

# Correspondence

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**M.W.POOLE**

## **User's Guide to Science and Belief**

In his generous review of my *User's Guide to Science and Belief* (Issue 22-1, 2010), the reviewer comments 'unfortunately, the sources often had no easily traceable reference' and the students who assisted him 'would have liked to see robust referencing conventions used'. The book is one of a series for which the publisher's policy decision was that references should not be included, although I do have a complete list. So no references were provided, except for six items for suggested further reading at the end. Incidentally, the opening sentence refers to a 'reprint', whereas the cover description is a 'new [3rd] edition... Substantially rewritten, updated and enlarged'.

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**DERMOT O'CALLAGHAN**

## **Theistic evolution and the Fall**

R.J. Berry's review<sup>1</sup> of the IVP book *Should Christians Embrace Evolution?* (ed. N.C. Nevin) strongly opposes the book's claim that 'the theology of theistic evolution necessarily denies any notion of a fall and a curse'. He affirms that a theistic evolutionist can believe in a historical Adam – an individual hominid on whom God bestowed his image – and advances Derek Kidner's suggestion<sup>2</sup> that this blessing may have 'extended outwards to his contemporaries as well as to his offspring', thus establishing the human race.

Though an admirer of Kidner, I have always felt that this proposal leads to as many problems as solutions:

1. It secures human status for Adam's descendants and contemporaries, but only for those of earlier generations who are still alive (including his parents and grandparents). His living grandmother would be human, his deceased grandfather would not.
2. Berry bypasses Kidner's proposition (actually in his previous sentence) that Eve was a 'special creation', which 'clinched the fact that there is no natural bridge from animal to man'. (Kidner clearly is not a good example

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1 *Science and Christian Belief*, (2010) 22 (2), 207-208.

2 Kidner, D. *Genesis – An Introduction and Commentary*, London: IVP (1967), pp. 29, 30.

of a pure theistic evolutionist.) But is it plausible to hold that Eve was specially created, but not Adam?

3. John Stott, in his *The Message of Romans*,<sup>3</sup> uses the same Kidner quotation in grappling with the question of the curse and Adam's death. 'Why did he die? What was the origin of death?' Stott concedes that death in the animal kingdom existed 'from the beginning', but says, 'we must not think of human beings as merely rather superior animals, who on that account die like animals'. He argues that 'physical death was included in the curse, and Adam became mortal when he disobeyed'. This implies that Adam's forebears died of natural causes not attributed to sin (which had not yet entered the world), and that Adam himself, though he shared his ancestors' biology, was exempted for a time from their mortality. His own mortality came later for a different reason – his fall from grace on account of his sin.

It would be unfair to require Professor Berry to sign up to Stott's exposition, since he has not quoted him. But this discussion illustrates the difficulties that our finest exegetes have in reconciling theistic evolution with the fall and the curse. And if we are to cite Kidner as our authority, we must do justice to his belief in the special creation of Eve, and explain how that fits into our evolutionary framework.

When theistic evolution leads people such as Kidner and Stott to posit:

- an Adam who is biologically evolved but becomes human and immortal;
- and whose humanity is extended by God to his contemporaries and descendants;
- but only to those of his forebears who are still alive;
- and that this new human status brings a change from being mortal to being immortal;
- but that this immortality reverts to mortality when Adam sins;
- and an Eve who is specially created as immortal rather than biologically evolved, and who likewise loses her immortality,

it seems to me that the elastic, both theological and scientific, is being stretched beyond breaking point.

Dr Kidner described his 'exploratory suggestion' as 'tentative', and I have struggled with it for forty years. Now suddenly I find Professor Berry using it as a major plank in his argument. Kidner expressly invited 'correction and a better synthesis' of his thesis. I would greatly appreciate anything that Professor Berry or others can do in that regard.

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<sup>3</sup> Stott, J. *The Message of Romans*, Leicester: IVP (1994), p. 165.

**R J BERRY**

## **A Response to Dermot O'Callaghan**

I am grateful for the opportunity to try to repair the confusion I seem to have wrought for Dermot O'Callaghan. He cannot understand how a theistic evolutionist can believe in a historical Adam – incomprehension that he shares with the contributors to *Should Christians Embrace Evolution?* which I reviewed rather unfavourably in *Science & Christian Belief* 22 (2), 207-208 and which has stimulated his letter. As others remain similarly unconvinced this has prompted me to prepare a paper on Adam or *Adamah* for this journal in an attempt to explain more clearly some of the issues raised by Mr O'Callaghan in his letter. I fear that this note will overlap with issues I discuss in my longer paper; so I will confine myself here mostly to eight specific axioms. I hold these on the basis of my understanding of science and my acceptance of the authority of Scripture.

I believe that:

1. The evidence that we share a common ancestry with other animals is overwhelming. The data from anatomical and physiological likenesses and a large number of fossils is now supplemented by a compelling weight of molecular and cytogenetic data. As a believer, I do not doubt that God could have created human beings *de novo* (as it were) with all their appropriate historical anomalies. Such a tactic was the one proposed by Philip Gosse in *Omphalos*. It was widely condemned as positing a deceitful God.<sup>1</sup> I just don't believe God worked in this way.
2. The Earth has a history which stretches over millions of years. This was generally accepted decades before Darwin put forward his evolutionary ideas. It is therefore independent of them and should not be controversial.<sup>2</sup>
3. Primates only appeared relatively recently in the long history of life. The earliest fossils of *Homo sapiens* appear in the fossil record around 200,000 years ago. The absolute dates do not matter for the present discussion. The essential point is that humankind must have originated at some time in history.
4. The defining characteristic(s) of humanness as described in the Bible is that we are made in God's image (Gen. 1:27). The precise meaning of this has been (and is) debated at length, but I know of no reputable commen-

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1 Thwaite, A. *Glimpses of the Wonderful: The Life of Philip Henry Gosse*, London: Faber and Faber (2002).

2 Lewis, C.L.E. & Knell, S.J. (eds.) *The Age of the Earth from 4004 BC to AD 2002*, Special Publication of the Geological Society of London, no 190 (2001); White, R.S. 'The Age of the Earth', *Faraday Paper* no.8; Young, D.A. & Stearley, R.F. *The Bible, Rocks and Time*, Downer's Grove: IVP (2008).

tator who claims this involved any inevitable physical change. I find John Stott's terminology helpful – that the biological species *Homo sapiens* was transformed into *Homo divinus*, a creature able to respond to God. This is discussed further in my article in this Issue. O'Callaghan is correct in concluding that pre-transformees will not have fully human status. I do not see this as a problem: not being in relation with the Creator in the biblical sense of being made in His image, means they cannot rebel against Him. Sin, for them, can have no meaning.

5. Conventional genetic theory assumes that the origin of a new species in mammals involves a group of tens if not hundreds of individuals. The appearance of *Homo divinus* is described in Hebrew as a *bara* event, involving God in an active role. It is therefore not necessarily describable in scientific language. From the Genesis text, I have no problem in accepting that God might have transformed one individual or several hundred. However my understanding of Romans 5:12-19 (and 1 Cor. 15:21-22) is that the parallel between the first man (Adam) and the one man, Jesus Christ requires that Adam was an individual. I am well aware that most expositors of Romans do not accept that it is necessary to insist on a single Adam, but I am encouraged that they are not unanimous. John Stott is definite. In his *The Message of Romans*,<sup>3</sup> he wrote, 'Scripture clearly intends us to accept their [Adam and Eve's] historicity as the original human pair.' If this was the way that the Creator acted, there need be no bar to His extending His *bara* act to other members of *Homo sapiens* alive at the time; it is, after all, a divine transformation not a genetic transmission. We can have no evidence that this is what God did, but equally there is no evidence (biblical or other) against it.
6. The emergence of *Homo divinus* could have taken place at any time in human history. The Bible describes Adam as a Neolithic farmer.
7. Adam and Eve were told that the day they ate of a particular fruit, they would die. At this point I disagree with John Stott. He writes, 'the reference is clearly to physical death';<sup>4</sup> he cites Romans 1:32 and 6:23 in support – but, *pace* Stott – these verses do not say that the death referred to by Paul involved physical mortality.<sup>5</sup> I do not find the inevitable link between physical and spiritual death anywhere in Scripture. Physical

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

4 Stott *op. cit.*, (3), p. 152.

5 Gen. 3:19 is also sometimes quoted, because part of the curse in Gen. 3:19 is that the man was dust and to dust he will return. But this does not settle the issue. Gordon Wenham, *Word Commentary. Genesis 1-15*, Waco, TX: Word (1987), p. 83, comments: 'The return to dust is presented as inevitable, rather than as an immediate consequence in the death penalty which 2:17 led us to expect... It may be that the narrator avoids life-and-death language in this verse, because for him only life in the garden counts as life in the fullest sense.' For Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning*, Leicester: IVP (1984) p. 171, 'In the Bible, death is the reverse of life – it is not the reverse of existence.'

death was certainly in the world before humankind appeared. Moreover, Adam and Eve lived on physically for many years after being excluded from Paradise; all their family was born in their post-Eden time. What did happen when they disobeyed God was that their fellowship with Him was broken (Gen. 3:9). From that moment, all humankind was alienated from God. This was what we call the Fall.<sup>6</sup> It was this rupture and its consequences that Christ died to repair. The New Testament is unequivocal: 'you *were dead*...' but now in Christ you are made alive (Eph. 2:1-10, and similar passages). Nicodemus was told he must be born again, that is, undergo a saving experience by the Spirit, although he was obviously alive in the physical sense. It is sometimes said that Jesus had to die physically to redeem us. I do not find this a compelling argument. My understanding of Christ's atoning work is that it was complete when the Son on the Cross was terribly separated from the Father; after this, he cried 'It is finished.' He had to die and rise again to make his triumph clear to us. I should be happy to be corrected if I am wrong about this, but in any case it doesn't affect the nature of Adam's death.

8. We are told virtually nothing about the life of Adam and Eve in Eden. It is certainly reading too much into Scripture to assert that they changed from mortal to immortal and then reverted to mortality when Adam sinned. O'Callaghan is apparently assuming that the creation of Adam led to immortality. This is not a description used of Adam in the Bible.

O'Callaghan asks whether it is plausible to hold that Eve was specially created, but not Adam. The implication of his question is that I hold that Adam was not specially created. This is a false assumption on his part. I do believe that Adam was specially created, albeit in the sense that something happened that made him truly human, in other words in God's image, as *Homo divinus*. I hope this is explicit in axiom 5 above.

O'Callaghan says that I bypass Kidner's proposition that Eve was a 'special creation' which 'clinched the fact that there is no natural bridge from animal to man'. I don't think bypass is the right word: I was reviewing a book, not attempting a critique of Derek Kidner's views. But I must confess that I have never thought that Kidner was implying that the 'woman' was a new biological entity. Surely he is describing her theological and social significance. I entirely agree with Gordon Wenham's comments on Genesis 2:21-25, that the whole account of woman's creation has a poetic flavour: it is certainly mistaken to read it as an account of a clinical operation or an attempt to explain some feature of man's anatomy. Rather, it brilliantly depicts the relation of man and wife... Here the ideal of marriage as it was understood in ancient Israel is

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6 In his Commentary on Genesis (Kidner, D. *Genesis*, London: Tyndale Press (1967), Tyndale (1967) p. 73), Derek Kidner identifies the multiple disarray [in personal relations, the spiritual realm, and the physical plane] is, from one aspect, [the man's] punishment; from another, it is the plain outcome of his anarchy. Leaderless, the choir of creation can only grind on in discord.

being portrayed, a relationship characterised by harmony and intimacy between the partners.<sup>7</sup> I would be very surprised if Kidner would dissent from this.

Let me be as clear as possible: I believe in a historic Fall. I have no problem in believing in a historic Adam, but I should be happy to rethink this if I am wrong about the meaning of Romans 5: 12-19. I believe that we have a common ancestor with the chimpanzees and have evolved according to the normal biological consensus about mechanism, with the rider [from faith] that God created *Homo divinus* in a *Homo sapiens* body at some time in history. O'Callaghan may disagree with any or all of my beliefs, but I hope he will allow that they are internally consistent and accord with scientific understanding and legitimate interpretations of Scripture. He is, of course, wholly free to suggest other interpretations, which would have to be examined in the normal way. As O'Callaghan notes, Derek Kidner described his proposals on Genesis as only tentative. Kidner was considerably upset by the reception of his commentary in some quarters. It could be that his ideas were wrong; but they may be right and prescient. Certainly we should heed his qualifier that when the revealed and the observed seem hard to combine, it is because we know too little, not too much. I would add that we also have a dangerous tendency to over-interpret the Scriptures and even to add to them. In my review of *Should Christians Embrace Evolution?* I bewailed the depiction of theistic evolutionism by the contributors. I hope O'Callaghan is not falling into some of the same errors.

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<sup>7</sup> Kidner *op. cit.*, (6), p. 69.

## Voluntary Help Requested

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