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The Fall: History or Myth?

Professor R.J. Berry's article 'This Cursed Earth: Is 'the Fall' credible?' (Science and Christian Belief 11:29–49, 1999) raises far-reaching questions and calls for comment.

1. Whatever may be thought about the ultimate reconciliation of science and religion in general terms there can be no denying the tensions and conflicts which arose as a matter of fact when scientific discovery was compared with the early narratives of Genesis.¹ A vast amount of evidence has been produced and has continually been added to which shows that the story in Genesis 2:4b–3:24 is not historically true and not even historically credible. Berry nevertheless claims that there is an historical element in the story and seems to think that this is essential to the story's credibility as religious truth; but this link between the historical and the religious is never justified. Nor are any criteria given whereby we can distinguish between the historical and non-historical elements in the story.

2. Berry is dismissive of the term 'myth' because it has been used with varying meanings. If, however, we cease to use words because they have been given various meanings we shall find our vocabulary seriously impoverished. A thoroughgoing investigation into the uses and meanings of the concept is contained in *Myth In Old Testament Interpretation* by John W. Rogerson.² After a wide-ranging and detailed survey Rogerson commends 'readiness . . . to admit of more than one way of understanding the complex phenomenon of myth' (ft. page 163) and complains that the 'need for a multi-definitional approach to myth' is not sufficiently recognised (p. 166). Cf. opening of chapter 11, page 174. Rogerson says of De Wette's *Über Religion und Theologie* that it 'posited an intuitive way of knowing in religion. . . . In the religious sphere, this way of knowing coordinated the experience and knowledge which a man gained during his lifetime not according to logical principles, but in such a way that the problems and contradictions of life were resolved into an understanding which transcended the perspective of this world. However, it was a necessary characteristic of this way of knowing that it should express itself in mythical or symbolic ways, and thus myth was an inescapable part of religious experience and expression' (op.cit. pp. 19–20). The supernatural or transcendental

1 See *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*, John Hedley Brooke, Cambridge, 1991, especially in this connection chapter VII: 'The object of this chapter is to locate the considerations that led a succession of naturalists to construct historical models for the earth at variance with popular belief and with customary interpretations of Scripture' (p. 227). For illustrations of the somewhat varying religious responses to the challenge posed by new knowledge see *Philosophy And Biblical Interpretation*, Peter Addinall, Cambridge, 1991, especially chapters 4–8.

2 De Gruyter, Berlin & New York, 1974.

character of myth is frequently referred to elsewhere in Rogerson's book. In his concluding remarks Rogerson favours a view of myths as 'stories or literature which expressed the faith and world view of a people. Myths would have much to say about origins, and they would express a people's intuitions of transcendent reality' (p. 188).

I would suggest that this positive conception of myth is a far safer guide to appreciating the religious truth of the Genesis story than a damage-limiting attempt to salvage some kind of historicity out of the wreckage of Fundamentalist literalism. The treatment of the Genesis story of the Fall as in any way a direct reference to a specific situation and events within history raises insuperable problems and distracts attention from its profound meaning. Some indication of why this is the case is called for.

3. Berry scarcely touches on the central affirmation of the story that sin consisted in eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, thereby acquiring knowledge of good and evil. Yet if the world as originally created by God was entirely good, how do the forbidden tree and the serpent come to form any part of it? Jonathan Clatworthy is quoted as saying that part of the world's goodness is the capacity God has given humans to choose freely between good and evil (article, page 40); but according to the Genesis story this is precisely the capacity which God told the man whom he had just created he should not possess (2:17). It is no reply to this to say that the tree and the serpent did not really exist. If the Fall was a change which took place at a given point in history the tree and the serpent represent elements in the situation, and the fundamental contradiction between the opening account of creation and the story of the Fall remains.

4. 'The bible seems to intend us to accept the historicity of Adam and Eve' (p. 35). 'The bible describes Adam as a Neolithic farmer, placed in a garden to till and care for it', apparently 10–15,000 years ago (pp. 38–39). If, however, the historicity of Adam and Eve is accepted there is no evading the fact that the first 'adam' and his woman were the original couple from whom the whole human race is descended. In the story under consideration there is only one man, referred to in almost every instance as '*the* man'. This man is the first man to be created and he is alone in the garden which God has planted. It is because he is alone that he needs a companion (2:18). The Hebrew text speaks of 'the adam' i.e. 'the *man*'. The use of the personal name Adam can obscure this fact for the simple reason that it can refer to one individual out of a number of men. In the Masoretic Hebrew text this personal use does not occur until chapter 5. Nor is there any escape from the plain meaning of the statement that the man called his new wife Eve because she was the mother of all living (3:20). Cf. Berry's own admissions, 'The biblical genealogies trace the human race back to Adam'; 'Paul told the Athenian philosophers that God had made every nation from "one man" ' (p. 35). Quoting Gordon Wenham's Word Bible Commentary on Genesis, ' "it therefore follows that the disobedience of the first couple from whom Genesis traces the descent of the whole human race must have had grave consequences for all mankind" ' (p. 44). If we want an historical Adam and Eve we

cannot avoid recognising them as the first human beings on earth from whom all others are descended.

This then raises the question why the activities of a man and a woman in an ancient garden should have such devastating consequences for the rest of us. If we suppose, as Berry does, that there were thousands or millions of human beings existing before Adam as well as in his own time, the problem merely becomes more acute. Calling Adam the federal head of humanity explains nothing (pp. 38–39). This merely raises the fundamental question in a different form: Why was Adam the federal head of humanity? How did Adam become the federal head of men and women who had already existed and died? Why should they have been involved in his sin?

The ancient Hebrew storyteller knew nothing of genetics and was incapable of making a distinction between being the genetic parent of all modern men and women, and the spiritual founder of humankind. The specific sin of humanity was getting the knowledge of good and evil. Did the rest of humanity before and at the time of Adam and Eve have the knowledge of good and evil or not? The tree was in the garden and we do not learn of anyone else entering the garden and eating its fruit. If they did not have the knowledge, why were they blamed as if they had? If they did have the knowledge, where did it come from? And why were they not punished on account of their own possession of the forbidden knowledge rather than because someone else possessed it?

Berry wants to locate Adam and Eve as an actual historical couple at a point in history, and this compels him to admit that many human beings were alive before them and that others were contemporary with them. But this contradicts the plain teaching of the Bible, and at the same time seriously aggravates the already acute problem of explaining how the disobedience of the original man and woman can bring sin and guilt on the rest of us.

5. According to the story the punishments which follow this disobedience are explicitly inflicted by God. It is therefore not correct to say 'Logic and exegesis come together to suggest that the earth's curse is not a change in ecological law . . . the fault lies in human carelessness and greed. . . . The weeds and thorns of the Genesis curse are a direct and causal consequence of the stewardship which God ordained for us' (page 46). The story says nothing about carelessness and greed, and we could well express the effect of the divine curse as precisely a change in ecological law. According to the story the earth is no longer what it was because God has deliberately changed it. And this is not in response to carelessness and greed but the human acquisition of a certain kind of knowledge.

6. What is this knowledge? Its object is said to be 'good and evil', and this has to be different from the knowledge which the man already possessed in order to look after the garden. We naturally think of the new knowledge in moral terms, and there can be no doubt that moral right and wrong are included in what is denoted by the phrase; but this is not enough. The terms 'good' and 'evil' in the Old Testament have a much wider connotation. The use of the word 'good' in the opening account of creation illustrates the fact, and the standard dictionary of Classical

Hebrew by Brown, Driver and Briggs clearly indicates the wide variety of meanings conveyed by the Hebrew words.³

7. The knowledge to be gained by eating the fruit of the forbidden tree is therefore very wide with a direct application to human welfare and the enjoyment of life, and includes the will and capacity to make independent judgments concerning what is desirable and beneficial, and what is not. It is also a kind of knowledge fitting for God and the heavenly host, but not mankind. Mankind is capable of getting it, at least in some degree, but not coping with it.

The meaning of the Hebrew phrase is therefore very general and we are not entitled to confine the reference to what the author knew in his own time and circumstances: the reference is to any knowledge which human beings want in order to satisfy their curiosity about the nature of things beyond what is readily observable and of obvious practical use, and in order to make their own independent judgments about what is good and bad for them and control their own lives accordingly. This obviously covers a very high proportion of what is today regarded as legitimate, indeed highly desirable and useful, even necessary knowledge.

8. The word 'myth' should therefore be applied to this story to indicate that it is dealing with the nature of history, that it is an interpretation of what history means rather than the description, however plain or fanciful, of a series of events within history; and that we cannot understand history unless we are prepared to look beyond it and see the clue to its meaning in a transcendental realm ruled by God and a divine intention with regard to humanity.

9. Let us return to Jonathan Clatworthy's assertion, quoted earlier, that human beings have the capacity to choose freely between good and evil. This implies the ability to know good and evil, and this capacity and ability are apparently essential to human nature. And yet the story says otherwise. The story posits a situation in which mankind is entirely and willingly dependent upon God, and which is in consequence one of blissful happiness and contentment. But it also speaks to us of the serpent, the temptation of disobedience, the forbidden tree, the danger of death alongside the possibility of eternal life: and the threatened disaster is precisely the acquisition of the capacity and ability which seem to be essential to human nature. The knowledge of good and evil is absolutely incompatible with the enjoyment of a proper relationship with God and the blissful life of the garden.

Yet at the same time we know that men and women actually have the knowledge of good and evil and the capacity to choose between them. The knowledge is very imperfect and the capacity for making a right choice is weak, or often even non-existent, being overwhelmed by natural feeling or nullified by sheer ignorance; but there can be no denying the centrality of knowledge and some

³ *A Hebrew And English Lexicon Of The Old Testament*, Oxford, 1907, reprint of 1959 referred to here. The Hebrew text used is *Liber Genesis*, prepared by Otto Eissfeldt, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Stuttgart, 1969. It is also instructive to note the use of the phrase by the aged Barzillai (II Samuel 19:35, EV), by Moses in referring to very young children (Deuteronomy 1:39), and by Isaiah in the well known Immanuel prophecy (Isaiah 7:15–16).

kind of ability to choose in our everyday, self-conscious experience. This is all part of what it means to be a human being. And this is a direct reference to the whole of human history. What is essential to human life is *ipso facto* essential to history. To suppose that there ever was a time when a man and a woman did not possess the knowledge of good and evil and the capacity to choose between them, and when God walked the earth in a blissful paradise and communed directly with this man and woman, is to posit a situation which neither is nor could be historical.

10. Therefore, paradoxical though it may seem to some it is precisely when we recognize the mythical character of the narrative that it gains real significance and is seen to have a sharply pointed message for any reader. It then becomes possible to see in the first man and his wo-man the representatives of the whole of humanity, in the sense that they are deliberately created fictional figures to whom the storyteller has given precisely that character. As literary creations they are intentionally a statement about humanity, as humanity is seen by the storyteller.

Furthermore, the storyteller sees humanity not in some merely generalised sense based on observation of men and women in this world and confined to what is generally known as its history, but as having an essential relationship to the transcendent Being we call God. In a sense humanity belongs to a realm transcending this earth and known in the New Testament as the kingdom of God. The Genesis story is far removed from the plain discourse of historical narrative and offers a profound meditation on why we are in this world at all, what is the ultimate meaning and purpose of history itself.

11. We cannot locate the original paradise in history; and yet human experience, and therefore history, must contain elements or aspects which suggest it or otherwise the idea could never have arisen, it would be quite meaningless. On the basis of these elements the storyteller asserts that the Being upon whom this world ultimately depends for its existence and fundamental character may be thought of in personal human terms; and that this Being wants from his human creatures a personal response of love and trust; and that if that relationship existed universally and without qualification human life, including the environment upon which it is so intimately dependent, would be infinitely superior to that which actually confronts us in daily experience.

The storyteller explains the vast gulf between paradise and the world as we know it as the consequence of human beings' preference for a certain kind of knowledge over trust in God; indeed, the replacement of such trust by the self-conscious choice of knowledge which promises complete independence of God and equality with him. God warns the man that the actual consequence of gaining this knowledge will be instant death, and the man and the woman do die in the sense that they cease to be what they were, and they are cut off from the tree of life. God has not threatened death, but has rather done what he could to save the man and the woman from the inevitable consequence of consuming the forbidden fruit. Once the mistake has been made God does his best to 'clothe' the

guilty couple in something more substantial than they could possibly provide for themselves; and even the expulsion from the garden is an act of mercy since eternity spent in the fallen state is not even to be contemplated.⁴ That is, God continues to care for a corrupted humanity, or otherwise there would be no human history at all. History only exists because it is God's will to bring men and women back to the eternal life for which they were originally intended and this world is the stage upon which the divine act of salvation is carried out.

12. It is essential to being human in this world that we should have some sort of freedom, some power of choice, including the ability to choose wrongly and pervert that very freedom. When we ask why this state of affairs should exist at all we can only give an answer by pushing human thought and expression to its limit and by means of analogy, by means of figure and symbol, which in imagination carry us beyond the world of time and space.

We are reminded of the Book of Job. Neither Job nor his friends ever know why he suffers. The explanation is contained in prose narratives at the beginning of the book, 1:6–12 and 2:1–7, imagined scenes which no human being could ever witness; yet which are intimately related to the events of Job's earthly life, and, indeed, its true explanation. Yet the explanation has that peculiar character of stimulating reflection rather than offering the kind of ready answer to life's problems repeatedly put forward by Job's friends and for which they come under the wrath of God. The Book of Job does not make further thought unnecessary, it compels further thought; and the same is true for the Genesis story of the Fall.

13. Serious reflection will focus on the forbidden knowledge, and it is directly relevant to the fundamental concern of Berry's article that this will include knowledge of nature. The tree of knowledge is part of a garden which it is precisely the function of the man to care for. It is also true that the serpent is part of the created order and that at least part of its function in the story is to represent a powerful drive within humanity itself. This drive has as its object the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil, and this must include knowledge of nature. It is genuine knowledge, but therein lies its danger for humanity, just as a real weapon is dangerous in the hands of a child precisely because it is real. The knowledge belongs to God and the attempt to control human life, including our environment by means of it constitutes the fundamental sin of mankind: according to the story.

This penetrating comment on history and the contemporary scene demands communal reflection and the input of a great variety of expertise and experience for its proper understanding and application. No single commentator can begin to exhaust its significance. The term 'myth' has the virtue of drawing attention to its symbolic character, its universality with reference to human nature, its insistence that this world can only be understood in relation to a spiritual realm which transcends it, and its recognition that God is both within and beyond the created order.

⁴ The opening remark of Genesis 3:22 is a deliberate echo of the serpent's misleading promise and must be taken as an ironical comment on the predicament caused by human pretentious foolishness. It can hardly be taken literally.

R.J. BERRY

The Fall is History

All teachers (and preachers) should be humbled when they find someone who has totally failed to understand what seemed completely lucid and straightforward to the expositor. This was my reaction to reading Peter Addinall's response to my paper on the Fall in *Science and Christian Belief* 11 (1): 29–49. I remained puzzled after reading Addinall's comments twice more. There seemed to be virtually no points of agreement between us. Closer examination showed that I was wrong: we agree on ten points and specifically disagree on twenty-two. I examine the more significant ones below. Notwithstanding, the overall effect of Addinall's criticisms is to sow doubt on my attempts to explore the Fall narrative(s) in terms of (particularly) Pauline teaching (which is not referred to by Addinall) and the nature and history of humankind. Addinall therefore needs a response.

When an expositor fails to get over his or her message, some of the blame must attach to him. At the risk of repeating material in my original paper, let me therefore begin by making my own interpretation of the Fall as clear and explicit as possible.

1. God created the world and its inhabitants as good, very good

We traditionally regard the goodness of creation as implying physical and biological perfection, permitting neither disaster nor disease. In fact the biblical text does not say everything is equally good. For example, darkness is good insofar as it is part of God's creation, but less good than light, which received God's specific approval. In English, 'good' refers to an object's quality and fitness for its purpose; in Hebrew, the word relates more to the mind and opinion of God, who is preeminently the one who is good and whose goodness is reflected in his works. 'It was God's judgment that creation was good. It can never be our judgment, the fruit of our experience. Our knowledge and experience is always limited by the unexplained and incomprehensible. We can speak about creation only with reference to the creator for whom it presents no riddle.'¹ 'The goodness of creation is based solely on God's authority; what it is good for, such as it is, only God knows. But because it is good in God's sight, joy in God's creation is set free in human beings. Moreover, this 'goodness' also comprehends beauty (the Hebrew word can mean both 'good' and 'beautiful'); joy in God's creation contains within itself all joy in what is beautiful.'²

1 C. Westermann, (English translation, 1984). *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*. London: SPCK, p. 174.

2 C. Westermann, (English translation, 1987). *Genesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, p. 11–12.

Creation was not a self-regulating Paradise. The man was put into Eden 'to till it and look after it.' 'Paradise was not a life of leisured employment. Both *Enuma elish* and the *Attrahasis* epic speak of man being created to relieve the gods. But the biblical narrative gives no hint that the creator is shuffling off his load onto man.'³ God holds his world in being, we are his estate managers. Human *work* is our action which corresponds to God's providence.⁴ Although God has finished all *his* work of creation, this does not necessarily mean that the creation is a completed entity in a manufacturing sense, unlike the watch which Archdeacon Paley found when out walking.

2. Human-ness is derived from God's image not genetic descent

Too much ink has been spilt on attempts to disprove our evolutionary relationship to other primates. Clearly we are animals and it is disingenuous to argue that our genetical, anatomical, and physiological similarities with the great apes do not imply a common ancestor. But much more important is that we are the only creatures made in God's image, which is not a genetical trait inherited and transmitted in the same way as eye or skin colour. In this respect we are a special creation, an interpretation strengthened by the use in Genesis 1 of the word *bara* for God's action in creating human beings. The idea that God's image spread 'laterally' to all members of the species alive at the time of Adam and Eve's creation is my most speculative proposal. It is not novel, and seems to be consistent with scripture as currently understood. Nevertheless, it must be regarded as a provisional interpretation, open to test and possibly rejection.

Humans appeared on the scene at a late stage in the story as told in Genesis 1. These humans (*Homo divinus*, as they are sometimes called to distinguish them from their presumed progenitors, *Homo sapiens*) may represent the first or a crucial stage in self-awareness or self-consciousness. We can only speculate. The crux is that they represent a novel introduction into creation and therefore it is reasonable to describe them as the 'first' or the 'original' men and women.

Anthropology and archaeology can tell us nothing definitive about the characteristics of these first humans. History is littered with possible definitions – tool-using, fire-making, sundry anatomical traits, burial of dead, evidence of worship sites, domestication of animals and plants – but we do not know for certain what distinguishes *H. divinus* from *H. sapiens*. The one certain difference is that only *H. divinus* is 'made in the image of God'.

Scientific debate about whether the original *H. divinus* were a group or a single pair is also sterile; we cannot tell on biological grounds. The one thing we do know is that *H. divinus* emerged as a specific act of God. God could have begun with a number of individuals; he could have started with one person (or one pair) and then extended his creative work to other members of *H. sapiens*.

3 G.J. Wenham, 1987, *World Bible Commentary*. Genesis 1–15. Waco, TX: Word Books, p. 67.

4 D.J. Atkinson, 1990, *The Message of Genesis 1–11*. Leicester: IVP, p. 60.

Likewise, science cannot indicate when *H. divinus* appeared. All we can do is to interpret as best we can what scripture seems to mean. This raises problems: are the Bible accounts revelation or merely a distillation of traditional tales? If we assume (as I do) that God reveals himself to us in the Bible, we are then apparently told that there was a single parent of the human race and that (s)he lived in neolithic times:

- a. The Genesis account of creation can be read as God creating a *H. divinus* 'type' as distinct from an individual man. However Paul's comparison between the first man and the man Jesus Christ (Rom. 5: 12–17; 1 Cor. 15: 21,22) seems to demand their historical equivalence. John Stott comments, 'Paul's carefully constructed analogy between Adam and Christ depends for its validity on the equal historicity of both'.⁵ James Dunn points to the 'explicit terms of the two men whose single acts of disobedience and obedience encapsulate and determine the character of the two epochs [sin and death, followed by grace and life] which together span human history'.⁶
- b. Adam is portrayed in Gen. 2–3 as a neolithic farmer, placed in a garden to till and care for it, with one son who was a shepherd and another who lived in a town, and a near descendant (Tubal-Cain) who was the 'master of all copper-smiths and blacksmiths'.

The obvious inferences from the text, that Adam and Eve were the ancestors of the whole human race and that they lived 10,000 or so years ago in neolithic times, may be wrong. So be it; it would be foolish to tie oneself to a particular interpretation. However these assumptions are the traditional and most apparent ones, and there should be a good reason for discarding them. For myself, I believe that Adam and Eve were the spiritual but not the genetic parents of present day humankind; and I am happy to accept that they appeared (or were created) in the neolithic. Addinall's belief that 'the story in Genesis 2:46–3:24 is not historically true and not even historically credible' seems to be more evasion than reason; it is one of our areas of disagreement.

3. Sin entered the world through one man, and this sin led to (spiritual) death

Paul is unequivocal that sin entered the world 'through one man', and that this sin led to death. It is my contention that death in this sense was separation from God, the source of life; in other words, sin leads to *spiritual* death. There was certainly biological death in creation before the time of Adam, because God gave 'all green plants as food for animals'. Moreover, there cannot be very many people nowadays who do not accept that there was animal death before humans were created; the claim that dinosaurs were contemporaneous with men and women has been shown to be risible. There was no death of *H. divinus* before the Fall, but as *H. divinus* is a specifically spiritual creation, physical death is not

⁵ J.R.W. Stott, 1994, *The Message of Romans*. Leicester: IVP, p. 163.

⁶ J.D.G. Dunn, 1988, *World Bible Commentary*. Romans 1–8. Waco, TX: Word Books, p. 242.

primarily relevant. As I pointed out in my original paper, although Adam and Eve were condemned to die 'the day' they ate from the forbidden tree, they lived on for many years, *albeit* separated from God (spiritually dead). Indeed, the Hebrew phrase of Gen. 2:7 cannot mean 'you will die sometime later' or 'you will become mortal'⁷; Adam and Eve died when they disobeyed God, they did not somehow become merely liable to die. This seems an inescapable inference from the text. It is an important distinction. It does not surface in Addinall's comments, but it was an objective raised in criticisms to my original article by Philip Duce (*Science and Christian Belief*, 11 (2): 159–165), to which I have already responded (*Science and Christian Belief*, 11 (2): 165–167).

4. Adam's (and Eve's) death pervaded the whole human race. (Rom. 5:12)

Why and how did the original disobedience spread to all humankind? Augustine believed that the process involved inherited sin and its consequences. This is both genetically unsound and exegetically dubious. Augustine based himself on David's plaint in Ps. 51:5 ('From my birth I have been evil, sinful from the time my mother conceived me'). Modern commentators emphasize that David is not concentrating on his genetic problems but is facing up to the whole of his existence – his sins are his own (vv. 1–3) and inexcusable (v. 4).

Henri Blocher's exposition of Paul's thought is appealing to me (p. 33 of my original paper). He points out that justification is both unnecessary and impossible for someone who has not been condemned. If Christ's redeeming work is to be universally effective, it must necessarily be preceded by universal condemnation.⁸ This legal nicety fits well with Paul's general argument in Romans. Hence the concept of Adam as the federal head of humanity as expressed by a number of exegetes (e.g. Derek Kidner in his Tyndale Commentary on Genesis⁹) is important, even if Addinall does not like it. (His point 4: he ignores the fact that Adam and Eve were the first human beings on earth in the key sense of being in God's image, and all others are descended from them – albeit in a spiritual rather than a genetic line.)

5. The Fall and its consequences arose from disobedience

My most profound difference with Addinall is about the nature of Adam and Eve's sin. For Addinall 'the central affirmation of the story consisted in eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, thereby acquiring knowledge of good and evil' (point 3); 'according to the story the earth is no longer what it was because God had deliberately changed it [because of] . . . the human acquisition of a certain kind of knowledge, . . . [whose] object is said to be "good and evil"' (points 5,6); 'the

7 Westermann, 1984. See note 1, p. 225.

8 H. Blocher, 1997, *Original Sin*. Leicester: Apollos, especially pp. 77, 78.

9 D. Kidner, 1967, *Genesis*. London: Tyndale, pp. 29, 67.

reference is to any knowledge which human beings want in order to satisfy their curiosity about the nature of things beyond what is readily observable and of obvious practical use, and in order to make their own independent judgements about what is good and bad for them and control their own lives accordingly' (point 7); 'the knowledge of good and evil is absolutely incompatible with the enjoyment of a proper relationship with God and the blissful life of the garden' (point 9); 'serious reflection will focus on the forbidden knowledge . . . [such] knowledge belongs to God and the attempt to control human life, including our environment by means of it, constitutes the fundamental sin of mankind according to the story' (point 12).

I hope I have not misrepresented Addinall in this summary, but it seems clear that he regards the key to the Fall story as the illegitimate knowledge obtained from eating from the forbidden tree. But the emphasis of the story is on obedience, not the effects of disobedience. Von Rad writes, 'God's prohibition . . . placed before man decision and the serious question of obedience. To seek a purpose in the divine prohibition, as exegetes have often done, is in our opinion not permissible; the question cannot be discussed. Nothing is said to indicate that God combined pedagogical intentions with this prohibition (in the sense of a 'moral' development of man). On the contrary, one destroys the essential part of the story with such rationalistic explanations'.¹⁰ For Westermann, '[God] forbids them only to eat of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. If they eat from it, they must die; the prohibition is intended to protect them. By giving the man the command, he will adhere to it; but he is also free to act in opposition to the command'¹¹ – nothing about the effects of eating, except death. And again, 'it is a misunderstanding of the meaning of the text to ask why God wanted to withhold from man the knowledge of good and evil'.¹² Wenham is definite: 'the text is a straightforward warning that death will follow eating'.¹³

The weight of opinion, therefore, is that the Gen. 2–3 story is about wilful disobedience. Such disobedience produces separation from God, that is death. The consequences of this separation I discussed in my original paper (pp. 41–46). Because Addinall concentrates (I believe mistakenly) on human knowledge rather than separation from God, I will not repeat my arguments that evil is a result of godlessness rather than a sort of illegitimate gnosis obtained by feeding on a particular tree. (I acknowledge, of course, the existence of 'natural' evil, but this does not affect my contention so long as we are careful about defining evil). However, it is worth quoting von Rad again: 'The curses do not speak of death as a primary issue, but rather of life, and they affirm that hardship and wretchedness will continue until man in death returns again to the earth'¹⁴, in other words until he is redeemed from the curse. I know of no evidence for Addinall's contention that 'the earth is no longer what it was

10 G. Von Rad, (English translation, 1971). Genesis. London: SCM, p. 80–1.

11 Westermann, 1987. See note 2, p. 22.

12 Westermann, 1984. See note 1, p. 223.

13 Wenham, 1987. See note 3, p. 68.

14 Von Rad, 1971. See note 10, p. 95.

because God has deliberately changed it' (point 5), and reaffirm my original conclusion that 'the earth's curse is not a change in ecological law, but a massive failure [on our part]. . . . The weeds and thorns of the Genesis curse are a direct and causal consequence of the [lack of] stewardship, which God ordained for us'.

6. As in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be brought to life

Addinall treats the Fall story as if it was complete in itself, a record of humanity acquiring 'knowledge'. It must be remembered that the Fall is a specifically Christian doctrine, barely considered within Judaism. The Fall sets the scene for Christ's redeeming work. The New Testament is full of references about our being dead 'because of our sins' and being made alive in Christ, reconciled to the Father. Gen. 3:15 is sometimes referred to as a protoevangel, a first glimmer of the gospel. It is inadequate to describe the Fall without mentioning the possibility of salvation.

I find it difficult to envisage how Addinall's exposition of the effects of the Fall relates to the gospel. The traditional belief (which I share) is that the Fall led to separation from God (expressed in Gen. 3:8 as the man and his wife 'hiding' from God), and that this gulf can be bridged by Christ's death on the cross. Addinall concentrates on our first parents gaining knowledge. I do not see how this can relate to salvation; in Christ we have (eternal) life, not some reduction in knowledge or understanding or capability.

In summary, the Fall story to me is a description of the initial rupture between God and the first human beings (i.e. those made by God in his image, not the much older biological group we call *Homo sapiens*), cutting them off from their source of life in its fullest sense. The Bible story places this event in neolithic times, but there is no problem in accepting this dating so long as we do not muddle biological and spiritual categories. In other words, there need be no conflict between our understanding of science and the existence of a historic Fall. I am well aware that my interpretation raises questions, perhaps most acutely about the nature of mankind, but these are matters for debate¹⁵ rather than outright rejection as intrinsically preposterous.

Addinall's Commentary

I have already indicated my difficulty with Addinall's position. Have I selectively omitted any of his comments that seriously affect my own interpretation, summarized above? Let me try to deal with our points of disagreement. In this section the numbers in brackets relate, as before, to the numbered points in Addinall's response to my original article.

15 See for example W.S. Brown, N. Murphy, and H.N. Malony, (eds), 1998, *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress; W.S. Brown and M.A. Jeeves, (1999). *Portraits of human nature. Science and Christian Belief*, 11: 97–192.

1. Addinall refers to 'a vast amount of evidence produced . . . which shows Genesis 2:46–3:24 is not historically true and not even historically credible' (1), and to treat it in this way 'raises insuperable problems' (2). He does not identify this evidence, but no doubt he has in mind such authorities as Wolfhart Pannenberg who is unequivocal: 'As a historical claim about the beginnings of human history, the idea that there was an original union of humankind which was lost through a fall into sin is incompatible with our currently available knowledge about the historical beginnings of the race'.¹⁶ Presumably the problems for Addinall and Pannenberg involve the million or so years that the species *Homo sapiens* is believed to have existed since it (we) emerged from *H. erectus*, and perhaps also the geographical details given for the site of Eden in Gen. 2. The latter is of no particular significance for the Fall story; all the commentators accept that point. The fossil and genetic antecedents of humans are only a problem if *H. sapiens* is equated with *H. divinus*. The Genesis account (and indeed many other parts of the Old Testament, particularly the Wisdom writings) are careful to describe our species as a distinct creation – which we are in our unique status of being in God's image. Biology cannot tell us when *H. divinus* was created. The problem for Addinall may be his definition of history (8); I return to this below when I discuss myth.
2. I am accused of never justifying the link between the historical and the religious (1). This is one of the points where Addinall and I seem to be talking about different things. My endeavour was to relate a historical episode involving historical people (which seem to be demanded by Paul's treatment of the Fall) with Christ's redeeming work in overcoming death and alienation from God. Am I making a spurious connection?
3. I specifically disclaim any motive of attempting 'to salvage some kind of historicity out of the wreckage of Fundamentalist literalism' (2). All I tried to do in my original paper was to explore if the Bible record is credible. Obviously the interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis is difficult; we must seek to understand them in terms of other parts of scripture as well as scientific beliefs (I would prefer to write 'scientific facts', but I do not – or need – to be dogmatic about secular knowledge).
4. Addinall avers that 'the central affirmation of the story [is] that sin consisted in eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, thereby acquiring knowledge of good and evil' (3, see also 5, 7, 9, 11, 12). He seems to be in a minority about this among commentators (see my affirmation no. 5). I believe he is wrong in this contention.
5. Although he does not explicitly claim it, Addinall seems to accept that the world was at one time 'entirely good' (3). In this he verges towards a literalism which I am sure he would disavow. I discuss the Bible writers' understanding of 'goodness' (which is not the same as ours) in my first affirmation above.

16 W. Pannenberg, (English edition 1985). *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, p. 57.

6. It is untrue that I *want* to locate Adam and Eve as an actual historical couple at a point in history (4). A better way of describing my aim would be to say that I accept the discipline of rigorously interpreting revelation.
7. My suggestion that there were pre-Adamic human beings does not ‘contradict the plain teaching of the Bible’ (4). On the contrary, it answers, for example, the old chestnut of the origin of Cain’s wife or the description of a surprisingly populous world in the early post-Fall world or (less convincingly) the identity of ‘the sons of the gods’ (Gen. 6:2). However Addinall’s objection shows he has missed completely my distinction between *H. sapiens* and *H. divinus*.
8. Addinall claims (*contra me*) that ‘the story says nothing about carelessness and greed’ (5). I may have been over-extrapolating to talk about ‘carelessness’ but Eve’s response to the serpent was certainly about covetousness and greed – which is Addinall’s own emphasis. I am unrepentant about ‘carelessness’; it is a trait which often goes together with greed.
9. More significantly Addinall states that ‘according to the story the earth is no longer what it was because God has deliberately changed it’ (5). This is not part of the story recorded in Genesis. Bonhoeffer comments, ‘All creatures rise up against *sicut deus* man, the creature that tries to live out of his own self. . . . Since they are subject to man they fall with the Fall of man. Nature is without a lord and is itself rebellious and desperate. It is nature under curse, the cursed ground. . . . The *work* (Bonhoeffer’s emphasis) of man upon the cursed ground becomes the expression of the disunion of fallen man with nature; it is under the curse.’¹⁷
10. I have already argued that Addinall wrongly concentrates on the hypothetical knowledge gained from eating from the forbidden tree, rather than the disobedience it involves (Affirmation no.5 above). This leads him into unjustified speculation, such as ‘the knowledge of good and evil is absolutely incompatible with the enjoyment of a proper relationship with God and the blissful life of the garden’ (9), or more peculiarly that ‘knowledge of nature’ (which presumably means ecology) is ‘forbidden knowledge’ (13), or worse still that ‘the fundamental sin of humankind’ is ‘the attempt to control human life, including our environment’ (13). After they ate from the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve *knew* that they were naked’, but the story treats this as a barrier between them and God, not something they had gained.

The Fall as Myth

In my original paper, I rejected the description of the Fall story as myth on the grounds that myth is too imprecise a term, even as used by theologians, never mind its common meaning as a fairy story. To take an example almost at random, myth as understood in medicine is ‘a strongly held belief that can provide powerful group cohesion but is not open to verification or falsification

17 D. Bonhoeffer, (English translation 1959). *Creation and Fall. Temptation*. New York: Macmillan, p. 85.

through empirical data'.¹⁸ This is not my belief about the Fall: in principle we can (and do) learn more about the components of human nature from many lines of study and we can certainly experience (i.e. verify) the effects of Christ's redemption in our own lives.

Obviously there is a problem about how to refer to the Fall narrative.¹⁹ One possibility might be 'saga', which implies a story based on fact. Certainly 'the Genesis story is far removed from the plain discourse of historical narrative and offers a profound meditation on why we are in this world at all, what is the ultimate meaning and purpose of history itself' (10). But I am not persuaded by Addinall's attempt to salvage 'myth' for the Fall (2, 8, 13). I prefer to quote Alan Richardson in my defence: 'The stories of Genesis belong to a wholly different *genre* of thought [to the Middle Eastern fertility-religion myths] so that the use of the word 'myth' in connection with them is out of place. . . . The biblical writers in making use of the old myths and images have stood them on their head; they have employed them in the service of a totally different conception of the relation of God and man. The biblical creation-stories were not designed as myths for recitation in a magical fertility festival: they show, not how God can be made to serve the purposes of men, but how men are utterly dependent upon God and are responsible before him for their every word and deed'.²⁰

I am tempted to suggest that Addinall has not taken on the inversion of understanding described by Richardson, and is still reading Genesis 1–3 as if it were a Babylonian myth(s), rather than an account of our dependence upon the creator and betrayal of the trust he placed in us.

A Way Forward?

It will be obvious that I disagree with many of Addinall's observations on my paper, and that I believe he is wrong in much of his apparently positive suggestion. Nevertheless we agree on some substantial points, and these may be a positive basis for attempting to find a common mind. (As before, I identify Addinall's points by a number in brackets.)

'If we want a historical Adam and Eve we cannot avoid recognising them as the first human beings on earth from whom all others are descended'(4); 'in the story under consideration there is only one man, referred to in almost every instance as "the man" ' (4). That is exactly my point. To underline my point (see affirmation no.5), James Dunn comments on Rom. 5:12–21, 'the concept of a corporate responsibility is more of a hindrance than a help; still less can it be maintained that Paul has in mind some universal mythical Man – as the distinction between "one man" and "all men" makes clear'.²¹

18 P. Dieppe, 1999, Narrative based medicine. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 92: 380–381.

19 See for example J.A. Thompson, 1968, Genesis 1–3. Science? History? Theology? *Tyndale Student Fellowship Bulletin*, 50: 12–13; H. Blocher, 1984, *In the Beginning*. Leicester: IVP.

20 A. Richardson, 1953, Genesis 1–11. *The Creation Stories and the Modern World View*. London: SCM, p. 33.

21 Dunn, 1988, See note 6, p. 222.

This is a clear starting point. The problem then is, as Addinall points out, 'why the activities of a man and a woman in an ancient garden should have such devastating consequences for the rest of us' (4). I agree with him that 'the storyteller asserts that the Being upon whom this world ultimately depends for its existence and fundamental character may be thought of in personal human terms; and that if that relationship existed universally and without qualification human life, including the environment upon which it is so intimately dependent, would be infinitely superior to that which actually confronts us in daily experience' (11). Where we part company is Addinall's next statement that 'the vast gulf between paradise and the world as we know it [is] the consequence of human beings' preference for a certain kind of knowledge over trust in God' (11). Addinall's explanation involves getting knowledge; I believe the biblical picture is one of a *loss* of relationship, which means that we lose the control and discipline of the One with whom we were created to be in fellowship and obedience.

At this point I would like to acknowledge a treatment of the Fall story by Mark Worthing²², which has strengthened my own thinking and may provide the beginning of a bridge to Addinall's position. Worthing summarizes his understanding in a way that accords with my own interpretation (although not, incidentally, with that of Philip Duce in his critical comments on my original paper in *Science and Christian Belief*, 11 (2):159–165): 'The point of the Fall is that spiritual death became a part of our human reality as a result of human disobedience toward God. While, theologically speaking, there are undeniable links between spiritual and physical death, there is no reason to insist that the death that entered the world through human sin must also have been physical death as such. The problem here is not with the Fall itself but with an overly idealised view of the original state. With regard to such things as the problem of competition, pain, difficulties associated with growth and development, and even biological death, there need be no insurmountable conflict between contemporary evolutionary theory and the Christian doctrine of the Fall.' In the *New Dictionary of Theology*, Colwell comes to a similar conclusion from a different starting point: 'It is only from the perspective of our inclusion in the righteousness of Christ and its consequences in terms of justification and sanctification that we can comprehend the reality of our inclusion in the sin of Adam with its consequences of guilt, death and total depravity'²³.

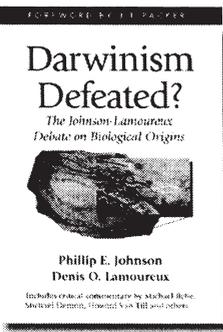
Addinall concludes his dissection of my article, 'No single commentator can begin to exhaust its [the Fall story's] significance'. How true! Indeed it would be both arrogant and dangerous for me, as a scientist, to venture far into questions which belong properly to exegesis and hermeneutics. All I can do from my own background is to insist on an interpretation of the Bible record which is

22 M.W. Worthing, 1999, The Christian doctrine of the Fall in the light of modern science. Festschrift for Hans Schwarz. D. Rakte, (ed.). Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

23 J.E. Colwell, 1988, Fall. In *New Dictionary of Theology*: 249–251. S.B. Ferguson and D.F. Wright, (eds). Leicester: IVP. Karl Barth argues similarly: *Christian Dogmatics*, 1956, volume IV (1), pp. 358ff. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

constrained and disciplined by scientific knowledge. I am therefore happy to associate myself with Mark Worthing writing from the standpoint of a professional theologian, 'Biblically and theologically there are compelling reasons to commend the idea that the Fall has episodal character, that is to say it is an actual demarcation standing at the beginning of the history of the human species that reminds us that we are not now what we were meant to be as beings enjoying a right relationship with God'. What is ultimately at issue in the question of the Fall in light of the findings of modern science is neither the Fall itself nor original sin but the gift of original righteousness which humanity possessed as a result of its relationship with God. The loss of this righteousness is the beginning of a story which ends only at the cross and resurrection of Christ and with the gift to reconciled humanity of Christ's own righteousness. A look at the actual requirements for compatibility with the theory of evolution shows that neither the Fall nor the original state, when viewed within their proper biblical and theological contexts, apart from the accruelements of popular piety, need be abandoned or compromised in the light of modern science' (Worthing, loc. cit.).

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Darwinism Defeated?
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Phillip E. Johnson
Denis O. Lamoureux
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