

R. J. BERRY**Adam or Adamah?¹**

Many – perhaps most – commentators on the creation story in Genesis accept the conventional scientific understanding that at least several hundred hominids formed the ancestral group which gave rise to modern humankind, treating ‘Adam’ as a metaphor for this group and using the word as a play on adamah, which means ‘from the earth’. This is consistent as far as it goes, but it has the danger of being subservient to science and requiring hermeneutical gymnastics to accommodate robust interpretations of the relevance of the ‘Fall story’ and original sin, especially the force of Paul’s analogy in Romans 5:12-19 between the ‘first man’ and the ‘last man’. These difficulties disappear if we treat Adam as an individual imbued with God’s image, which does not spread through conventional Mendelian mechanisms, but depends on and is transmitted by God’s divine (and mysterious) action; God’s image in us reflects our relationship with him, which can be broken (as it was in the ‘Fall’), but is restored when we are ‘in Christ’. Our role on Earth is to foster this God-given relationship and the responsibilities implicit in caring for our fellows and other parts of creation.

Key words: human evolution, Adam, *adamah*, Fall, federal head, *imago Dei*, Darwinism, original sin

Introduction

Human evolution has been a source of uncertainty, confusion and conflict for Christians since the early days of Darwinism. How should we understand ‘Adam’? Was there such person as a man called ‘Adam’ in history? Or should the word ‘Adam’ be taken as a surrogate for humankind, or perhaps a particular group of ancestral humans? Or is it really a play on the Hebrew word *adamah*

1 I first developed the background to the ideas presented here in a paper given at the CiS-ASA Conference in Cambridge in August 1988, published in *Science & Christian Belief* (1999)11, 29-49. The published paper elicited responses from Duce, P. *Science & Christian Belief* (1999) 11, 159-165, Addinall, P. *Science & Christian Belief* (2000) 12, 47-52 and Russman, H., Nelson, P. & Knight, R. *Science & Christian Belief* (2000) 12, 165-168 to all of whom I responded in the Journal. It was good to be challenged by these correspondents, which enabled me to refine my ideas: Berry, R.J. *God’s Book of Works*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark: (2003), pp. 227-232; and ‘Did Darwin dethrone God?’ in Berry, R.J. & Noble, T.A. (eds.) *Darwin, Creation and the Fall*, Nottingham: Apollos (2009), pp. 30-74 but my proposals produced more criticisms, particularly over the implications of the concept of Adam’s federal headship of humankind – see Messer, N. *Selfish Genes and Christian Ethics*, London: SCM (2007), pp. 186ff. and ‘Natural evil after Darwin’, in Northcott, M.S. & Berry, R.J. (eds.) *Theology After Darwin*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster (2009), pp. 138-154, p. 149; Bimson, J. ‘Doctrines of the fall and sin’ in Northcott & Berry *op. cit.*, (1), pp. 114f; Southgate, C. *Reviews in Science & Religion* (2010) no.55, p. 12. This paper is an attempt to put the questions raised into the full context of human origins and nature.

(‘from the earth’, from which Adam was reported to come – and to return)? All these possibilities have passionate advocates. There may be no definitive answer to favour or exclude any of them, but exegetical rigour and scientific honesty call us to examine the implications and fallacies of the different interpretations.

The easiest option is to deny that humans are evolved in any sense. A hundred and fifty years ago a *Guardian* review of Darwin’s the *Descent of Man* was unequivocal, ‘Holy Scripture plainly regards man’s creation as a totally distinct class of operations from that of lower beings.’² Cardinal Manning proclaimed ‘The true indictment against the theory of man’s descent from the apes is that it is unscientific, unphilosophical, and based upon an inadequate and therefore an illusory induction.’³ At least as far as our physical nature is concerned, such a belief is now eccentric.

The evidence of animal origins and relationships of humankind inferred from the cumulative data of fossils and more recently from molecular analyses is overwhelming to most people. To deny their meaning courts the condemnation of Augustine,

Even a non-Christian knows something about the earth... the kinds of animals, shrubs, stones and so forth, and this knowledge he holds to as being certain from reason and experience. Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics... how are they going to believe these books on matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven, when they think their pages are full of falsehoods on facts which they themselves have learnt from experience and the light of reason?⁴

The fiercest debates in the past have been about human ancestry, but the more acute and continuing problems for Christians are about humanness in the fullest sense. The questions here extend well beyond narrow religious issues. Alfred Russel Wallace believed that ‘natural selection could not have done it all’; Asa Gray worried that Darwin’s ideas imported an unacceptable amount of chance; T.H. Huxley argued that human ethics could only come about by resisting selection. Darwin himself had problems. He wrote in the *Descent of Man*,

It is extremely doubtful whether the offspring of the more sympathetic and benevolent parents, or of those which were the most faithful to their comrades, would be reared in greater number than the children of selfish and

2 Cited by Browne, J. *Charles Darwin: the power of place*, London: Jonathan Cape (2002), p. 351.

3 Cited by MacFie, R.C. *The Theology of Evolution*, London: Unicorn Press (1933), p. 265.

4 St Augustine *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Taylor, J.H. (trans.) New York: Paulist Press (1982), p. 42.

treacherous parents of the same tribe. He who was ready to sacrifice his life, as many a savage has been, rather than betray his comrades, would often leave no offspring to inherit his noble nature. The bravest men, who were always willing to come to the front in war, and who freely risked their lives for others, would on an average perish in larger number than other men. Therefore it seems scarcely possible that the number of men gifted with such virtues, or that the standard of their excellence, could be increased through natural selection, that is, by the survival of the fittest.⁵

Uncertainties among scientists did not lead to a blanket denial of human evolution by Christians. Benjamin Warfield, an impeccable upholder of biblical integrity, was explicitly positive: 'I do not think that there is any statement in the Bible or any part of the account of creation, either as given in Genesis 1 and 2 or elsewhere alluded to, that need be opposed to evolution'⁶... '[it] supplies a tenable theory of the method of divine providence in the creation of mankind.'⁷

However, the commonest reaction from Christians was probably uncertainty and a certain amount of prevarication. For example, Arthur Rendle Short was hesitant in his *Modern Discovery and the Bible*, which for long influenced evangelical thought on faith and science in the UK. In the original edition of the book (1942), he stated a belief in human-like pre-Adamites, as represented by an increasing number of fossil discoveries, while insisting that Adam was created *de novo* with the spiritual qualities the pre-Adamites lacked; by the third edition (1955) he was less certain and declared himself agnostic about our origins.⁸

Bernard Ramm in his even more influential *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (1954) considered five possibilities. He ruled out the first but did not commit himself to any of the others:⁹

5 Darwin, C. *Descent of Man*, London: John Murray (1871), p. 163.

6 Lecture given in December 1888, reprinted in Noll, M.A. & Livingstone, D.N. (eds.) *Evolution, Science and Scripture*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker (2000). Noll and Livingstone quote James Packer as being unable to see anything in the early chapters of Genesis that 'bears on the biological theory of evolution one way or the other... I recall that B.B. Warfield was a theistic evolutionist. If on this count I am not an evangelical, then neither was he' (Noll & Livingstone *op. cit.*, (6), p. 38). Fred Zaspel ('B.B. Warfield on creation and evolution', *Themelios* (2010) 35, 198-211) has challenged Noll and Livingstone's presentation of Warfield's position, but his criticism is based on Warfield's consistent abhorrence of naturalism and on evolutionism rather than his denial of evolutionary science as such (with the complication that Darwin's ideas of the mechanism of evolution were under attack in Warfield's later years – see below). The doughty anti-evolutionist Henry Morris unsurprisingly condemned Warfield's understanding as 'pervasive theological apostasy' Morris, H. *History of Modern Creationism*, San Diego: Master Book (1984), p. 39.

7 Warfield, B. 'Calvin's doctrine of the Creation', *Princeton Theological Review* (1915)13, 190-255, 209.

8 'What sort of material the Creator used to make man, whether the dust of the earth directly or the pre-existing body of a beast, we leave an open question', Rendle Short, A. *Modern Discovery and the Bible*, 3rd edn. London: Inter Varsity Fellowship (1955), p. 114.

9 Ramm, B. *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (1954), pp. 315ff.

1. That geologists are completely wrong and that man was created a few thousand years before Christ. Ramm concluded, 'We cannot write off all of modern geology and anthropology in defense of the origin of man about 4000 BC.'
2. That there is a difference between fossil man and biblical man. This was effectively Rendle Short's position. Ramm quotes R.A.Torrey as believing that there were pre-Adamites alive in biblical times,¹⁰ but worried that this gives 'vexing problems... How do they fit into the doctrines of redemption and sin?'
3. That the biblical account is metaphorical with the 'inspired truth [being] set forth in allegorical or figurative or metaphorical or symbolical or mythical literary structure.'
4. Theistic evolution, so that 'at a certain point a pre-human became a human, and that was Mr Adam'.
5. That humans are as old as anthropologists say they are – presumably when *Homo sapiens* first appeared, recognising that 'the chief problem with an origin of man at 500,000 BC is the connection of Genesis 3 with Genesis 4'.¹¹

Henri Blocher takes a different approach. He points out that in the Bible, 'Man is neither angel nor beast, nor even a little of both'. He lists four ways in which the nature of humanness has been identified: spirituality, dominion, original righteousness (following Luther), and sexuality (Barth's suggestion), but warns, 'We must take a step backwards. Too little notice has been taken of the term 'image' [God created human beings in his own image; in the image of God he created them] Genesis 1:27)... An image *is only an image* [his italics]. It exists only by derivation. It is not the original, nor is it anything without the original.'¹² His caution is right, and I return to it below. However we have to accept the fact that we exist in time and have a history. We cannot avoid having to choose from Ramm's suggestions.

Debates about evolution in general and humankind in particular drag on apparently interminably. It is now nearly forty years ago since Theodosius Dobzhansky wrote his much-quoted essay 'Nothing makes sense in biology except in the light of evolution', a comment on a plea to the King of Saudia Arabia from Sheikh Abd el Aziz bin Baz, who later became the Grand Mufti, to suppress the teaching of evolution, on the grounds that

10 Torrey, R.A. *Difficulties in the Bible*, Chicago: Moody Press (1907), chap. V.

11 In his book *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?*, Oxford: Monarch (2008), Denis Alexander also sets out five models for the possible historicity of Adam and Eve (pp. 234-239). They are more developed than Ramm's set, but the two lists have considerable similarities.

12 Blocher, H. *In the Beginning*, Leicester: IVP (1984), p. 82. Interestingly he does not include the traditional assumption of rationality in his list. Rendle Short defined humanness as 'spirit, soul and body', on the basis of Paul's words in 1 Thess. 5:23, but did not seek to define 'spirit' and 'soul'.

The Holy Koran, the Prophet's teachings, the majority of Islamic scientists, and the actual facts all prove that the sun is running in its orbit... and that the earth is fixed and stable, spread out by God for his mankind.... Anyone who professed otherwise would utter a charge of falsehood toward God, the Koran, and the Prophet.... I am a creationist and an evolutionist. Evolution is God's, or nature's, method of creation. Creation is not an event that happened in 4004 BC; it is a process that began some 10 billion years ago and is still under way.¹³

Twenty-six years ago (1985), Derek Burke edited a book on *Creation and Evolution* in the IVP series 'Where Christians Disagree' with essays and rejoinders by four evolutionists and four anti-evolutionists; ten years ago, IVP (US) published a not dissimilar book; in 2009 Paternoster produced yet another volume of debates.¹⁴ A book by Denis Alexander examining the possibility that evolution is a divinely-used mechanism has provoked a concerted cry of outrage from a group of Christians.¹⁵ In recent years, a conflict has been provoked by 'intelligent design' advocates, with its own army of dedicated gladiators.¹⁶ Where does all this get us? It is easy to quote and oppose authorities of various weight. How can we evaluate the situation? What can be established with certainty by scientific understanding, whilst accepting that all science is provisional and open to challenge, and how can we best interpret Scripture in the light of science?

Scientific Understanding

The possibility that there was such a thing as a prehistory of humankind only became real with the recognition of 'deep time' towards the end of the eighteenth century. For a time, this strengthened the earlier speculation of Isaac de La Peyrère that the Bible taught that Adam and Eve were not the first human beings, but merely the original parents of the Jewish people.¹⁷ In other words

13 Dobzhansky, T. 'Nothing makes sense in biology except in the light of evolution', *American Biology Teacher* (1973) 35: 125-129.

14 Burke, D.C. (ed.) *Creation and Evolution*, Leicester: IVP (1985); Carlson, R.F. (ed.) *Science & Christianity: Four Views*, Downer's Grove, IL: IVP (2000); Finlay, G., Lloyd, S., Pattemore, E. & Swift, D. *Debating Darwin*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster (2009).

15 Alexander, D.R. *op. cit.*, (8); Nevin, N.C. (ed.) *Should Christians Embrace Evolution?*, Nottingham: IVP (2010).

16 e.g. Johnson, P.E. *Darwin on Trial*, Downer's Grove, IL: IVP (1991); Johnson, P.E., Lamourreux, D.O., et al. *Darwinism Defeated?* Vancouver, BC: Regent College (1999); Pennock, R.T. (ed.) *Intelligent Design Creationism and its Critics*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press (2001); Dembski, W.A. & Ruse, M. *Debating Design*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2004); Strobel, L. *The Case for a Creator*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (2004); Shanks, N. *God, the Devil, and Darwin*, New York: Oxford University Press (2004); Ayala, F.J. *Darwin and Intelligent Design*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress (2006); Kitcher, P. *Living with Darwin. Evolution, Design and the Future of Faith*, New York: Oxford University Press (2007); Miller, K.R. *Only a Theory*, New York: Penguin. This is far from a comprehensive list of books on the subject.

17 La Peyrère, I. de *Men Before Adam, or a Discourse upon the Twelfth, Thirteenth and Fourteenth Verses of the Fifth Chapter of the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Romans, by Which Are Prov'd That Men Were Created Before Adam*, London (1655).

there could well have been ‘pre-Adamites’, which would explain where Cain found a wife and who had peopled the land of Nod (Gen. 4: 16). La Peyrère was heavily criticised, but the idea of pre-Adamites persisted; in the Americas in particular it was used to explain how the native inhabitants of that continent related to the European colonisers.¹⁸

The debate was put on a firmer ground when skeletons of Neanderthals were discovered in Belgium in 1829 and in Gibraltar in 1848, although ‘Neanderthal man’ (*Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*) was not formally described until 1857, based on remains from the Neander Valley, near Düsseldorf. Darwin knew nothing of any possible ancestral humans when he was writing the *Origin of Species* in 1858-59. He notoriously included only one sentence on the subject, ‘I see open fields for far more important researches... Much light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history.’¹⁹ However, he could not avoid the topic, and returned to it fourteen years later with the *Descent of Man*.

Darwin had no doubts that humans shared an ancestor with the apes, indeed that as ‘Africa was formerly inhabited by extinct apes closely allied to the gorilla and chimpanzee; and as these two species are now man’s nearest allies, it is somewhat more probable that our early progenitors lived on the African continent than elsewhere.’²⁰ This was remarkably prescient. Although human-like (hominid) fossils were found in Java in 1891, the vast majority of finds – and all those of early date – have come from Africa. There is now general agreement about the outline of their evolutionary history and relationships during the 5-7 million years that separate us from our last common ancestor with the chimpanzee.

The answer to Darwin’s own perplexity about the origins of non-selfishness was addressed by J.B.S. Haldane as long ago as 1932, developed by Bill Hamilton, George Price and John Maynard Smith in the 1960s, and popularised by Ed Wilson in the 1970s as ‘sociobiology’.²¹ This does not mean that the problem

18 Livingstone, D.N. *The Preadamite Theory and the Marriage of Science and Religion*, Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society (1992); Nelson, G.B. ‘Men before Adam: American debates over the unity and antiquity of humanity,’ in Lindberg, D.C. & Numbers, R.L. (eds.) *When Science and Christianity Meet*: Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2003), pp. 161-181. In their book *Darwin’s Sacred Cause*, London: Allen Lane (2009), Adrian Desmond and Jim Moore argue that a significant motive for Darwin in developing his evolutionary ideas was to counter the idea that there are several species of mankind of different antiquity and intelligence.

19 In 1857, Darwin wrote to Wallace about his planned book on ‘transmutation’, ‘You ask whether I shall discuss “man”. I think I shall avoid the whole subject, as so surrounded with prejudices; though I fully admit it is the highest and most interesting problem for the naturalist.’

20 Darwin, *op. cit.*, (5), p. 199.

21 Haldane, J.B.S. *Causes of Evolution*, London: Longmans Green (1932); Hamilton, W.D. ‘The evolution of social behavior’, *Journal of Theoretical Biology* (1964) 7,1-16, 17-52; Price, G.R. ‘Fisher’s fundamental theorem made clear’, *Annals of Human Genetics* (1972) 36, 129-140; Wilson, E.O. *Sociobiology*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap (1975). Useful accounts of the debates are given by Dugatkin, L.A. *The Altruism Equation*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press (2006); Harman, O. *The Price of Altruism*, London: Bodley Head (2010).

is solved. Debates continue about the sufficiency of sociobiological mechanisms to produce the degrees of altruism encountered in human relationships, about the limits to such behaviours outside close family relationships, and about the determinants of behaviour generally.²²

Other scientific developments that bear on theological understandings come from neurobiology and the analysis of brain function. It is now possible to link directly neural activity with specific thoughts or challenges, even with prayer and worship. Put crudely, they show no room for a material (or physical) presence of God. Human capacities and distinctives can be explained without recourse to something like a soul or spirit understood as entities separate from the physical body; no dualism of body and soul seems to exist. Whatever it is in us that relates to God involves properties that emerge from our physicality but cannot be reduced to it.²³ Debates on such topics are important but their outcome is not central to the thesis of this paper. Suffice it to note that scientific developments are impinging on issues with theological implications and must therefore be taken in to account.

Theological understanding

A surprising number of people still resolutely refuse to acknowledge the strength and relevance of scientific discoveries about the origins and nature of humankind.²⁴ Among those prepared to accept our relationship with the apes, probably most assume that the evolution of humans has proceeded much as that of any other species, perhaps with the qualification that natural selection has been superseded at some point by non-genetic mechanisms. Julian Huxley used to write of such a post-biological phase as 'psychosocial' evolution and C.H. Waddington as 'sociogenetic' evolution. On the face of it, there seems no insuperable problem for Christians to accept an evolutionary process if somehow God oversees and controls it.

22 See, e.g. Wilson, D.S. *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion and the Nature of Society*, Chicago: Chicago University Press (2002); Boyd, R. & Richerson, P.J. 'Culture and the evolution human cooperation', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* (2009) 364, 3281-3288; Nowak, M.A., Tarnita, C.E. & Wilson, E.O. 'The evolution of eusociality', *Nature* (2010) 466, 1057-1062.

23 There is a growing literature on the proper modern understanding of the soul. See Brown, W.S., Murphy, N. & Malony, H.N. (eds.) *Whatever Happened to the Soul?*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress (1998); Jeeves, M.A. (ed.) *From Cells to Souls – and Beyond*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (2004); Green, J.B. & Palmer, S.L. (eds.) *In Search of the Soul*, Downer's Grove, IL: IVP (2005); Jeeves, M.A. & Brown, W.S. *Neuroscience, Psychology and Religion*, West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton (2009); Jeeves, M.A. (2009). 'Psychologising and neurologising about religion', *Science & Christian Belief* (2009) 21, 25- 54; Norman, W.D. & Jeeves, M.A. 'Neurotheology: avoiding a reinvented phrenology', *Perspectives on Science & Christian Faith* (2010) 62, 235-251.

24 Around 40% of American and 25% of Britons believe that 'Humans and other living beings have existed in their present form since the beginning of time': Miller, J.D., Scott, E.C. & Okamoto, S. 'Public acceptance of evolution', *Science* (2006) 313,765-766; Spencer, N. & Alexander, D.R. *Rescuing Darwin*, London: Theos (2009).

However there are four points on which Christians will want to be assured. The first is that all humans share a common root.²⁵ Here science and religion do not conflict; there is no valid reason to believe that we are not a single species. The other three concerns are more difficult to incorporate into a conventional scientific approach:

- The inference that there was a first human couple, Adam and Eve who existed in a paradisaical garden in a state of 'original righteousness', from which they 'fell' by disobeying God;
- A claim that we share a 'fallen nature' as a result of Adam and Eve's act of disobedience;
- Guilt and sentence of death of all humans because of Adam's sin.

These assertions are commonly ignored on the grounds that the first three chapters of Genesis are theological rather than literal history.²⁶ Some have regarded these chapters as nothing more than a primitive anthology irrelevant to modern believers.²⁷ Others are less dismissive: Gordon Wenham calls Genesis 1-11 'paradigmatic and protohistorical';²⁸ John Walton has detailed how these chapters reflect and respond to the literature of ancient Mesopotamia;²⁹ Melvin Tinker has provided a commentary which is conservative and yet finds no necessary conflicts with science.³⁰ John Bimson summarises the meaning of Genesis 2 and 3: 'The narrative refers to a real event within history. But it does so with great literary freedom in language that is culturally encoded, symbolic and metaphorical. Put simply, it speaks of a real disruption at the start of the human story, but does not require us to believe this involved two people, a piece of fruit and a talking snake.'³¹

Did Adam really exist? The first humans were presumably members of a fairly large group, not a single couple. Although a biological species can arise from a single pairing (most commonly through polyploidy), this is rare in ani-

25 Acts 17:26

26 They are often described as 'myth'. Whilst recognising that this term has an accepted literary use, I prefer to avoid it. Alan Richardson comments cogently, 'The stories of Genesis belong to a wholly different genre of thought [from 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 God and man' (Richardson, A. *Genesis 1-11*, London: SCM (1953), p. 33). Howard Marshall castigates 'myth' in the *New Dictionary of Theology* (IVP, 1988, p. 449) as 'a confusing and slippery term in theology; it is used in so many ill-defined ways by individual theologians that it would be no bad thing if its use were prohibited.'

27 e.g. Williams, P.A. *Doing Without Adam and Eve*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress (2001); Burge, E.A. *Science and the Bible Evidence-based Christian Belief*, West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton (2005).

28 Wenham, G.J. *Genesis 1-15*, Waco, TX: Word Books (1987), p. 91.

29 Walton, J. *The Lost World of Genesis One*, Downer's Grove, IL: IVP (2009).

30 Tinker, M. *Reclaiming Genesis*, Oxford: Monarch (2010).

31 Bimson, J. 'Doctrine of the fall and sin after Darwin', in Northcott, M.S. & Berry, R.J. (eds.) *Theology After Darwin*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster (2009), pp. 106-122, p. 109. George Murphy takes a similar approach in 'Roads to paradise and perdition: Christ, evolution and original sin', *Perspectives in Science and Christian Faith*, (2006) 58, 109-118.

mals and there is no sign that it has occurred in the human lineage. Palæoanthropologists differ about the details, but are unanimous that in spreading out of Africa our ancestral group must have gone through a bottleneck of numbers but this was probably of the order of several hundred individuals, perhaps a few thousands.³² This would mean that the person described in Genesis as 'Adam' refers not to the 'Mr Adam' that featured in Bernard Ramm's list of options, but to humankind; Adam becomes a symbolic representative of humanity.

Support for this can be adduced from the use of the word *Adam* in the creation story. The common Hebrew word for man is *ish*. It is often assumed that *Adam* is used in Genesis 2 and 3 because of a word play with the word *adamah*, the ground. The man Adam was created from the *adamah* and will return to the *adamah*. In other words, when the text speaks of 'Adam', it is implying the earthy one, 'adamah'.³³

While this imputation is fine in the context of the Genesis narrative it fails to account for the main thrust of Bible teaching – the meta-narrative, as it may be termed. Does the idea of humanity gradually evolving from hominid precursors provide a solid basis for the understanding of human sin? This seems unlikely. The Bible describes sin as rebellion or missing the mark. It is difficult to discern any meaning to this if we are really hominids on some presumed upward trajectory towards humanness. The biblical account of humanness is of repeated failure and apostasy, redeemed only by God's coming in Christ and reconciling humankind through his death on the cross. The Christian gospel is that the relationship between Creator and creation can be restored, a possibility necessarily presupposing that there was a relationship requiring repair. This is very different from the idea that evolutionary progress in itself can lead to full humanness, an idea that has often been popular amongst Christian 'liberals' as chronicled by Peter Bowler. He has documented the widespread assumption among Christians in the years before and following the beginning of the twentieth century that accepting a reconciliation of evolution with the Christian faith automatically meant that we are part of a divinely planned progression. He writes,

32 Fagundes, N.J.R., Ray, N., Beaumont, M., Neuenschwander, S., Salzano, F.M., Bonatto, S.L. & Excoffier, L. 'Statistical evaluation of alternative models of human evolution', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA* (2007) 104, 17614-17619; see also Tattersall, I. *Paleontology*, West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton (2010).

33 The 'Adam' of the Genesis text is not as unequivocal as it seems in English versions. All translations use the expression 'man' or 'human beings' in Gen. 1:26,27. The Authorized Version (KJV) uses 'Adam' in Gen 2:19; NIV and RSV first use 'Adam' in Gen. 3:17; while NRSV and REB do not use 'Adam' until Gen. 4:25. This ambivalence is due to the fact that the word translated 'man' in Gen.1-4 is usually preceded by the definite article ('the' man), but even this is not necessarily defining. Gordon Wenham comments on the fluidity between the definite and indefinite form, to the extent that it 'makes it difficult to know when the personal name 'Adam' is first mentioned'. He suggests that 'this very indefiniteness of reference may be deliberate. The word Hebrew word 'adam' is 'mankind, humanity' as opposed to God or the animals', Wenham, *op. cit.*, (28), p. 32, note 38.

Liberal thinkers were convinced that they could make common cause with a science that had turned its back on materialism. [But this] exposed cracks that had only been papered over in the earlier negotiations [i.e. in the immediate post-*Origin of Species* years]. If Christians accepted that humanity was the product of evolution – even allowing the process could be seen as the expression of the Creator’s will – then the whole idea of Original Sin would have to be reinterpreted. Far from falling from an original state of grace in the Garden of Eden, we had risen gradually from our animal origins. And if there was no Sin from which we needed salvation, what was the purpose of Christ’s agony on the cross? Christ became merely the perfect man who showed us what we could all hope to become when evolution finished its upward course.³⁴

A typical proponent of this view, significant because of his position, was Ernest Barnes, Fellow of the Royal Society, fellow of Trinity College Cambridge (and teacher of R.A. Fisher in the Mathematical Tripos), and Bishop of Birmingham from 1924 to 1953. In his Gifford Lectures, Barnes wrote,

Within the last four centuries the old Jewish cosmology has vanished. Science has created an entirely different picture of the nature and duration of the Universe. The single act – or week – of ‘Creation’ is replaced by a process of unimaginable extent... Man is the outcome of Nature’s processes... I postulate that there is a certain community of nature between God and man, that all human minds are reproductions ‘in limited modes’ of the Divine Mind, that in all true human thinking there is a reproduction of the Divine thought; and, above all, that in the highest ideals which the human conscience recognises there is a revelation of the ideal eternally present in the Divine Mind.³⁵

In a Westminster Abbey sermon, he quoted from the Presidential Address of the anatomist Arthur Keith at the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and declared that

the story of Adam and Eve is reduced to the status of folklore, and the horrible theory of the propagation of sin, reared on the basis of the Fall by Augustine, could be rejected... Biology showed that much that is evil in man’s passions and appetites is due to natural instincts inherited from his animal ancestry. Man is not a being who has fallen from the ideal state of innocence: he is an animal slowly gaining spiritual understanding.³⁶

In the light of this sort of rhetoric, it is not surprising that conservative

34 Bowler, P.J. *Monkey Trials and Gorilla Sermons*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (2007), p. 6; see also *Reconciling Science and Religion: The Debate in Early Twentieth Century Britain*, Chicago: Chicago University Press (2001).

35 Barnes, E.W. *Scientific Theory and Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1933), pp. 2f.

36 Barnes, E.W. *Should Such a Faith Offend?*, London: Hodder & Stoughton (1927), p. 311.

Christians reacted against a belief in the evolution of humankind, and, more damaging, that this led to a view that the whole science-faith debate was probably dangerous. No wonder the Adventist George McCready Price was wont to proclaim 'No Adam, no Fall; no Fall, no Atonement; no Atonement, no Savior'.³⁷ Conservatives generally welcomed the collapse of the views espoused by Barnes and his fellows, although the reason for their failure was not really to do with the narrow question of human evolution. Bowler concludes,

The economic depression of the 1930s and the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe drove home the message that there was something deeply flawed in the moral state of the West. Secularists turned to Marxism as a way of saving the idea of progress, but to many religious people it seemed the liberals' optimistic hopes of perfecting humanity were misguided... Neo-orthodoxy transformed the churches in the late 1930s and 1940s.... Karl Barth called for a return to the traditional vision of humanity as proclaimed in the Gospels: Human nature is deeply troubled because we have become alienated from God, and only His grace can save us... [But] neo-orthodoxy didn't want an alternative view of creation or a return to the argument from design – it just wasn't interested in science.³⁸

The nature of humankind

The Christian claim is that a saviour is needed because all people are sinners. It is pertinent to distinguish between a sin which took place at the beginning of humankind's existence and a 'sin of origin' which affects all humans from their personal beginnings and from which they need a saviour. This helps us to discern a way in the light of revelation and science, a way distinct from the failed humanism of the liberals and the ultra-conservatism of George McCready Price. We are forced to re-examine how we should understand the 'Fall'. The whole idea of a 'Fall' is commonly belittled. Celia Deane-Drummond's understanding is probably typical of many:

We need to view the fall as a mythological rather than a historical account, epitomizing the outcome of humanity's self-assertion in claiming radical independence from God, the land, and the human community. In evolutionary terms, the fall could be thought of as the sharper awareness of the capacity for negative choice that is present in the human community, with its enhanced capacity for moral action.³⁹

37 See e.g. his *Predicament of Evolution*, Southern Publishing Association (1925), chap. 13. Intriguingly Price drew his quotation from an atheist, Robert Blatchford, 'Accepting evolution, how can we believe in a Fall? When did man fall? Was it before he ceased to be a monkey, or after? Was it when he was a tree man, or later? Was it in the Stone Age, or the Bronze Age, or the Age of Iron? And if there never was a fall, why should there be any atonement?', Blatchford, R. *God and My Neighbour*, London: Clarion Press (1903), p. 159.

38 Bowler, P.J. *Monkey Trials and Gorilla Sermons*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press (2007), p. 187.

39 Deane-Drummond, C. *Christ and Evolution*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress (2009), p. 169.

But this is a benign judgement compared with others. For example, Patricia Williams writes:

both the literal and liberal interpretations of the narrative of Adam and Eve have collapsed. The reputed historicity [of Adam and Eve] conflicts with well-established scientific theories.... Science says the claim liberal theology has retained from literalism, that we are alienated and exiled is false... [but] the concept of alienation is recent. It arrived with agricultural surpluses and class distinctions about ten thousand years ago... Jesus shows that we are not alienated from God, but live in God's presence.⁴⁰

This is a gross travesty of Jesus's teaching, never mind his atoning death, and includes an illegitimate assumption that we learn from 'well-established scientific theories' about God's involvement with his creation. This is a category mistake. I suggest the way forward becomes clearer when we stand back from Genesis 1-3 and take into account the Scriptures as a whole, the 'grand narrative' of the Bible and the New Testament understanding of the Genesis account.⁴¹

One way of doing this is to take the reasons set out by Douglas Farrow as to why a historical dimension for Adam and the Fall remains significant in Christian doctrine:⁴²

- the biblical claim is that the creation was originally (very) good. The only alternative to a historical 'Fall' would be to agree with Origen that this goodness refers to some other creation than this one;
- redemption, hope and eschatology all depend on historic events;
- if the Fall is not a particular event in history, incarnational Christology – indeed, the entire Doctrine of the Trinity – is mistaken;
- if 'original righteousness' did not exist, then there is no need for Christ's saving grace; and
- the traditional view allows us to affirm the world was created 'good', without denying that it is also corrupt.

Farrow's conclusion is that 'there is very little of importance in Christian theology, hence also in doxology and praxis, that it is not at stake in the question of whether or not we allow a historical dimension to the Fall'. Notwithstanding, he is unhappy about a literal Adam and sees a possible way forward 'by accepting something of the complexity of Irenaeus's christological and anthropocentric conception of time, particularly the suggestion that the Adam story was about growth from immaturity, with all human experience recapitu-

40 Williams, P. *Doing Without Adam and Eve: Sociobiology and Original Sin*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press (2001), pp. 199-200.

41 Wilkinson, D. 'Worshipping the Creator God: the doctrine of creation', in Berry & Noble (eds.) *op. cit.*, (1), pp. 15-29.

42 Farrow, D. 'Fall', in Hastings, A., Mason, A. & Pyper, H. (eds.) *Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2000), pp. 233f.

lated in Jesus's life'. This seems over-complicated. Tony Lane concludes from a detailed examination of Irenaeus's writings on the Fall that 'because of his emphasis on recapitulation, Irenaeus's theology is undermined more than most others by the suggestion of a non-historical Adam.'⁴³

Turning for the moment from the Fall, there is one occasion in early human history when God unequivocally acts, and that is when humanity is transformed by being 'made in God's image'; in Ramm's expression, 'a pre-human became a human, and that was Mr Adam'.⁴⁴ It does not matter whether this involved a group of 'pre-humans' nor whether it was instantaneous or took place over a long period. Genesis 1 describes it as a specific act of God, while Genesis 2: 7 describes it as a divine in-breathing into an already existing entity.⁴⁵ It is convenient to mark this work of God by describing the 'imaged-being' as *Homo divinus*, differing and distinct from the biological species *Homo sapiens* by the possession of God's image, but without any reason to assume that it would be anatomically or genetically changed. This distinction was originally suggested by John Stott.⁴⁶ For some this name is an unnecessary confusion, while for others, such as Graeme Finlay, it is a useful clarification.⁴⁷

Can we say anything more about it? If the image is confined to humankind (and Genesis 1:26, 27 seems clear about this – although David Clough apparently rejects this as an anthropocentric, 'pre-Darwinian' reading, albeit as a reaction against 'speciesism', i.e. on philosophical and not exegetical grounds⁴⁸), it must have been 'introduced' at some time in history. I use 'introduced' without intending any implication about mechanism; it was a transforming event rather than an addition.⁴⁹ The conventional assumption is that humanness may have appeared as an emergent collection of traits involving self-consciousness or self-knowledge.⁵⁰ The timing or mechanism does not matter. The essential

43 Lane, A. 'Irenaeus on the Fall and original sin', in Berry & Noble (eds.) *op. cit.*, (1), pp. 130-148, p. 140.

44 Ramm *op. cit.*, (9).

45 Gen. 2:7 emphasises the uniqueness of the human creation; it says nothing about the image. Even so, 'this verse matches and completes the classic 1:27', Kidner, D. *Genesis*, London: Tyndale Press (1967), p.60.

46 Stott, J.R.W. *Understanding the Bible*, London: Scripture Union (1972), p. 63.

47 e.g., Finlay, G. 'Homo divinus: the ape that bears God's image', *Science & Christian Belief* (2003) 15, 17-40; Finlay, G. 'Human genomics and the image of God', *Faraday Paper no.14*, Cambridge: Faraday Institute (2009).

48 Clough, D. 'All God's creatures', in Barton, S.C. & Wilkinson, D. (eds.) *Reading Genesis After Darwin*, pp. 145-161, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2009).

49 Day, A. 'Adam, anthropology and the Genesis record', *Science & Christian Belief* (1998) 10, 115-143, properly complains that the language of 'introduction' or 'insertion' implies 'semi-deism'. 'Transformation' is used here as a hopefully neutral term.

50 e.g., C.S. Lewis wrote, 'For long centuries, God perfected the animal which was to become the vehicle of humanity and the image of Himself.... Then in the fullness of time, God caused to descend on this organism, both on its psychology and physiology, a new kind of consciousness which could say "I" and "me", which could look upon itself as an object, which knew God, which could make judgements of truth, beauty and goodness', Lewis, C.S. *The Problem of Pain*, London: Geoffrey Bles (1940), p. 68.

point is that it must have happened in time. Claims have been made that it was coincident with burying the dead or with including grave goods with the dead, or when cave paintings began to appear.⁵¹ We cannot be sure.

What is the ‘image’? Some expositors of Genesis 1 associate it with the practice of conquerors’ leaving a statue, or ‘image’, of themselves in conquered cities to remind the inhabitants of their authority.⁵² For Middleton, ‘the *imago Dei* designates the royal office or calling of human beings as God’s representatives and agents in the world, granted authorized power to share in God’s rule or administration of the the earth’s resources and creatures’.⁵³

This function is complemented and enabled by our transformation into humankind-soul unities – a transformation which is, of course, our creation as human beings in the fullest sense, as *Homo divinus* rather than *Homo sapiens*. Claus Westermann expresses this as effecting a kinship: ‘The relationship to God is not something which is added to human existence; humans are created in such a way that their very existence is intended to be their relationship to God.’⁵⁴ For Joel Green,

God’s words [in Gen. 1:27] affirm the creation of the human family in relation to himself, as his counterpart, so that the nature of humanity derives from the human family’s relatedness to God. The concept of the *imago Dei* is fundamentally relational or covenantal.... The distinguishing mark of human existence when compared with other creatures is thus the whole of human existence (and not some ‘part’ of the individual).⁵⁵

Dermot McDonald argues similarly. After an extensive review of the Scriptures, he concluded that image should be taken as indicating ‘sonship’:

Man’s chief end is to glorify God. Such was God’s intention for the man he made. But man could only respond to the divine desire in so far as he reflected God’s glory. And it was in him so to do because he was created in the image of God with the gift of sonship.... All men are in the image of God by reason of an original creative sonship through Adam.⁵⁶

Middleton sees our role as ‘representing and perhaps extending in some way God’s rule on earth through the ordinary communal practices of human socio-

51 Van Huyssteen, J.W. *Alone in the World?*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (2006).

52 Von Rad, G. *Genesis*, Philadelphia: Westminster (rev. edn 1972), p. 60: ‘Just as powerful kings, to indicate their claim to domination, erect images of themselves in the provinces of their empire where they do not personally appear, so man is placed upon earth in God’s image as God’s sovereign emblem’; see also, Lucas, E.C. *Can We Believe Genesis Today?*, Leicester: IVP (2001), p. 175. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos (2005), p. 26, suggests that the statues were more usually those of a god rather than the king himself. This does not change their emblematic status.

53 Middleton *op. cit.*, (53), p. 27.

54 Westermann, C. *Genesis 1-11*, Scullion, J.J. (trans.), London: SPCK (1984), p. 158.

55 Green, J.B. *Body Soul and Human Life*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster (2008), p. 63.

56 McDonald, H.D. *The Christian View of Man*, London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott (1981), p. 40.

cultural life',⁵⁷ which is not very different from C.F.D. Moule's conclusion, 'the most satisfying of the many interpretations, both ancient and modern of the meaning of the image of God in man is that which sees it as basically responsibility'.⁵⁸

Middleton distinguishes between what he calls 'a functional – or even missional interpretation of the image' and 'substantial or relational interpretations'.⁵⁹ This distinction seems to arise more from an emphasis on outcome than a rejection of other interpretations. Chris Wright avoids any split. For him, "The expression "in our image" is adverbial (that is, describes the way God made us), not adjectival (that is, as if it simply described a quality we possess). The image of God is not so much something we possess, as what we are. To be human is to be the image of God.⁶⁰ This leads him to state four significant truths about humanity, 'all of which are vital to biblical mission':

- All human beings are addressable by God
- All human beings are accountable to God
- All human beings have dignity and equality, and
- The biblical gospel fits all⁶¹

The personal nature of the image is emphasised by the language of Genesis 1:26, 'let us make human beings', whereas all the other acts of creation are the results of an impersonal fiat, 'let there be', and also by the incident of Adam and Eve's trying to hide from God (Gen. 3: 8, 9). All this strengthens the idea that God's image in us is about relationship – to God, to other humans and to the rest of creation. Such a functional understanding of God's image accords both with the Genesis texts and the need to incorporate Paul's teaching on Christ as the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15), not least our destiny to share Christ's image (Rom 8:29).⁶² It also implies that the result of the disobedience in the garden was a breaking or interruption of that relationship.⁶³ Terence Fretheim suggests that we should express the Fall as a falling 'out' or apart', the result of mistrusting God and wanting autonomy from him.⁶⁴

57 Middleton *op. cit.*, (53), p. 60.

58 Moule, C.F.D. *Man and Nature in the New Testament*, London: Athlone (1964), p. 5. For the working out of this responsibility, see Berry, R.J. (ed.) *Environmental Stewardship*, London: Continuum (2006); Berry, R.J. (ed.) *When Enough Is Enough*, Nottingham: Apollos (2007).

59 Middleton, *op. cit.*, (53), p. 27, distinguishes between 'a functional – or even missional – interpretation of the image of God in Genesis 1:26-27' and 'substantialistic or relational interpretations'.

60 Wright, C.J.H. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, Leicester: IVP (2004), p. 119.

61 Wright, C.J.H. *The Mission of God*, Nottingham: IVP (2006), pp. 422-425.

62 Gunton, C.E. *Christ and Creation*, Carlisle: Paternoster (1992), pp. 99f; Briggs, R.S. 'Humans in the image of God', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* (2010) 4 (1).

63 The image was not obliterated by the 'Fall' (Gen. 9:6). Claus Westermann comments, 'It is not a question of a quality in people but of the fact that human beings can have a history with God. The image and likeness of God are only there in the relationship between God and the individual', Westermann *op. cit.*, (55) p. 468.

64 Fretheim, T. *God and World in the OT: a Relational Theology of Creation* Nashville, TN: Abingdon (2005), p. 71. See also Bimson *op. cit.*, (1), p. 112.

The consequences of the fracture are described in Scripture as ‘death’. Adam and Eve were told that they would ‘die’ if they ate the fruit of a particular tree (Gen. 2:17); the New Testament describe those not ‘in Christ’ as dead (e.g. Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13; 1 Jn 3:14). It is wrong to equate the death so described with physical death.⁶⁵ Adam and Eve lived many years after their disobedience in the garden. They had all their family following their expulsion. Nor can we claim that there was no physical death before their sin: both the millions of years of prehistoric life and God’s giving plants for animals to eat (Gen 1:29 – plant death is as much biological death as is animal death) disprove this. In his *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, Hans Wolff deduced, mainly from Job 31 and Psalms 38, 88 and 116, that the Old Testament recognition is that ‘for the whole of man, life passes into death at the precise moment when the praise of God falls silent’.⁶⁶ For Henri Blocher, ‘death is not ceasing to be, but being “cut off from the land of the living”’.⁶⁷

These definitions support the idea that the Genesis ‘Fall’ can best be seen as essentially a break in relationship between creator and creature. This is more in accord with the understanding of the Eastern Church than the Western. For Augustine and for the Western Church which has largely followed him, Adam and Eve were conceived as perfect before they ‘fell’. In contrast, the Eastern tradition deriving from Theophilus of Antioch and Irenaeus was that God gave humanity divine grace to progress toward full union with the Creator. As the first humans developed self-awareness, they became aware of God’s call and his demands on them. In other words, as they moved from *Homo sapiens* to *Homo divinus* they were for the first time able to respond – to obey or disobey. James Barr suggests that the Genesis 3 story can best be read not as one of lost immortality, but of a lost *chance* for immortality.⁶⁸ This could be represented as

65 Alexander *op. cit.*, (11), pp. 244-253, has an extended study of ‘death’ in the light of evolutionary history. Philip Duce’s main criticism of my original paper on the Fall (see note 1) was his insistence that physical and spiritual death should not be separated. He marshals an impressive corps of exegetes, but fails to convince me (Four centuries ago Galileo was in an overwhelming minority when he claimed the earth went round the sun, but he was right). The Bible does not state that Adam and Eve were immortal. Walton points out that the effect of their expulsion from the garden meant that they had no access to the ‘tree of life’ and consequently ‘humans were doomed to the natural mortality of their bodies’, *op. cit.*, (29), p. 101. Mark Worthing ‘The Christian doctrine of the Fall in the light of modern science’, in Ratke, D. (ed.) *Festschrift for Hans Schwarz*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang (1999) writes, ‘The point of the fall is that spiritual death became a part of our human reality as a result of human disobedience to 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 the problem of competition, pain, difficulties associated with growth and development, there need be no insurmountable conflict between contemporary evolutionary theory and the Christian doctrine of the Fall.’ Duce’s position would seem to lead him to diminish the importance of the history of humankind. The issue is discussed further by Fretheim *op. cit.*, (65), p. 77 and by Bimson *op. cit.*, (1), p. 113.

66 Wolff, H. *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, London: SCM (1974), p. 111.

67 Blocher, H. *op. cit.*, (12), p. 171.

68 Barr, J. *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress (1992).

‘an ape on the way up coming of age’, but it also could be interpreted as the very different idea of an emerging consciousness being transformed at some stage by God’s implanted image. Only the second interpretation seems to accord with the subsequent history of humankind. The emphasis of the Greek Fathers was that the Fall is an ontological matter as well as an ethical one. Humanity’s being is affected, deprived of life because we are deprived of communion with God.⁶⁹ The result of the Fall was not the cosmic explosion described in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, but anarchy produced by the disordered relationships between the sexes and with the non-human creation.⁷⁰

A historical Adam?

Genesis portrays Adam and his household as farmers, putting them in the Neolithic period, suggesting that this ‘imaging’ took place around 10,000 years ago.⁷¹ This conveniently places the origin of humankind within the traditional dating, but it would be dangerous to place too much emphasis on the literal details of the account.⁷² Anyway it does not take us much further. The Genesis 3 story describes a rupture of relationship through disobedience. We are helped with understanding this if there was a relationship to be disrupted, in other words if part (at least) of the meaning of ‘image’ is relationship. Until the ‘image’ was established in the human line, there could be no relationship to break. ‘Original sin’, which is not a biblical term, would then be the condition of being marooned, as it were, in a state of lack of fellowship with God.⁷³ Such lack of fellowship – or alienation – removes the implication of being blamed for something we have not done, which is an innately uncomfortable implication of original sin as conventionally understood, and disposes of Augustine’s notion that we are genetically tainted by an event in which we had no part.⁷⁴ It is not too difficult to go from this status of out-of-relatedness to searching for a means of repairing the relationship. Without probing too deeply into the mechanics of the atonement – which is impossible anyway – we see that the Bible is explicit that Christ’s death somehow incorporates all sinners who acknowledge their

69 Noble, T.A. ‘Original sin and the Fall’, in Berry & Noble (eds.) *op. cit.*, (1), pp. 99-129.

70 Bimson, J.J. ‘Reconsidering a cosmic fall’, *Science & Christian Belief* (2006) 18, 63-81.

71 Pearce, E.K.V. *Who Was Adam?*, Exeter: Paternoster (1969).

72 Bimson *op. cit.*, (1), p.115 sets out several reasons for rejecting a Neolithic date. He prefers the suggestion of Raymond Schwager, *Banished from Eden: Original Sin and Evolutionary Theory*, Leominster: Gracewing (2006), that the dawn of human consciousness is a more likely time. Allan Day takes a similar view (see note 50).

73 See Noble *op. cit.*, (70).

74 In his response to my original article, Russman asks, ‘What kind of mechanism could cause Adam’s sinful nature to be transmitted to every person alive in subsequent generations?’, Russman *op. cit.*, (1). I wouldn’t want to speculate about mechanism, but the concept of a broken relationship could well spread from its origin and persist through time – as tragically may happen with ‘blood feuds’. This would be wholly consistent with the ‘cultural evolution’ which many believe followed our physical evolution (See, e.g., Francisco Ayala ‘Being human after Darwin’, in Northcott & Berry (eds.) *op. cit.*, (1).

state. Reconciliation is a word which is commonly applied to the restoration of relationship following an estrangement; Paul frequently refers to Christ's having reconciled us to God through the cross (e.g. Rom. 5:10,11; 2 Cor. 5:18; Col. 1:20).

God's 'imaging' of *Homo sapiens* and the subsequent disobedience of *Homo divinus* must have taken place after the emergence of *Homo sapiens* as a species, sometime in the last 200,000 years or so of history. We can only speculate when this was. The defining disobedience and fracturing of the relationship with the Creator could have taken place at any time after that, although human rebelliousness is described throughout Scripture and its effects are seen throughout history. Care must clearly be taken in our interpretation of the details of the events set out in Genesis 3. It is often noted that there are no direct references to the 'Fall' in the Old Testament after Genesis 3 (and the word 'Fall' is used nowhere). The only specific description of the events of Genesis 3 are in Romans 5: 12-19 (also 1 Cor. 15: 21), which compares the 'one man' through whom 'sin entered the world' with the saving grace of the 'one man, Jesus Christ'.

Romans 5 must be taken into account in interpreting the 'Fall'. Is it legitimate to understand the 'one man' of Romans 5 as a group which disobeyed in the early stages of humanness? Presumably Paul thought of Adam as a man who lived in history just as he presumably regarded the 'world' as referring to the known inhabited world of his time (Col. 1:6 and 23). It could be argued that because of this he had no reason or comprehension not to compare one individual, 'the first man' Adam, with another individual, Jesus Christ. But such an imputation of Paul's limitations may be wrong. In his commentary on Romans, Leon Morris writes:

the one man [Adam] is very important and underlies the whole discussion. Twelve times in verses 12-19 we have the word one; repeatedly Paul refers to the one man Adam (and to one sin of that one man) and opposes to him (and it) the one man Jesus Christ (and his one word of grace). The one man and his sin and the one Savior and his salvation are critical to the discussion.

Nevertheless, he warns that

Paul's argument in Romans 5 is very condensed and in all translations and comments we must allow for the possibility that Paul's meaning may at some point be other than we think.⁷⁵

John Stott enters no such caveat. He writes:

Scripture clearly intends us to accept their [Adam and Eve's] historicity as the original human pair: the biblical genealogies trace the human race back

⁷⁵ Morris, L. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Leicester: IVP (1988), p. 228.

to Adam, Jesus himself taught that ‘at the beginning the Creator made them male and female’ and then instituted marriage, Paul told the Athenian philosophers that God had made every nation ‘from one man’, and in particular, Paul’s carefully constructed analogy between Adam and Christ depends for its validity on the equal historicity of both.⁷⁶

(Though it should be noted that the Greek of Acts 17: 26 simply says ‘From one he made every nation of men’, the word ‘man’ having been added in translation.)

Other conservative commentators take a more nuanced view. James Dunn writes:

Paul’s theological point [in Rom 5 does not] depend on Adam being a ‘historical’ individual or on his disobedience being a historical event as such. Such an implication does not necessarily follow from the fact that a parallel is drawn from Christ’s single act: an act in mythic history can be paralleled to an act in living history without the point of the comparison being lost... The effect of the comparison between Adam and Christ is not so much to historicize the original Adam as to bring out the individual significance of the historic Christ.⁷⁷

F.F. Bruce takes a step further back. He comments on Romans 5:12, ‘Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned –’ :

It is not simply because Adam is the ancestor of mankind that all are said to have sinned in his sin (otherwise it must be argued that because Abraham believed God all his descendants were automatically involved in this belief); it is because Adam *is* mankind.⁷⁸

The intriguing point to note is that the assumption – certainly the commonest contemporary belief – that our first parents were mythical beings with mythical existences gets strength from an unnecessary and misplaced attempt to allow evolutionary science to determine the meaning of Scripture.⁷⁹ It is completely right to interpret the Bible in the light of the best modern knowledge and it is true that the first humans must have been part of an interbreeding population, but Scripture seems very clear in recording that the original investment of *Homo divinus* (or transformation of *H. sapiens* to *H. divinus*) was a specific act of God, not an entirely naturalistic progression. This ‘investiture’ would have been a unique divine intervention, a miracle, but not

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

77 Dunn, J.D.G. *Word Bible Commentary 38A, Romans 1-8*, Dallas, TX: Word (1988), pp. 272, 290.

78 Bruce, F.F. *Tyndale Commentary on Romans*, Leicester: IVP (1963), p. 130.

79 Henri Blocher notes, ‘The issue is not whether we have a historical account of the Fall, but whether we have the account of a historical Fall. The *real* ground on which deniers of historicity stand, as several of them have honestly acknowledged, is its apparent contradiction with scientific opinion’, Blocher, H. ‘The theology of the Fall’, in Berry & Noble (eds.) *op. cit.*, (1), 149-172, p. 139.

one in the sense of requiring normal scientific laws to be suspended, like nature or healing miracles.

It is simpler to assume that God created a single individual as *Homo divinus* than to assume that he created *Homo divinus* in a group of individuals, although that is not a reason for preferring it. In both cases, the consequences of the act (the image) must have spread to all members of *Homo sapiens* alive at the time, either instantaneously or shortly afterwards – a divine act not a Mendelian expansion. This suggestion is entirely hypothetical, but brings together the scientific and biblical accounts and allows a late date for the appearance of *Homo divinus* (i.e. Mr Adam could really have been a Neolithic farmer – although John Bimson's objections⁸⁰ to this remain). If a 'lateral spread' of this nature took place, there is no reason to deny a similar effect of the consequences of Adam's disobedience. The breaking and repair of a relationship could certainly spread 'laterally'. Indeed, this would be normal for a broken relationship. Once this is understood, traditional understandings of the creation and fall of humankind, and of its redemption through Christ, become more credible.

Federal headship

If the current condition of humankind is rightly attributed to the disobedience of our first parents in the garden, there seems to be no alternative to regarding Adam as the federal head of humankind. There is nothing radical about this; it is a traditional reformed doctrine, integral in covenant theology as classically expounded by Calvin.⁸¹ It is formally expressed in Article 7.2 of the Westminster Confession as part of the so-called Covenant of Works: 'The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.' Some authorities prefer to speak of 'corporate solidarity' rather than 'federal headship', but there is no reason why the concepts should be opposed. Corporate solidarity can be regarded as an extension of federal headship, since people identify and unite in the way that the head acts.

Adam's federal headship is unequivocally affirmed by Derek Kidner in his Tyndale Commentary on Genesis:

With one possible exception (Gen. 3:20, naming Eve as 'mother of all the living'; the concern of that verse, however, is principally to reiterate in the context of death, the promise of salvation through 'her seed' – Gen. 3:15), the unity of mankind 'in Adam' and our common status as sinners through his

80 Bimson *op. cit.*, (1).

81 e.g., McGowan, A.T.B. *The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster (1997); Kline, M.G. *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock (2000); Grant, J.A. & Wilson, A.I. (eds.) *The God of the Covenant*, Leicester: Apollos (2005).

offence, are expressed in Scripture not in terms of heredity (Is. 43:27) but simply in terms of solidarity. We nowhere find applied to us any argument from physical descent, such as that of Heb. 7:9,10 (where Levi shares in Abraham's act through being 'still in the loins of his ancestor'). Rather, Adam's sin is shown to have implicated all men because he was the federal head of humanity, somewhat as in Christ's death 'one died for all, therefore all died' (2 Cor. 5:14)... After the special creation of the first human pair 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.⁸²

Adam and Eve disobeyed God, resulting in their original and intended relationship being fractured (they 'died'), and this consequence affected all other members of the species by divine fiat.

Henri Blocher discusses the issue of federal headship at length and concludes 'the decisive consideration when we search for the rightness of the "fact" [of being born sinners] remains the headship or capitate structure – the organic solidarity of the race, the spiritual dimension of humanity's oneness.'⁸³ He accepts that his view might differ from the 'current headship solution' but he clearly does not reject the concept.

Does all this matter? Is it important to insist on a historic Adam or is it, in Chris Southgate's words, merely 'an awkward fudge, trying to retain the federal headship of Adam so as to justify literal exegesis of Romans 5. A full-blooded mythological reading of Genesis 2-3 is surely to be preferred, along with a theology that accepts that the image of God, however understood, evolved gradually in the human.'⁸⁴

Neil Messer agrees. He follows Barth in treating the early chapters of Genesis as 'biblical saga' 'where there can be no historical proof', quoting Barth in regarding Adam as of interest simply in that

he did in the insignificant form of the beginner that which all men have done after him... There never was a golden age. There is no point in looking back to one. The first man was immediately the first sinner.⁸⁵

However, Messer's main objection seems to be

why, if each of Adam's contemporaries had God's image individually breathed into him or her, Adam's original sin had to go on to infect all mem-

82 Kidner, D. *op. cit.*, (46), pp. 30, 29.

83 Blocher, H. *Original Sin*, Leicester: Apollos (1997), p. 129.

84 Southgate *op. cit.*, (1).

85 Barth, K. *Christian Dogmatics*, Bromiley, G.W. & Torrance, T.F. (eds.), Edinburgh: T&T Clark (1956-75), 4: 508, 509.

bers of the species. In other words, [such an] account can certainly do justice to the contingency of sin (Adam's and Eve's first sin was a freely willed choice), but it is far less clear that it can give a satisfactory account of its radicality, communicability or universality.⁸⁶

John Bimson is less dismissive but also prefers an ahistorical story of the Fall in the sense defined by John Polkinghorne: 'the symbol of a turning away from God into the self that occurred with the dawning of hominid self-consciousness, so that thereby humanity became curved-in upon itself, asserting autonomy and refusing to acknowledge heteronomous dependence.'⁸⁷ Bimson cites C.S. Lewis, Keith Ward, Allan Day and Raymond Schwager as subscribing to this interpretation.⁸⁸

***Homo sapiens*: getting better?**

The positive reasons for retaining a historical element to the origin and 'fall' of humankind are reinforced by Farrow's comments above. It is worth underlining the consideration that replacing Adam with an improving *H. sapiens* raises the ogre of Blatchford's cry, 'If there was no Fall, what need was there for an Atonement?', taken up in different ways by George MacCready Price and modern day literalists, and by Bishop Barnes, Charles Raven and the Anglican liberals. It is a challenge to conservative commentators, who often do little more than recognise that there are problems with interpreting Genesis 3 in the modern age. John Colwell well introduces the situation in the IVF *New Dictionary of Theology*:

Was there ever a time when nature was not 'red in tooth and claw'? Was there ever an historical Adam, and if there was, how can the sin of one man affect the whole of humanity? Such questions have inevitably led to symbolic interpretations of the narrative of Genesis 3 which view it as a mythical account of the condition of all mankind and the nature of human sin. Yet while the account is clearly capable of such symbolic and existentialist interpretations, the apparently historical elements of the narrative ought not to be arbitrarily ignored or avoided.⁸⁹

Tom Noble has examined the issues in depth.⁹⁰ He is unequivocal: the Fall story

must be formulated within the integrity of Christian theology, that is to say, on the grounds of revelation. But it must be formulated on that ground in

86 Messer *op. cit.*, (1), pp. 186f.

87 Polkinghorne, J.C. *Exploring Reality*, London: SCM (2005), p. 139.

88 Bimson *op. cit.*, (1), pp. 114-119.

89 Article on the Fall, in Ferguson, S.B., Packer, J.I. & Wright, D.F. (eds.) *New Dictionary of Theology*, Leicester: IVP (1988), pp. 246, 251.

90 Noble *op. cit.*, (70).

such a way that leaves open the possibility of some kind of correlation of the biblical story and the scientific story.... To try to conflate the two is to muddle two different methodologies... the kind of muddled thinking which treats the doctrine of creation as if it were a scientific theory.... If there are tensions within the story told by modern science, we must not fall into the trap of conflating the two stories but live with the tension while working at ways of resolving it.

He identifies key elements of the Fall:

- That humanity is alienated from God by a spiritual and ethical event.
- That this event took place in the created realm, that is in time, even though the language used is prophetic and full of imagery; we may not be able to date this event, since it may not be open to our historical enquiries.⁹¹
- Death is the consequence of alienation from the Source and Origin of life; cut off from the Creator, humanity cannot avoid disintegration.
- We must distinguish between acts of sin and a condition of sinfulness; the paradox of sin is that we are enslaved in our freedom, responsible but helpless.
- Without a doctrine of the Fall, the doctrine of salvation by grace (and, indeed, historic Christianity itself) becomes incoherent.

Henri Blocher is forthright: 'A historical Fall is a non-negotiable article of faith.'⁹²

If we are not fallen, we can only aspire to improve ourselves; salvation is one of the steps on our upward progress. The link between faith and salvation may remain, but is weakened. This is a long way from the historical and scriptural position that we are justified by personal faith alone: 'he purified their hearts by faith' (Acts 15:9); 'righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe' (Rom. 3:22); 'we have been justified through faith' (Rom. 5:1); 'a man is not justified by observing the law but by faith in Jesus Christ' (Gal. 2:16); 'you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:26), and so on.⁹³ A non-historical 'Fall' would seriously diminish this need for faith.

91 'Perhaps we are to understand from the angel and the flaming sword [Gen. 3:24] that there is no way back into Eden. Creation and Fall are inaccessible to scientific or historical investigation. Yet we have to affirm from Holy Scripture that the fall was a temporal event and that there is a timeline from Adam to Christ within the fallen age', Noble *op. cit.*, (70), p. 119.

92 Blocher *op. cit.*, (80), p. 169.

93 It is possible to envisage some qualifications to the exercise of personal faith, the most obvious being infant baptism when a child is presented through the faith of his or her sponsors, but it hardly needs saying that this procedure is not universally accepted. Another qualification is when God condemns or blesses a whole nation (e.g., Deut.32:28; Judges 2:20; Prov.14:34; Isa. 26:2, 65:1; Jer. 7:28, 18:8; Mal. 3:9; John 11:50), but these supplement rather than replace individual responses.

None of this establishes that there really was a first historical Adam. But we need to ask again if a historical Adam is more than a possible interpretation – a let out for conservatives? Is it a necessary assumption or merely a possible one? Romans 5: 12-19 certainly implies the existence of a ‘Mr Adam’. But this implication is strengthened when we take it in the fuller context of Paul’s argument in Romans 5-8, which summarises the whole history of God’s dealing with his creation and of his patient and gracious ordering despite humankind’s repeated dis-ordering. Romans 8:19-22 is particularly important because it is the most explicit New Testament commentary on the consequences of ‘the Fall’.

Romans 8: 19-22 is best read within the general framework of the biblical narrative of disorder followed by reordering. Genesis 1-3 is a vignette of this disorder-reorder cycle where the intended integration of humans with the whole creation gives way to a massive dislocation and fracturing. The story is repeated with Noah and the Flood and then followed by the Babel episode. The history of Israel then continues with a seemingly endless procession of rebellion and failure, matched always by God’s saving deliverance. The climax comes, of course, with God’s coming in the person of Jesus Christ, climaxing in his redeeming death and clinching resurrection. This history is recapitulated in Romans, beginning with a rehearsal of human disobedience (Rom. 1:18-32) followed by recalling the covenant and God’s promises, and culminating in chapters 5-8. Chapter 6 tells of God’s people coming through the waters (baptism, in parallel with crossing the Red Sea, q.v.1 Cor. 10:2) and being freed from slavery (as they had been from Egypt). The final consequence is described in Romans 8:19-28, which clearly refers to the origin and pervasiveness of disorder.

The effects of Adam’s disobedience are said to be that the created universe was ‘subjected to frustration’ (verse 20) and to be ‘groaning as if in the pains of childbirth’ (verse 22). Romans 8:19-22 is undeniably a difficult passage and most expositors do not help much,⁹⁴ but it would be improper to ignore in the present context. James Dunn comments,

The point Paul is presumably making, through somewhat obscure language, is that God followed the logic of his proposed subjecting of creation to man by subjecting it still further in consequence of man’s fall, so that it might serve as an appropriate context for fallen man: a futile world to engage the futile mind of man... There is an out-of-sortness, a disjointedness about the created order which makes it a suitable habitation for man at odds with his creator.⁹⁵

94 Tom Wright notes that the passage is ‘regularly marginalized in mainstream Protestant interpretations of Romans. If you insist on reading Romans as a book about how human beings “get saved”, in the sense of “going to heaven when they die” you will find that these verses function as a kind of odd, apocalyptic appendix. That in consequence is how the tradition has often regarded them, both in the “radical” scholarship of Lutherans like Bultmann and Käsemann and in the “conservative” readings of much evangelical scholarship.’ Wright, T. *New Heavens, New Earth*, Cambridge: Grove Booklet B11 (1999), p. 12.

95 Dunn *op. cit.*, (78), p. 487.

Derek Kidner seems to approach this notion when he contrasts the pre-Fall situation with our present existence: 'Leaderless, the choir of creation can only grind on in discord. It seems from Romans 8: 19-23 and from what is known of the pre-human world that there was a state of travail from the first which man was empowered to "subdue" until he relapsed into disorder himself'.⁹⁶ Charles Cranfield has used the same analogy with a powerful *reductio ad absurdum* argument, much reprinted in discussions of Romans 8:20.⁹⁷

Henri Blocher makes essentially the same point, 'If man obeys God, he would be the means of blessing the earth, but in his insatiable greed... and in his short-sighted selfishness, he pollutes the earth and destroys it. He turns a garden into a desert (cf. Rev. 11: 18). That is the main thrust of the curse of Genesis 3.'⁹⁸

Richard Bauckham argues that the phrase 'the creation was subject to futility (or frustration)' (Rom. 8:20) is likely to refer to the ecological degradation referred to by the prophets, when they spoke of the Earth mourning, the soil losing its fertility, plants withering, animals dying (Is. 22:4, 33:9; Jer. 4:28, 14:4, 23:10; Hos. 4:3; Amos 1:2; Joel 1:10-12, 17-20). He points out that the words translated 'groan' (Rom. 8:22, 23) may mean 'mourn', and this links with the language used by the prophets and with the repeated rebellion of God's people rather than the single disobedience in Eden. Furthermore, it helps us to recognise the way that 'frequently in the Bible, language of divine judgement describes the way acts have consequences in this world. Disruptions of the created order of things cause further disruption that rebounds on the perpetrators.'⁹⁹ Whilst Bauckham is correct to insist that Romans 8:18-23 refers to more than Genesis 3,¹⁰⁰ his arguments do not diminish its link with the events portrayed in Genesis 3.

The 'Fall' is not primarily about disease and disaster, nor about the dawn of self-awareness. Rather it is a way of describing the fracture in relationship between God and the human creature made in his image.¹⁰¹ The rupture means that we rattle around in our space, as it were, producing disorder within ourselves, with our neighbours, and with our environment, human and non-human. This will continue until our relationship with God is restored and we become at 'peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God' (Rom. 5: 1, 2) – words which condition

96 Kidner *op. cit.*, (46), p. 73.

97 Cranfield, C. 'Some observations on Romans 8: 19-21', in Banks, R. (ed.) *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology presented to L.L. Morris on his 60th Birthday*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (1974), pp. 224-230, p. 227.

98 Blocher *op. cit.*, (12), p. 184.

99 Bauckham, R. *Bible and Ecology*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd (2010), pp. 92-100.

100 Jonathan Moo argues similarly. He suggests that Paul had in mind Isa. 24-27, Moo, J. 'Romans 8:19-22 and Isaiah's cosmic covenant', *New Testament Studies* (2008) 54, 74-89.

101 Bimson *op. cit.*, (71).

and explain the state of nature which Paul uses later in the same passage (Rom. 8: 19-21).

The Adam of early Genesis may be a way of speaking about a group of our earliest ancestors. Romans 5 can be interpreted to accommodate this concept, but this seems to me to diminish the burden of responsibility which the Genesis account lays upon us individually to care for creation. How is this worked out? The Bible speaks from beginning to end about our interdependence with the rest of creation. Sometimes we are given direct commands, as when we are told to 'have dominion'; in other places, the instructions are implicit – the perils of a journey, the care needed for a farm or a flock of animals, the mastery we may expect over wild animals or fierce weather. We are told that sin led to Noah's flood and also to drought (Lev. 26, Dt. 28); the food laws regulated hunting; a very positive attitude to creation is expressed in the Wisdom Literature. Increasingly we are learning how much we depend upon 'creation's [nature's] services'.¹⁰² In all cases we interact with creation; we are a part of it as well as apart from it.

Christ on the cross reconciled *all things* to the Father (Col. 1:20). There is a sense in which we are corporately redeemed. But we all need to be personally reconciled. It is obviously grossly misleading to take individuals out of the gospel message; we are 'in Adam' because we are not in our intended relationship to the creator. And when we are reconciled through faith in Christ, we have a personal relationship to that same creator and an implied responsibility to creation care for Him.

Conclusion

Should we read 'adamah' when the Bible text speaks of 'Adam'? Both an individual Adam and a 'generic' Adam seem to be exegetically possible. Contrary to the common assumption, evolutionary science can embrace the possibility of an Adam who 'fell'. Which interpretation we adopt depends on our understanding of sin, and particularly of Romans 5-8: if the comparison between the first man and the last man is taken to be a firm equivalence, then it seems we must accept that there was a historic Adam. The more seriously we take sin, the more it seems better not to avoid the possibility of 'Mr Adam'.¹⁰³

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102 Constanza, R., d'Arge, R., deGroot, R., Farber, S., Grasso, M., Hannon, B., Limburg, K., Naaem, S., O'Neill, R.V., Paruelo, J., Raskin, R.G., Sutton, P. & van den Belt, M. 'The value of the world's ecosystem services and natural capital', *Nature* (1997) 387, 254-260; Millennium Ecosystem Assessment *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: General Synthesis*. New York: World Resources Institute (2005).

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