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Response to Denis Lamoureux and Joshua Swamidass

Genomics evidence has challenged two longstanding Christian claims: that the first humans were created *de novo,* and that all humans descend from them as sole genetic (and thereby sole genealogical) ancestors.[1] Evangelical apologetics responses to genomics evidence, such as the Genealogical Adam and Eve (GAE) hypothesis developed by Joshua Swamidass, are thus occasioned: they arise in a specific context to address the needs of an audience with particular concerns. They do not arise because they naturally flow from the evidence, but they rather attempt to mitigate the effect of evidence on prior theological commitments.

The GAE is a speculative theological proposal that claims to resolve the pressure that genomics exerts on *de novo* creation and sole progenitorship. Swamidass's solution is straightforward but also ambitious: he posits a recent, miraculous, *de novo* creation of Adam and Eve, and redefines 'human' to apply only to their descendants as their offspring interbreed with the evolved *Homo sapiens* around them. In this way of thinking, many families in the past contained individuals in different theological categories: one partner, a descendant of Adam, and thus theologically human; the other partner, who did not descend from Adam and thus was outside the biblical definition of human; and their children, who, like their one parent, are 'in' because they have Adam as a genealogical ancestor.

Swamidass thus 'solves' the problem of sole progenitorship by simple redefinition of terms, but thereby generates numerous difficulties. One challenge for his proposal is that there is no scientific evidence to support it. Moreover, his thinking requires a redefinition of 'human' in stark contrast to thousands of years of Jewish and Christian thought. Further, his proposal is a modern, selective, and concordist reading that does not engage with well-attested scholarship on the Ancient Near East (ANE) context of the Genesis narratives. Scientist and theologian Denis Lamoureux has rightly critiqued Swamidass on these three points, which we will consider in turn.

Swamidass frequently uses the language that his GAE model is 'consistent with the evidence'. When scientists use this phrasing in the professional litera-

1 Venema, D.R. and McKnight, S. *Adam and the Genome: Reading Scripture After GeneticScience*. Brazos Press, Grand Rapids (2017)

ture, they mean that the model they propose flows from the evidence they have assembled. Swamidass's usage of this phrasing is thus highly atypical, since he has not assembled any evidence that Adam was created *de novo*, or that there were different theological categories of human in the past, or that there was genealogical contact with Tasmania after 4000 BCE, *et cetera*. His presentation of how genealogical ancestry works is not evidence in favour of his conjecture, any more than a detailed discussion of telescope optics and orbital mechanics would be evidence in favour of Russell's teapot. Indeed, by Swamidass's usage of the term, Russell's teapot and the GAE are equally 'consistent with the evidence.' The most one can say scientifically about either is that we cannot disprove them. Neither have any evidence in their favour. Lamoureux's objection that the GAE is 'scientifically vacuous' is accurate.

Theologically, Swamidass claims that the GAE retains a 'traditional account' of the Genesis narratives. However, the uniform understanding of the Genesis narratives for thousands of years of Jewish and Christian thought is that they refer to humanity as a whole, not a theologically-distinct subset that interbreeds with other biologically compatible beings. Lamoureux naturally objects to such a move, but so do others despite their significant theological differences with Lamoureux. A young-earth theologian critiques Swamidass on this point incisively: 'In traditional Christianity, being human and being a descendant of Adam are co-extensive. As far as I can see, Swamidass's revisionism lacks a convincing exegetical or theological basis'.[2] Leading evangelical philosopher and theologian William Lane Craig favours an ancient Adam in order to avoid this precise issue.[3] He makes this point very strongly on GAE models: 'Unfortunately, this version of the view faces the insuperable objection that the Bible demands the truly universal progenitorship of Adam and Eve.'[4] Moreover he states that Swamidass 'distinguishing different sorts of human leads to the horrific conclusion that there could be people today who look and act just like us but who are not in God's image and therefore sub-human.'[5] One additional point that these theologians have not yet considered is this: under the GAE hypothesis, did the *de novo* Adam have the signs of common ancestry in his genome? Neither answer is palatable. If yes, then God created Adam with a false evolutionary history. If no, then Adam is not truly human but a being with a genome significantly different than our own.

2 Madueme, H. (2020). *Evolution and Historical Adam? A Provocative But Unconvincing Attempt.* https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/genealogical-adam-eve-swamidass/

3 Craig, W.L. *In Quest of the Historical Adam: A Biblical and Scientific Exploration*, Eerdmans (2021).

4 Craig, W.L. in Kenneth D. Keathley, (Ed). *Perspectives on the Historical Adam and Eve: Four Views*, Baker Academic (2024) p. 134.

5 Craig, W.L. 'Preferring an Ancient Genealogical Adam and Eve,' *Peaceful Science* (2020) https://doi.org/10.54739/t9q9

Swamidass's assertion that he has found a model that preserves a traditional reading of the Genesis narratives has thus not found support among evangelical audiences. Lamoureux's theological assessment of his model is in agreement with the evangelical consensus. Swamidass's claims are specific to his idiosyncratic definition of a 'traditional interpretation' which is not shared by any theologian of which I am aware.[6] Accordingly, Swamidass's criticisms that my work has misled evangelicals by omitting viable options[7] are shown to be without substance: his proposed correctives do not have scientific or theological merit and do not accomplish what he claims for them.

In my 2010 article[8] that by some accounts instigated this conversation among evangelicals[9] I discuss an effect I termed 'ratcheting concordism.' The idea is that a committed concordist, when faced with new evidence that renders his prior concordist interpretation untenable, may simply choose to 'ratchet' over to the next available position that retains the balance of his theological commitments. I did not anticipate just how theologically creative the concordist approach would become, and Lamoureux ably demonstrates that the GAE is motivated by concordist concerns. There would be no need for such an *ad hoc* proposal if it were not driven by a desire to align Genesis in some way, however tortured, with the findings of modern science. Such a mindset will always be vulnerable to the advance of scientific inquiry. Moreover, this mindset ignores the clear evidence that Genesis is ANE literature. I can offer no better advice for evangelicals than I did fifteen years ago:

> In contrast to a ratcheting concordist approach, an Evolutionary Creationist framework, such as that advanced recently in the works of Denis Lamoureux, readily accepts and incorporates new scientific information. This view, in that it approaches the science of the Genesis narratives as divine accommodation to an Ancient Near-Eastern culture, has no expectation that Genesis will be in concord with modern science.[10]

One wonders how many notches remain on the ratchet.

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6 A possible exception to this claim is philosopher Andrew Loke, who proposes a modified version of the GAE hypothesis that suffers from the same fatal flaws described here, and has come under similar theological criticism.

7 E.g. Swamidass, S.J. (2020). *The Genealogical Adam and Eve: A Rejoinder.* https://henrycenter.tiu.edu/2020/08/the-genealogical-adam-and-eve-a-rejoinder/

8 Venema, D.R. 'Genesis and the genome: genomics evidence for human – ape common ancestry and ancestral hominid population sizes.' *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* (2010) 62, 166-178.

9 op.cit., Madueme, H. (2020).

10 op.cit.,Venema, D.R. (2010).