creatures. We now die eternally when we die physically. And since we are now alienated from God, the world is under the power of the forces of darkness in a way that would not have occurred without the fall. The physical world now ‘groans’ under disintegration because human beings have failed to be God’s stewards of creation. Greater ‘natural evil’ is combined with human, moral evil to create a dark, chaotic world indeed. The world will finally be renewed, and become all it was designed to be (Romans 8:19-23), only when we finally become all we should be through the work of the Second Adam (1 Cor 15:42-45.)

### **Other models.**

Is this the only model possible for those who believe in an historical Fall yet who believe God used evolution to bring about life on earth? No. Some believe in theistic evolution—that both Adam and Eve were the products of evolution and given the image and breath of God.<sup>25</sup> Others think it makes more sense theologically and philosophically to believe in ‘progressive creation’ that while God used evolution in general to bring about life, he created both Adam and Eve through a special act, and that the thesis of common ancestry with other animals is completely false.<sup>26</sup> Kidner’s model is a kind of hybrid between theistic evolution and old-earth, progressive creationism. Whatever one’s ‘model’ for working out the relationship of the Bible to science, however, Kidner insists:

“What is quite clear from these chapters in the light of other scriptures is their doctrine that mankind is a unity, created in God’s image, and fallen in Adam by one act of disobedience; and these things are as strongly asserted in this understanding of God’s Word as on any other.”<sup>27</sup>

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

How do we correlate the data of science with the teaching of Scripture? The simplest answer for scientists would probably be to say ‘who cares about Scripture and theology?’ but that fails to do justice to authority of the Bible, which Jesus himself took with utmost seriousness. The simplest answer for theologians would probably be to say ‘who cares about science?’ but that does not give nature its proper importance as the creation of God. Psalm 19 and Romans 1 teach that God’s glory is revealed as we study his creation, yet in the end both of those passages say that it is only Scripture which is the ‘perfect’ revelation of God’s mind (Psalm 19:7). We must interpret the book of nature by the book of

God. "It cannot be said too strongly that Scripture is the perfect vehicle for God's revelation...its bold selectiveness, like that of a great painting, is its power. To read it with one eye on any other account is to blur its image and miss its wisdom."<sup>28</sup>

My conclusion is that Christians who are seeking to correlate Scripture and science must be a 'bigger tent' than either the anti-scientific religionists or the anti-religious scientists. Even though in this paper I argue for the importance of belief in a literal Adam and Eve, I have shown here that there are several ways to hold that and still believe in God using EBP.<sup>29</sup>

When Derek Kidner concluded his account of human origins, he said that his view was an "exploratory suggestion...only tentative, and it is a personal view. It invites correction and a better synthesis."<sup>30</sup> That is the right attitude for all of us working in this area.

## End Notes

1. A good popular level book by a scientist is Denis Alexander, aptly titled: *Creation or Evolution-do we have to choose?* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2008.)
2. See Christian Smith, ed. *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life* (University of California Press, 2003.) and Rodney Stark *For the Glory of God : how monotheism led to reformations, science, witch-hunts, and the end of slavery* (Princeton: 2003.)
3. Peter van Inwagen, "Explaining Belief in the Supernatural", in J.Schloss and M.Murray, ed. *The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Reflections on the Origin of Religion*. (Oxford, 2009) p.136.
4. Edward J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964) p.82
5. Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (IVP, 1984) p.33.
6. Blocher, p.32.
7. C.John Collins *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 2006.) p.44.
8. Meredith G. Kline, "Because it had not rained", *Westminster Theological Journal* 20 (1957-58), pp. 146-157.
9. There have been numerous convincing arguments put forth by evangelical Biblical scholars to demonstrate that the genealogies of the Bible, leading back to Adam, are incomplete. The term 'was the father of' may mean 'was the ancestor of'. For just one account of this, see K.A.Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, pp.439-443.
10. Plantinga sees the two great alternatives to orthodox religious views: a) perennial naturalism—and b) creative anti-realism—the view that is often called 'post-modernism' or post-structuralism. See "Christian Philosophy at the End of the Twentieth Century" in *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader* (Eerdmans, 1998.)
11. Sam Harris, "Science is in the Details", *New York Times*, July 26, 2009.
12. Ibid.
13. David Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11* (The Bible Speaks Today Series), p.31.
14. A.Plantinga, "Naturalism Defeated" 1994, available at [www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/vital\\_library/articles/plantinga\\_alvin/naturalism\\_defeated.pdf](http://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/vital_library/articles/plantinga_alvin/naturalism_defeated.pdf)
15. This argument is worked out in detail in A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford, 1993) chapter 12. Also see also William C. Davis, "Theistic Arguments", Michael J. Murray, ed. *Reason for the Hope Within* (Eerdmans, 1999) p. 39.
16. Granted, often New Testament writers see Messianic meanings in Old Testament prophecies that were doubtless invisible to the OT prophets themselves. Nonetheless, while a Biblical author's writing may have *more* true meanings than he intended when writing, it may not have *less*. That is, what the human author meant to teach us cannot be seen as mistaken or now obsolete without surrendering the traditional understanding of Biblical authority and trustworthiness.

17. See Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Zondervan, 2001) p. 75. Of course, Waltke notes that Psalm 139 is poetry and Genesis 2 is narrative, but that does not mean that prose cannot use figurative speech and poetry literal speech. It only means that poetry uses more figurative and prose less. Another example of a narrative that speaks of the divine power behind a natural process is Acts 12:23. There we are told that Herod Agrippa was delivering a public address to an audience when “an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms, and died.” Josephus relates that Agrippa did indeed fall ill at the same time, but it was due to a ‘severe intestinal obstruction.’ (J. Stott, *The Message of Acts* (IVP, 1990) p.213. Here again we see the Bible speaking of God’s action behind a natural biological process.
18. K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 2003) p.425. Cited in Collins, p.252.
19. N.T. Wright, “Romans” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* vol.X, p. 526.
20. Alan Jacobs, *Original Sin: A Cultural History* (Harper Collins, 2008), p. 280.
21. Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (IVP, 1967) p.28 n.2.
22. Kidner, p.28.
23. Kidner goes on to write: ‘With one possible exception [Gen 3:20] the unity of mankind ‘in Adam’ and our common status as sinners through his offence are expressed in Scripture in terms not of heredity but simply of solidarity.’ (p.30.) Kidner comments on this one possible exception--Gen 3:20, which calls Eve ‘the mother of all living.’ He considers that the translation could be instead something like ‘the mother of all salvation’ since salvation will be coming to the world through her ‘seed’ and that is the context of the name.
24. Another popular view of these verses is the ‘Gap’ theory, namely, that God created the heavens and the earth to be a place of order and light, and then verse 2 tells us that the world *became* chaotic and dark through some struggle or disaster, and that Genesis 1 is the story of how God re-created the world. Grammatically, the ‘Gap’ theory is not likely, but there have been at least four different ways of reading the relationship of the clauses of Genesis 1:1 and 2. See Gordon Wenham’s summary of this debate in Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Word Biblical Commentary, 1987), pp.11-17.
25. See Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?*
26. See the September 1991 issue of the *Christian Scholar’s Review* for articles by Alvin Plantinga, Howard Van Till, and Ernan McMullin. See a summary of these arguments in W. Christopher Stewart, “Religion and Science” in *Reason for the Hope Within*, ed. Michael J. Murray (Eerdmans, 1999), p.331.
27. p.30.
28. Kidner p.31.
29. Denis Alexander (*Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* (Monarch Books, Oxford, UK, 2008) speaks of several ‘models’ by which we can relate the teaching of Genesis 2-3 with evolutionary biology. ‘Model A’ sees Genesis 2-3 as parabolic about every individual human being. (i.e. we all sin.) ‘Model B’ sees Genesis 2-3 as a figurative account of something that actually happened to a *group* of early human beings. ‘Model C’ sees Adam and Eve as real historical figures, but fully accepts the fact that human life came from EBP. ‘Models D’ is old earth creationism, and ‘Model E’ is young earth creationism. (See chapters 10 and 12.) Even though Alexander lists these five, I’m not sure this exhausts the possibilities. The proposal by Derek Kidner doesn’t really fit into any of Alexander’s categories.
30. Kidner, p.30.