

Correspondence

Dear Sir,

Having read both Professor Berry's original article (SCB 1999, v.11:29–49) and his reply to Peter Adinall's comments (SCB 2000, v.12: 53–63), I find myself as mystified as ever concerning his basic arguments and I suspect that I am not the only one. I would like to raise two points:

1) The distinction between *Homo sapiens* (the biological human species) and *Homo divinus* (mankind made in the image of God) is completely novel and I can see no Biblical mandate for it (though there is a good case for regarding redeemed humanity in this way). Christians have always traditionally regarded the image of God as consisting of such characteristics as intelligence, conceptual reasoning and speech, self-awareness, moral awareness, the religious sense, and the capacity to love and form relationships. These are characteristics that we share with God and not, except occasionally in inchoate form, with any other animal on this planet. Yet they were certainly all in place thousands (if not hundreds of thousands) of years before the advent of Berry's Neolithic Adam. They are therefore the characteristics of *Homo sapiens*. What extra quality or qualities did Adam possess that constituted the image of God in a way that these other things did not?

2. Berry has not answered Adinall's main question: if Adam is not the ancestor of most of mankind (and he cannot be this if he lived in the Neolithic era), why should his sin have any effect on us? It is no answer to say that he is not our genetic but our spiritual ancestor. This is just a string of empty words unless it is given some kind of meaning. What is a "spiritual ancestor"? What kind of mechanism (spiritual or otherwise) could cause Adam's sinful nature to be transmitted to every person alive in all subsequent generations? Either there is such a mechanism (and Berry should provide us with a scripturally-based account of what it is) or God must, by an arbitrary act, impose this sinful nature separately on each new person. If the latter, why should a righteous God do this and by what sort of justice can He hold us responsible for the consequences of it?

It seems to me that Berry's thesis preserves the historicity of Adam at the cost of denying the most important aspects of the Old Testament story, those that link it to the New Testament story of redemption. If we are to give full weight to the reality of the Fall as the fall of all mankind, there are really only two possibilities: either Adam was the first *Homo sapiens* as traditionally believed, and our solidarity with him in his fall is one of genetic descent, or Adam is simply mankind personified (which is, after all, the meaning of his name). The first alternative is difficult to maintain in the face of our present knowledge of the history of mankind. The second has been challenged in view of Paul's Adam-Christ parallel in Romans 5:15–19. Christ, after all, was a historical character and not an

allegorical figure. However, this is not an insuperable obstacle. If Adam was originally the universal Old Man who came, over the centuries, to be seen as an individual man (the first true *Homo sapiens*), then he indeed becomes a parallel in reverse to Christ, the individual man who was the first true *Homo divinus* and who became, through the resurrection, the universal New Man, whose body is the Church and of whom all Christians find themselves members. Thus an allegorical interpretation of Adam's story does preserve the essential elements of the traditional interpretation and does so better, I think, than Berry's rather eccentric version.

H Russman (Dr)

Dear Sir,

I read with interest the debate between Philip Duce and R.J. Berry on the nature of the death God imposed on Adam as a result of the Fall.¹ I should like to offer the following comments on the key scriptures involved in this debate (Gen. 2–3, Rom. 5).²

1. Genesis defines the death God imposed on Adam in two ways. First, God says to Adam, “to dust you shall return” (3:19). This describes physical death. Second, Genesis states that God drove Adam away from the tree of life lest he should eat from it and “live for ever” (3:22–24). This means that Adam would cease to live (5:5), in contrast to what happened to Enoch (5:24). The reference is again to physical death.

Genesis presents the fulfilment of God's warning to Adam that he would die “on the day” he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:17), in 3:22—24: “on the day” he ate from this tree God drove him from the tree of life which would have given him immortality.

Whether God also imposed “spiritual death” on Adam depends on what this means. If it means being completely cut off from God immediately (i.e. prior to physical death), the answer is that Genesis gives no indication of this. God left Adam and Eve after the Fall, but he had also left them before the Fall, only coming to them after they had sinned (3:8–13). Eve later attributed to God the birth of Cain (4:1) and of Seth (4:25). Seth's family “called on the name of the LORD” (4:26). Enoch “walked with God” (5:24).

If “spiritual death” means a *weakening* of relationship with God, then Genesis does give indications of this, but “death” is a strong term to describe it.

2. Romans 5:12 can be translated: “through one man sin entered the world, and through sin death, and so death spread to all men, in that all have sinned”.³ Paul's logic is then as follows: when Adam sinned, God drove him away from the tree of

1 *S & CB* 11(2) (1999), pp. 159–167.

2 Cf. P. G. Nelson, *Big Bang, Small Voice: Reconciling Genesis and Modern Science* (Latheronwheel, Caithness: Whittles, 1999), pp. 44–45, 102.

3 See, e.g., C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1975).

life. This not only denied Adam access to the tree, but also his descendants. God circumvented this in the case of Enoch (Gen. 5:24), and also Elijah (2 Kin. 2:11). But for everyone who sins, God made death the penalty for sin.

Now Paul established earlier in Romans that “all have sinned” (3:9–26). Consequently, with but two exceptions, “death spread to all men”. From comment 1, this refers to physical death.

Later in Romans, Paul says that, when he became aware of the law, he “died” (7:9). This can be understood in the same way as Adam’s “death” on the day that he sinned.³

P.G. Nelson

Dear Sir,

Professor Berry’s attempt to maintain that “the Fall is History” in the context of the world view of modern History and modern Science does not seem to command general assent. This is perhaps not surprising. The Genesis story makes sense in its own terms, describing primaeval parents, whose relationship with God is portrayed as typical of the relationship which every human being has with God. Without considering whether it is “historically true”, it is certainly a very powerful “myth” in the broadest sense of that word. I suspect if we asked the original compiler/author of Genesis whether his story were literally true, he would not understand the question. Cain marrying a wife was no problem to him. Nor were the difficulties of reconciling Genesis 1 with Genesis 2 & 3. If we asked him whether his story were literally true, he might well accuse us of lacking imagination and missing the point.

The best attempts of modern History and modern Science to describe human origins allow no room for a common ancestor pair for the whole human race at any period plausible for a literal Adam and Eve. The fundamentalist can maintain his belief that Genesis 1–12 are historically true only by insisting that scientists and historians are misinterpreting the evidence, but that has alarming repercussions for the truth claims of both disciplines across the whole spectrum of their studies. Professor Berry (certainly not a fundamentalist) tries to maintain that there must have been a historical “Adam and Eve”, but at the cost of having to postulate two separate human groups – *Homo sapiens* and *Homo divinus* for which there is no other evidence. Surely it is more true to the Bible to see all creatures as relating to their Creator at an appropriate level and human-beings (how ever they were created) relating to God the way Adam and Eve did in the Genesis story. That is what the doctrine of Original Sin means.

Professor Berry’s difficulty seems to come from the need to balance Adam with Christ (the new Adam) in I Corinthians 15. In Paul’s exposition (equation?) can a “mythical” Adam correspond to a real Christ? Perhaps there is a way out of this difficulty by developing some very traditional theology.

Theologians influenced by the Platonic Tradition would always have insisted that

the spiritual was more real than the material. All orthodox theologians would agree that only God exists in Himself. Only God is ultimately real. Everything else (including every human being) is contingent being, not fully real. Maybe we could say that the only completely real man ever to be on this planet was Jesus Christ, in fact that He was more real than the planet He walked on. In Paul's equation, even if he were a historical figure, Adam would not be equivalent to Christ. Adam's being would be contingent on Christ's being in Himself.

It is possible to argue that – since it concerns spiritual reality – the truth contained in Genesis is more important and less contingent than *what actually happened* as investigated by History and Science. Man's relationship with God may be more real (and certainly more important) than accounts of man's physical origins.

The modernist claim was that the subjective realities of religion etc were less certain than the objective realities of science and other “hard” disciplines. In reality of course the history of science has been that the more we discover, the more we discover there is still to discover. “Indivisible” atoms turn out to consist of sub-atomic particles and sub-atomic particles turn out not to be particles in any normal sense of that word.

Philosophers of Science and History doubt that there is any truly objective study. It is never possible to know all the data and – if it were – not only the interpretation, but also the phenomena themselves – must be in part determined by the perspective of the observer.

Only God is objectively real and the claim of 1 Corinthians 13 is that although *now we see through a glass darkly*, there will come a time when we shall see God *face to face*. *Then shall I know even as also I am known*. There is only one being of which/Whom objective knowledge is possible and paradoxically we shall only have that pure objective knowledge when our subjective knowledge of God is complete.

I suggest therefore that I Corinthians 15 does not make a literal Adam necessary to balance a literal Christ. The balance is between the absolute truth that all of us rebel against God and thereby forfeit our right to life (*in Adam all die*) and that Jesus, the perfect man, makes it possible for us to be forgiven and begin again (*in Christ shall all be made alive*). The balance of probability seems to be against a historical “Adam and Eve” in the Neolithic Period. Maybe that balance will shift as new evidence comes to light, but I suggest that whether or not “Adam and Eve” existed in history has no bearing on the fact that we are all fallen and that redemption in Christ is offered to all of us.

Roger Knight

Dear Sir,

The concerns expressed by these correspondents are important, because they are central to our understanding of the Christian faith: the nature of humankind and the nature of death (and therefore life) (which was also raised by Philip

Duce in a previous response to my original article : see *S & CB*, 11: 159–167, 1999).

Humanness: Russman states (correctly) that Christians have “traditionally regarded” the image of God which is the distinctive feature of full humanness as “consisting of such characteristics as intelligence, conceptual reasoning and speech” etc. He could have added bipedalism, tool making, play and other such features. Speculations have abounded and been repeatedly abandoned as our knowledge of non-human animal behaviour and capability has increased.¹ Commentators on Genesis 1:26 now seem agreed that it describes relationship and it is inappropriate to interpret “image” in terms of specific traits.² Rudman summarises much scholarship on the subject: “Humanity is God’s partner in dialogue, responsible to God for the care and replenishment of creation.”³ We can describe the *results* of this relationship, but not its mechanism, as Russman wants; we understand much more about air currents since Nicodemus was told that he did not know where the wind came from or where it is going, but we are still unaware of *how* the Spirit carries out his work in individual lives.

Roger Knight approaches the nature of man from an exegetical standpoint: how should we relate Paul’s statements about the first man in Romans 5 and I Corinthians 15 to the ‘Adam’ described in Genesis 1–3? We cannot avoid in this context also the challenge of what it means to be made ‘in God’s image’ while acknowledging the genetical, anatomical and palaeontological likelihood that we share a common ancestry with other living beings. I agree wholly with Knight that ‘the best attempts of modern History and modern Science to describe human origins allow no room for a common ancestor pair for the whole human race at any period plausible for a literal Adam and Eve’. But what about the *theological* understanding of this? Knight sees the solution in some immaterial essence. Fine: but how and when did this humanness become immanent in *Homo sapiens*? My proposal is that *H. divinis* is the result of the differentiating (= creating) work of God described in Genesis 1:27,2:7; this is the basis for me of the distinction between *H. sapiens* and *H. divinis*. I disagree with both Russman and Knight that this is a ‘completely novel’ idea for which there is ‘no evidence’. All I am doing is providing names to distinguish pre-Adamic humans from those made in God’s image, i.e. Adam and his descendants.

Genesis tells us that God created his image in our first parents and that Adam was a Neolithic farmer. (This is a statement from Genesis, not my embellishment as Russman suggests). Those in whom God first in-breathed his Spirit were necessarily the parents of all humanity. Such in-breathing is a divine act not a genetical relationship. There is thus no problem about Adam being the ancestor of true

1 The most complete account known to me is contained in W.H. Thorpe’s Gifford Lectures, *Animal Nature and Human Nature* (London: Methuen, 1974).

2 See, for example, Blocher, H. *In the Beginning*: 79–94 (Leicester: IVP, 1984); Westermann, C. *Genesis 1–11*: 142–158 (London: SPCK, English translation, 1984).

3 Rudman, S. *Concepts of Person and Christian Ethics*: 141 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

humankind (*i.e.* those made in God's image) as Russman claims (as did Addinall before him: *S & CB*, 12 : 48, 2000), unless we equate physical (genetic) descent with spiritual relationship.

I am grateful to Roger Knight for calling us back to the fundamental problem, the understanding of Scripture. I am not persuaded by his own suggestion because it does not provide (at least for me) a firm equation between 'the spiritual reality – the truth contained in Genesis [and] ... what actually happened as investigated by History and Science.' Notwithstanding, we need to get away from unbridled speculation and give ourselves a Bible-based discipline for discovering the truth about our real nature.

Death: The Bible differentiates physical death from spiritual death (e.g. Lazarus, Christ himself, and Paul in 1 Corinthians 15; and in a related dualism, the healing of the paralysed man in Luke 5:18–25). This is not the same as the common and non-scriptural materialistic dualism of body and soul⁴. Wolff concludes a detailed review of Bible teaching by defining a dead person as "one who is cut off from the praise of God [whereas] the living is the man who can praise God ... Death means lack of relationship."⁵ When God says to disobedient Adam "to dust you will return," he was condemning him to nothingness not simply physical death. The distinction between our physical body which we share with other animals, and the image of God which enables us in Christ to be born anew and restored to a proper relationship with God, is the basis of the gospel. I cannot agree with Nelson's attempt to blur the distinction.

Interpretation: Any treatment of the Fall narratives (and their sequelae in Romans and 1 Corinthians) inevitably depends on interpreting the "plain text" of scripture. I am well aware of the danger of mistreating awkward texts in the interests of producing a coherent story, but we must be always on our guard against illegitimate faithfulness to particular interpretations. For example, Nelson seems to regard the trees of good and evil and of life as literal plants. Blocher's comment is salutary: "In 3:22 God appears to be worried that the eating of the fruit ... should produce an effect of immortality. And that is quite simply magic ... Magic supposes a view of the world and of the divine that are diametrically opposed to that of Genesis. [In Proverbs 3:18, cf. 11:30, 13:12 and Revelation 2:7, 22:1–5] the reference to Genesis is as clear as daylight. It does not incline towards literalism, even in part ... If the tree of life is figurative, the same must be said for its counterpart, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."⁶

Probably the most contentious and speculative part of my own exploration of the Fall narratives is the imbuing by God with his image of all members of *H. sapiens* after his initial creation of Adam (and Eve) and his subsequent imputing of

4 Moule, C.F.D. St. Paul and dualism: the Pauline conception of resurrection. *New Testament studies*, 13:106–123, 1965–1966; Jeeves, M.A. & Berry, R.J. *Science and Christian Belief*: 147–152 (Leicester: Apollos, 1998).

5 Wolff, H.W. *Anthropology of the Old Testament*: 106–7 (London: SCM, English translation 1974)

6 Blocher, *loc. cit.*, pp. 123–5.

'original sin' to all humankind. I am not worried about the way(s) God did this; we are concerned with (in Roger Knight's phrase) 'spiritual reality', not with biological processes. But *why* did 'death spread to all' (Romans 5:12)? The most convincing answer for me is the exegetical one of Henri Blocher which I quoted in my original paper, that condemnation is a necessary preliminary to justification⁷. If we are not like Adam 'dead in our trespasses and sins', we cannot be made alive through Christ. This puts my speculation firmly under the test of scripture, which is exactly where it should be.

In a previous exchange, I resisted Addinall's interpretation that the Fall is a myth. I also disagree (although less strongly) with Nelson's suggestion that it is an allegory. In his masterly survey of *The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science*, Peter Harrison shows that a major legacy of the Reformers has been the elimination of wholesale allegory in Bible interpretation allowing "a demystification of the world ... (which) has been a major catalyst in the emergence of science."⁸ I believe with John Stott⁹ that the Fall narratives must be treated as history – or at least as protohistory¹⁰ – if we are fully to recognise their impact and their significance for Christ's work and our salvation.

R.J. Berry

[Editor's Note: further correspondence on this topic is now closed.]

7 See p. 33 in my original article (*S & CB*, 11: 29–49, 1999); this refers to pp. 77–78 in Blocher, H. *Original Sin* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997).

8 Harrison, P., esp. pp 4–9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

9 Stott, J.R.W. *The Message of Romans*: 162–6 (Leicester: IVP, 1994).

10 Wenham, G.J. *Genesis 1–15*: 91 (Waco, TX: World Books).