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Four Views on the Historical Adam

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Four views on the historical Adam / Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday, general editors ; Denis O. Lamoureux, John H. Walton, C. John Collins, William D. Barrick ; Gregory A. Boyd, and Philip G. Ryken, pastoral reflection contributors ; Stanley Gundry, series editor. p. cm.—(Counterpoints: Bible and theology)

ISBN 978-0-310-49927-5 (softcover)

1. Adam (Biblical figure) 2. Evangelicalism. 3. Reformed Church—Doctrines. I. Barrett, Matthew Michael, 1982- editor of compilation.

BS580.A4F68 2013

222'.11092—dc23

2013015377

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Cover design: *Tammy Johnson*

Interior design: *Matthew Van Zomeren*

Printed in the United States of America

13 14 15 16 17 /DCI/ 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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MATTHEW BARRETT AND ARDEL B. CANEDAY

The title of this book, *Four Views on the Historical Adam*, implies the presence of conflict among Christians. Who likes discord? No one relishes it. But in this present age is disagreement not inevitable? When we face controversy, one crucial factor is how we behave in what we have to say and how we respond to others with whom we disagree. The contemporary notion concerning public discourse that anyone who openly and plainly expresses disagreements with others engages in hate-speech is hardly a new concept. The apostle Paul, no stranger to conflict, recognized how controversy renders relationships tenuous when he inquired of the Galatians, “Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?” (Gal. 4:16).

Therefore, at the outset of this book it is fitting to ponder J. Gresham Machen’s observations on controversy in the church:

Our preaching, we are told, ought to be positive and not negative; we ought to present the truth, but ought not to attack error; we ought to avoid controversy and always seek peace. . . .

With regard to such a program, it may be said at least that if we hold to it we might just as well close up our New Testaments; for the New Testament is a controversial book almost from beginning to end. That is of course true with regard to the Epistles of Paul. They, at least, are full of argument and controversy—no question, certainly, can be raised about that. Even the hymn to Christian love in the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians is an integral part of a great controversial passage with regard to a false use of the spiritual

gifts. That glorious hymn never would have been written if Paul had been averse to controversy and had sought peace at any price.¹

Machen intimately knew alienation that comes with controversy.² But like the biblical authors, Machen understood that as important as peace and unity are, genuine peace and unity are never acquired at the cost of truth.

The point Machen makes concerning how controversy gave birth to much of the New Testament, especially the letters, can be extended to the creeds of the church. Throughout history, as significant theological disagreements have emerged, they have constrained the church to clarify beliefs that distinguish Christian beliefs from erroneous beliefs. Painful as conflict has been for the church, the convening of councils—beginning with the Jerusalem Council during the days of the apostles—to engage competing beliefs and to formulate expression of the common faith has been necessary. Wisdom constrains us to be grateful for Christians preceding us whose close and careful devotion to quests for truth brought about the great creeds that Christians universally confess.

Thus, when conflict emerges among Christians, our quest for truth must not avoid conflict but face it, even if this makes us uncomfortable. With this perspective in mind, we invite readers to engage each contributor of this book who gives expression to one of four perspectives on the historicity of Adam, a current point of dispute among evangelicals. The beliefs articulated by the four scholars conflict with one another at significant points, even though they all hold other important beliefs in common. We offer this respectful conversation among scholars, who present four distinct views followed by two pastors who offer divergent responses, to encourage thoughtful conversation on the issue of Adam's historicity, governed by belief that seeks to understand and thus to speak truth.

Some Historical Reflections

More than a century ago, even though various theories of evolution were already being considered among Christians, the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species* in 1859 began to compel some

1. J. Gresham Machen, *Machen's Notes on Galatians*, ed. John H. Skilton (Philadelphia: P&R Publishing, 1973), 6.

2. See D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003).

evangelicals to give those theories greater attention. Consequently, many within Protestant churches and institutions began to embrace the theory of evolution.

The Christian view of creation that Darwinism rivaled was not monolithic, even if the popular belief among Christians was that God created the cosmos approximately 4,000 years before the coming of the Christ. This belief preceded the publication of *The Annals of the World* by James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, who attempted to identify the time of creation's beginning with precision.³ For example, both leading church Reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin believed that creation was not yet 6,000 years old and that God created all things within six twenty-four-hour days.⁴ Calvin is thoroughly conversant with Augustine, agreeing with him at several points, but also rejecting his belief that God created all things instantaneously.⁵

However, in 1876 Thomas Huxley declared that the teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution was as assuredly verified scientifically as was Copernicus's theory of heliocentricity.⁶ A majority of scientists had come to accept evolution, and increasing numbers of Christian leaders, such as James McCosh, president of Princeton College (1868–88), also embraced it.⁷ The editor of a religious weekly publication in 1880 estimated that a fourth and perhaps even half the ministers in major evangelical denominations had abandoned belief in the historical Adam.⁸

Nevertheless, others resisted the trend by holding to the historicity of Adam and Eve while regarding humanity's antiquity a nontheological issue. Growing numbers of evangelicals did not agree with the Reformers' view concerning the nature and length of the six days of

3. James Ussher, *The Annals of the World* (London: E. Tyler for F. Crook and G. Bedell, 1658).

4. See Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Genesis*, ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 3, 5–6. See also John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.14.1.

5. With reference to Augustine's teaching that God instantaneously created all things, see Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.14.2.

6. Ronald Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 44.

7. See Fred G. Zaspel, "B. B. Warfield on Creation and Evolution," *Themelios* 35.2 (2010): 202. See also idem, "Princeton and Evolution," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 8 (2012): 93.

8. See Ronald Numbers, *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 3.

creation, while at the same time they accepted the creation accounts of Genesis 1–2 as authoritative concerning the historicity of Adam and Eve, whether they believed God’s act of creation was recent or ancient.⁹ For example, B. B. Warfield, who as a youth had embraced Darwin’s theory of evolution but later came to reject it,¹⁰ states,

The question of the antiquity of man has of itself no theological significance. It is to theology, as such, a matter of entire indifference how long man has existed on earth. It is only because of the contrast which has been drawn between the short period which seems to be allotted to human history in the Biblical narrative, and the tremendously long period which certain schools of scientific speculation have assigned to the duration of human life on earth, that theology has become interested in the topic at all.¹¹

Warfield differs from many Christians today who, since the resurgence of six-day-young-earth creationism in the mid-twentieth century, find theological significance as to when God created all things. Yet, even though Warfield regarded the antiquity of humanity as of little theological concern, he viewed the origin and historicity of Adam differently. As he writes:

The question of the unity of the human race differs from the question of its antiquity in that it is of indubitable theological importance. It is not merely that the Bible certainly teaches it, while, as we have sought to show, it has no teaching upon the antiquity of the race. It is also the postulate of the entire body of the Bible’s teaching—of its doctrine of Sin and Redemption alike: so that the whole structure of the Bible’s teaching, including all that we know as its doctrine of salvation, rests on it and implicates it.¹²

9. See B. B. Warfield, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Creation,” *Princeton Theological Review* (1915): 190–255.

10. On the relationship between Warfield and McCosh, see Zaspel, “Princeton and Evolution,” 95. Cf. Zaspel, “B. B. Warfield on Creation and Evolution,” 198–211.

11. B. B. Warfield, “On the Antiquity and the Unity of the Human Race,” *Princeton Theological Review*, 9.1 (1911): 1–2; idem, “On the Antiquity and the Unity of the Human Race,” *Studies in Theology* (1932; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 235–36.

12. *Ibid.*, *Princeton Theological Review*, 18–19; *Studies in Theology*, 252.

Though not all, many Protestants, especially evangelicals, viewed evolutionary scientists' claims concerning human origins as challenging Scripture's authority and truthfulness, even the Christian gospel itself. This was one of several ideas that prompted Christian leaders in the early years of the last century to take measures to counter diverse movements they believed were subverting the Christian faith.

The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth, edited by A. C. Dixon and R. A. Torrey and published from 1910 to 1915, consisted of ninety essays in twelve volumes that affirmed the evangelical faith over against higher criticism, liberalism, socialism, modernism, and naturalistic Darwinism. Concerning evolution, contributors to these volumes could be found on both sides, some believing evolution to be inconsistent with Scripture, while others concluded that "limited forms of evolution might have been used by God in creation."¹³ For example, in his chapter, "The Doctrinal Value of the First Chapters of Genesis," Dyson Hague writes, "Man was created, not evolved. That is, he did not come from protoplasmic mud-mass, or sea ooze bathybian, or by descent from fish or frog, or horse, or ape; but at once, direct, full made, did man come forth from God."¹⁴

And in case Adam and Eve's historicity was in question, Hague goes on to affirm,

Adam was not a myth, or an ethnic name. He was a veritable man, made by God; not an evolutionary development from some hairy anthropoid in some imaginary continent of Lemuria. The Bible knows but one species of man, one primitive pair. This is confirmed by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matt. 19:4. It is re-affirmed by Paul in Acts 17:26 ... Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21, 47, 49. Nor is there any ground for supposing that the word Adam is used in a collective sense, and thus leave room for the hypotheses of the evolutionary development of a large number of human pairs.... So closely does the apostle link the fall of Adam and the death of Christ, that without Adam's fall the science of theology is evacuated of its most

13. George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 122.

14. Dyson Hague, "The Doctrinal Value of the First Chapters of Genesis," in *The Fundamentals*, vol. 1, edited by R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 280.

salient feature, the atonement. If the first Adam was not made a living soul and fell, there was no reason for the work of the Second Man, the Lord from heaven. The rejection of the Genesis story as a myth tends to the rejection of the Gospel of salvation. One of the chief cornerstones of the Christian doctrine is removed, if the historical reality of Adam and Eve is abandoned, for the fall will ever remain as the starting point of special revelation, of salvation by grace, and of the seed of personal regeneration. In it lies the germ of the entire apostolic Gospel.¹⁵

However, as George Marsden observes, other contributors such as James Orr and George Frederick Wright conceded that the days of “creation might have been very long, allowing for the possibility of some evolutionary development.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, these men “argued strongly against Darwinian claims that evolution could explain the origins of life or the uniqueness of humans.”¹⁷ As Orr says, he is only open to “later evolutionary theory” that is a “revolt against Darwinianism.” He concludes, “Certainly there would be contradiction if Darwinian theory had its way and we had to conceive of man as a slow, gradual ascent from the bestial stage, but I am convinced . . . that genuine science teaches no such doctrine.”¹⁸ Marsden notes that “mediating positions” like Orr’s were common during this time period as “battle lines were not yet firmly fixed against every sort of biological evolutionism.”¹⁹

Moreover, even among those who did reject evolution, not all of them affirmed a young-earth view. Instead, some sought to accommodate their understanding of Genesis 1–2 to the concept of a much older earth than previously accepted. For example, the 1917 edition of the *Scofield Reference Bible* advocated the Gap Theory, which had been developed a hundred years earlier by Thomas Chalmers. Along with variations of the Day-Age theory, it became popular.

15. Hague, “The Doctrinal Value of the First Chapters of Genesis,” in vol. 1 of *The Fundamentals*, 282–283, 285.

16. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 280.

17. *Ibid.*

18. James Orr, “The Early Narratives of Genesis,” in *The Fundamentals*, vol. 1, 239. See also James Orr, “Science and Christian Faith,” in *The Fundamentals*, vol. 1, 345–47.

19. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 122.

The Scopes Trial of 1925, which proved to be an embarrassment for evangelicals despite legal victory for the anti-evolution side, demonstrates that many evangelicals, including leaders who identified themselves as “fundamentalists,” held to what is called today an Old-Earth Creation view.²⁰ This was true of William Jennings Bryan, who argued for the prosecution, and of William B. Riley who, as founder and chief spokesman of the World Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA), called on Bryan to act as co-counsel for the WCFA during the trial in Dayton, Tennessee.²¹ Both Bryan and Riley advocated forms of a Day-Age Theory.²²

While evangelicals and fundamentalists embraced views that accommodated an old earth, others—such as Seventh-Day Adventists, for example—held that the earth is young, as they interpreted the geological data with reference to the flood of Genesis 6. Not until after publication of *The Genesis Flood* by John Whitcomb and Henry Morris in 1961 did evangelicals and fundamentalists in large measures again embrace a young-earth creation view.²³ Interestingly, the conservative evangelical publisher Moody Press declined to publish *The Genesis Flood* because it was concerned that “firm insistence on six literal days could offend their constituency.”²⁴ This decision suggests how revolutionary six-day-young-earth creationism was in the middle of the last century.²⁵

On Thanksgiving Day 1959, at the Darwin Centennial Celebration in Chicago, Sir Julian Huxley, grandson of Thomas Huxley, announced in his address, “The Evolutionary Vision,” that religion itself is subject to the laws of evolution and would eventually evolve itself out of existence. His obituary for the “dinosaur” of religion, particularly Christianity,

20. For a detailed history of the trial, see Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

21. William Vance Trollinger Jr., *God's Empire: William Bell Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 33.

22. Numbers claims, “William Jennings Bryan, the much misunderstood leader of the post-World War I antievolution crusade, not only read the Mosaic ‘days’ as geological ‘ages’ but allowed for the possibility of organic evolution—so long as it did not impinge on the supernatural origin of Adam and Eve” (*The Creationists*, 13).

23. Zaspel, “Princeton and Evolution,” 92.

24. Instead, in 1961 the book was published by another Christian publisher: John C. Whitcomb Jr. and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1961). In 2011 the publisher released a fiftieth-anniversary version of that book.

25. Zaspel, “Princeton and Evolution,” 92.

turned out to be premature. Shortly thereafter, *The Genesis Flood* began to ignite a resurgence of belief among evangelicals in six-day-young-earth creation, which annoyed and embarrassed not just atheists and irreligiousists, but many fellow evangelicals as well.

The Debate Behind the Debate

Since the mid-twentieth century, debate over the age and origin of the universe has continued within evangelicalism. Evangelicals have remained confident that God exists and is the Creator of our universe. But as to how he created the universe and how long he took to do so, there is much disagreement. In his recent book, *Mapping the Origins Debate*, Gerald Rau outlines six contemporary models.²⁶

First, there is *Naturalistic Evolution*, which is highly dependent on philosophical naturalism. This first view falls outside the bounds of evangelicalism because it excludes belief in a Creator. Instead, natural causes explain all things. Evolution is *the* method of explaining the origin of the universe, including how humans came to exist. Atheism is the worldview that governs its advocates such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Stephen Jay Gould (although he was agnostic), Edward O. Wilson, Ernst Mayr, and Eugenie Scott. If Thomas H. Huxley was “Darwin’s bulldog” in the nineteenth century, this role has been inherited in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by men like Dawkins and Dennet who believe religion is a poison to society, ignoring the reality of science (by which they mean “evolution”).

A second model is *Nonteleological Evolution*, the view that, while the supernatural may exist, it does not intervene after the universe comes into existence. In prior centuries this view was known as “deism.” Today, those who hold this view may not appreciate such a label. Liberal Protestantism, Process theology, Buddhism, Hinduism, and New Age theology are all, in their own ways, variations of this view. Some of its most famous supporters include Christian de Duve, Ian Barbour, and John Haught. This view affirms evolution and shares many similarities with naturalistic evolution because even though a supernatural being may have jump started the process, the universe, as it evolved, did not

26. Gerald Rau, *Mapping the Origins Debate: Six Models of the Beginning of Everything* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), see especially 31–56.

originate or progress with an intended *telos*, or plan, in view. Therefore, the randomness that characterizes evolution in philosophical naturalism is preserved, as is the attempt to explain everything from naturalistic causes. In short, this view is best described as a form of theistic evolution, one that is not limited to Christian perspectives.

Third, there is *Planned Evolution*. As the label suggests, this differs from the previous view in that it affirms purpose. God did have a *telos* in view from the beginning. Therefore, while evolution is again affirmed, it is teleological in nature. Advocates of this view tend to be monotheists, some Jewish or Islamic, but most identify with Christianity. Typically, advocates attempt to reconcile Genesis with evolution, some by viewing Genesis as an “ancient drama” whose author(s) held to an ancient, primitive cosmology. Various interpretations are given of Adam and Eve. Typically, they are seen as a group of people or as names (symbols) used to refer to humanity as a whole, but not as a single pair from whom all of humanity originates. Rau identifies several advocates of this view, including Howard Van Till and Kenneth Miller as well as Francis Collins and the BioLogos Foundation. Like the previous view, this is another version of theistic evolution. Although purpose is involved, God typically does not intercede in the process of evolution. Rather, natural causes are an adequate explanation.

A fourth model is *Directed Evolution*, differing slightly from Planned Evolution. For our purposes, one significant difference is that directed evolutionists are more likely to see Adam and Eve as historical persons, even the parents of all humanity. Furthermore, not only is God the Creator, but he intervenes, or more specifically, “directs” the cosmos on a continual basis. But again, evolution is the method and means by which the universe originates. Rau suggests that advocates might include Henry Schaefer, Deborah Haarsma, Loren Haarsma, and Michael Behe.

The last two views, Planned Evolution and Directed Evolution, are both categorized by Rau as “non-concordist,” meaning they do not attempt to align the Bible and modern science. Similarly, the days in Genesis are not seen as “sequential, but tell us something about God’s relation to the world.”²⁷ Interpretations of the days of creation include various views:

27. *Ibid.*, 206.

1. *The Framework view*: “In the beginning, the earth was formless and void, so God gave form and filled the void. The framework tells us what happened, but nothing about the length or order of the creative acts.”
2. *The Analogical Day view*: “God creates for six days and rests for one, analogous to our six days of work and one of rest.”
3. *The Cosmic Temple view*: “God establishes the whole earth as his temple and takes up his residence there on day seven, similar to stories of the establishment of the temple in other ancient literature. Thus he gives creation function, rather than creating the form.”²⁸

By way of contrast, the last two views that follow (old-earth and young-earth creationism) are labeled by Rau as “concordist,” and each affirms six successive days of creation.

A fifth model is *Old-Earth Creationism* (OEC). With this view we now move from evolutionary-based models to creation-based models. Advocates of these two creation models (old-earth and young-earth) believe God created directly rather than through an evolutionary process. This first model receives its distinctiveness in how it explains the age of the earth. While rejecting evolution, this model still sees the earth as very old (billions of years). Yet the old age of the earth can be harmonized with the six days of Genesis, even though “day” is interpreted to account for long eons of time (more on this shortly). Genesis 1 is viewed as compatible with scientific discovery, properly interpreted. Rau observes, “OEC sometimes chooses to interpret the Bible in the light of scientific evidence, but other times chooses to interpret science in light of the Bible.” For example, it

accepts the standard geological chronology that the earth is billions of years old, by taking the term *day* in Genesis 1 to mean an unspecified period of time. On the other hand, adherence to the idea that God created in distinct phases (days) leads to the interpretation of periods of rapid appearance of species in the fossil record as creative events.²⁹

28. *Ibid.*, 206–7.

29. *Ibid.*, 49.

Advocates of old-earth creationism are many, but some stand out, including Hugh Ross and Reason to Believe as well as Stephen Meyer and the Discovery Institute Center for Science and Culture.

Sixth is *Young-Earth Creationism* (YEC), sometimes referred to as “scientific creation” or “creationism.” For advocates of this view, Scripture is always to be given priority over science, so that where science draws conclusions that disagree with Genesis 1–2, science is to be rejected. This view earns its distinctiveness in several ways. First, it rejects evolution (especially naturalistic evolution) as contrary to Scripture, particularly Genesis 1–2. Also, while it agrees with old-earth creationism that there are six successive days in Genesis 1–2, it disagrees that there is room in the text for long periods of time. Rather, “day” in Genesis 1–2 is a twenty-four-hour period. Additionally, the earth is young, perhaps not much older than six thousand years. This view sees Adam and Eve as historical persons as well as the first persons from whom all of humanity derives. Some more influential advocates include Ken Ham and Answers in Genesis, Jonathan Sarfati and Creation Ministries International, John D. Morris and the Institute for Creation Research, Walt Brown and the Center for Scientific Creation, Paul Nelson and John Mark Reynolds of the Discovery Institute, as well as other individuals such as Steven Austin, Jerry Bergman, D. Russell Humphreys, Michael Oard, John Sanford, and Kurt Wise.

As mentioned, these last two views, old-earth and young-earth creationism, affirm six successive days of creation. However, there are various interpretations of these six days. Rau lists four:

1. *The Gap view* (held among old-earth advocates): “There is a gap between the original creation in Genesis 1:1 and the recreation of the world in six days after it ‘became’ without form and void in Genesis 1:2. Fossils are part of the old creation. (Now rare)”
2. *The Intermittent Day view* (held among old-earth advocates): “Each day of creation was twenty-four hours long, but separated by long periods in which there was no creative work. (Now rare)”
3. *The Progressive or Day-Age Creation view* (held among old-earth advocates): “Each day was a long period of time. The luminaries were created in day one but only became visible in day four, perhaps due to clearing of the atmosphere.”

4. *The Twenty-Four-Hour Day view* (held by young-earth advocates): “Each day was twenty-four hours long. This is usually connected in modern YEC with flood geology (fossils bearing strata were laid down in the global flood) and mature creation (apparent age).”³⁰

While these categories and labels are not exhaustive, they do capture most views. However, there is a movement that does not fit neatly into just one category, and that is Intelligent Design (ID), usually credited to Charles Thaxton, Walter Bradley, and Roger Olsen (all of whom were old-earth creationists) and their 1984 book, *The Mystery of Life’s Origin*. Phillip Johnson’s 1991 work is perhaps more well-known, *Darwin on Trial*, where he argues that Darwinists and neo-Darwinists come to their conclusions, not because of the evidence for evolution but rather because they have accepted the philosophical worldview of naturalism, which assumes that only natural causes can account for human origins.³¹ A number of scholars have joined the ID movement from diverse backgrounds, including the fields of science, philosophy, law, mathematics, and theology.³²

Today ID has found a home in the Discovery Institute Center for Science and Culture and is defended by scholars such as Michael Behe, who created a stir with his 1996 book, *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*. There he argues for “irreducible complexity,” the belief that the cosmos is made up of complex systems, each with a makeup involving certain active parts that must be in place prior to the entire system operating, something that can only be accounted for if a Creator previously imposed design, structure, and configuration (e.g., DNA, the flagellum).³³ Some other notable scholars who have joined in the ID movement are Stephen C. Meyer, William A. Dembski, Paul Nelson, Jonathan Wells, and C. John Collins.³⁴

ID’s uniqueness is that it seeks to develop, as Stephen Meyer states, an “evidence-based scientific theory about life’s origins that challenges

30. *Ibid.*, 207–8.

31. Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991).

32. Interestingly, even some non-Christians have argued against evolution using a design argument. Consider Australian molecular biologist Michael Denton and his book *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Chevy Chase, MD: Adler & Adler, 1986).

33. Michael J. Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

34. Also consider Paul Chien, Guillermo Gonzalez, Dean Kenyon, Charles Thaxton, David Berlinski, David DeWolf, and Thomas Woodward.

strictly materialistic views of evolution.”³⁵ In other words, it seeks to argue empirically and non-religiously for design in nature and thus a Designer (Creator). As Rau explains, this does not necessarily mean a total rejection of evolutionary processes.³⁶ ID advocates range from directed evolutionists to old-earth and young-earth creationists, though not all proponents of those views also uphold ID.

Why devote so much space to outlining these diverse views of origins? The reason is that it truly is the *debate behind the debate*.³⁷ In other words, while this book focuses on the historicity of Adam, readers will doubtless notice that each contributor also addresses the origins debate. Why? Because how one understands the days of Genesis, evolutionary theory, and even the age of the earth to a certain extent will impact, in one way or another, what one believes about Adam and Eve. While not every view outlined above is represented in this book, the contributors do represent the major positions, and in this debate over Adam their interpretation of Genesis 1–2 is evident, and at times even a pivotal factor in how they believe Adam is to be understood.

Adam, to Be or Not to Be?

Whether he intended it or not, Francis Collins’s establishment of the BioLogos Foundation helped to spur a new round of vigorous disagreement about human origins among evangelicals. His high profile as long-time head of the Human Genome Project provided Collins significant influence when, as a confessing evangelical, he launched BioLogos on its mission: “To help communicate the harmony of faith and science to the modern Church,” with his view of science including an acceptance of evolution.³⁸ As he states:

I find theistic evolution, or BioLogos, to be by far the most scientifically consistent and spiritually satisfying of the alternatives. This position will not go out of style or be disproven by future scientific

35. Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (New York: Harper One, 2009).

36. Rau, *Mapping the Origins Debate*, 53.

37. For one example of the origins debate, see J. P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds, eds., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999). Young-earth creationism is represented by Paul Nelson and Reynolds, old-earth (progressive) creationism by Robert C. Newman, and theistic evolution by Howard J. Van Till.

38. See the statement at <http://biologos.org>.

discoveries. It is intellectually rigorous, it provides answers to many otherwise puzzling questions, and it allows science and faith to fortify each other like two unshakable pillars, holding up a building called Truth.³⁹

Collins and other theistic evolutionists (some preferring the label “evolutionary creationists”) question the notion that the Genesis account requires belief in Adam’s historicity. In *The Language of God* Collins queries,

But what about the Garden of Eden? Is the description of Adam’s creation from the dust of the earth, and the subsequent creation of Eve from one of Adam’s ribs, so powerfully described in Genesis 2, a symbolic allegory of the entrance of the human soul into a previously soulless animal kingdom, or is this intended as literal history?⁴⁰

In his more recent book, *The Language of Science and Faith*, coauthored with Karl Giberson (author of *Saving Darwin: How to Be a Christian and Believe in Evolution*), Collins says that when it comes to how God created us—specifically Adam and Eve—neither “science nor the Bible answers that question.” As Collins and Giberson conclude,

Based on what we know today about both science and the ancient world of the Hebrews, it is simply not reasonable to try to turn the brief comments [of Genesis] into a biologically accurate description of how humans originated. One point is that the Genesis account does not tell us how God created—only that God did create and that human beings are a part of God’s plan and not an accident.⁴¹

We would be remiss not to mention another well-known theistic evolutionist who does not hold to a historical Adam, Peter Enns. An affiliate professor of biblical studies at Eastern University and a past contributor to BioLogos, Enns is author of *The Evolution of Adam*. He

39. Francis Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 209–10.

40. *Ibid.*, 206–7.

41. Karl W. Giberson and Francis S. Collins, *The Language of Science and Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 206.

acknowledges that a historical Adam has been the traditional Christian view but concludes that “[t]o appeal to this older consensus as a way of keeping the challenge of evolution at bay is not a viable option for readers today.”⁴² Enns instead argues that “the special creation of the first Adam as described in the Bible is not literally historical.”⁴³ Enns has been at the forefront of the discussion over Adam in part because of his contention that the apostle Paul should be viewed as a first-century man who incorrectly believed in Adam’s historicity, but only because Paul did not have access to current archaeological and scientific knowledge.

Enns and Francis Collins, as well as the opposing response from those who affirm a historical Adam, have done much to frame public discourse on the topic. The first view in this book, presented by Denis O. Lamoureux, agrees with Enns and Collins in rejecting a historical Adam, though Lamoureux’s perspective is not identical to that of either of them. The other three views presented in this book uphold a historical Adam in one way or another. Each contributor offers his own distinctive view, differing from one another not only in regard to how they view Scripture’s accounts concerning creation in light of evolutionary science, but especially with regard to how they view Adam. Nevertheless, all agree on the central importance of resolving the question of Adam’s historicity adequately.

It is to this central question that we now turn.

A Preview of *Four Views on the Historical Adam*

In addressing the debate over a historical Adam, each contributor has been asked to present the case for his position, supporting his view from the Scriptures as well as addressing any extrabiblical material (e.g., Ancient Near Eastern literature, evolutionary theory) that might be relevant to the topic. In defending their positions, we have asked them to answer three key questions:

1. *What is the biblical case for your viewpoint, and how do you reconcile it with passages and potential interpretations that seem to counter it?* In responding to this question, each contributor was

42. Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012), xvi..

43. *Ibid.*

asked to explain his overarching hermeneutic as well as the specific hermeneutic he employs when interpreting the first chapters of Genesis, including New Testament references to those chapters. In doing so, it was necessary for each contributor to speak to how evolution should or should not affect his hermeneutical approach to Genesis 1–2, especially when it comes to the historicity of Adam.

2. *In what ways is your view more theologically consistent and coherent than other views?* Each contributor was asked to relate his view of Adam to his view of revelation (special and general), Scripture (specifically the doctrine of inerrancy), creation, redemption in Christ, and any other relevant theological matter. Therefore, while the bulk of each chapter focuses on details surrounding the origins debate, at various points each contributor draws out implications of his view for corresponding theological issues.
3. *What are the implications your view has for the spiritual life and public witness of the church and individual believers, and how is your view a healthier alternative for both?* In this final question we get to the big picture surrounding the debate. Each contributor devotes some attention to the particular “problems” his view solves for a personal understanding of the Bible, the integration of faith and science, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the church’s witness to Christ in the public square.

Answering these questions are four scholars who have devoted themselves to the issue at hand. While it is not possible to represent every position in this Counterpoints book, we are confident that these scholars represent the four major positions that evangelicals today must evaluate. Following are brief introductory summaries of these four views without supporting argumentation.

1. *No Historical Adam: Evolutionary Creation View*, by Denis Lamoureux, Associate Professor of Science and Religion at St. Joseph’s College in the University of Alberta, and author of *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution*.⁴⁴

44. Denis Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008).

Lamoureux argues that while Christians in the past affirmed a historical Adam, the evidence for evolution precludes such belief today. Rather, God created the universe through the natural process of evolution, and humanity's existence also results from evolutionary development. Evolutionary genetics and the fossil record indicate that humans "share with chimpanzees a last common ancestor that existed around six million years ago" and that we descended not from one couple (Adam and Eve), but from a group of around 10,000. While Lamoureux acknowledges that some scholars have tried to incorporate a historical Adam with an evolutionary view (e.g., Bruce Waltke, Darrel Falk, Denis Alexander), he argues that such an attempt is misguided because it seeks to combine modern science with ancient science, the latter of which God accommodated as an incidental vessel through which he communicated inerrant spiritual truths.

Specifically, Lamoureux rejects scientific concordism, the idea that God chose to reveal through the Scriptures certain scientific facts and that modern science, properly understood, can be aligned with the Bible. To the contrary, he says, the authors of Scripture had an ancient perception of the world, apparent in their belief in a three-tiered universe, their view of the "firmament," and elsewhere. When it comes to humanity's biological origins, the biblical authors likewise had a primordial understanding. They held to "*de novo* creation," the belief that God created man and everything else directly, immediately, and completely, that is, fully mature.

Lamoureux argues that Adam did not exist, but that this fact does not damage the core and essential beliefs of the Christian faith. Although the biblical authors affirmed an ancient view of the world and man's biological origins (e.g., Paul's view of Adam in Romans 5:12–19), this in no way should erode our confidence in Scripture. Adam is not a historical person, but another example of an incidental vessel through which Scripture conveys inerrant spiritual truths. While Adam is not historical, the Second Adam, Christ Jesus, is a historical person who died for our sins.

2. *A Historical Adam: Archetypal Creation View*, by John Walton, Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College. Walton is the author of numerous books, including *The Lost World of Genesis: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*.⁴⁵

In contrast to Lamoureaux, Walton believes that Adam was a historical person. However, his historicity is not where Scripture places its emphasis. Rather, Scripture's primary concern is to speak of Adam and Eve as archetypal representatives of humanity. Walton argues that not only do Old and New Testament passages support his view, but also evidence from Ancient Near Eastern literature strongly buttresses his claim.

Nowhere is this archetypal emphasis more evident than in Genesis 2. The author is *not* concerned with the material formation of Adam and Eve as biological beings. Rather, the author is concerned with the function of mankind. Consequently, the purpose and intent of Genesis 2 is *not* to make a statement about our biological origins, nor about the biological origins of Adam and Eve. Evangelicals are misguided if they pit the Bible over against modern science when it comes to the issue of human origins.

Therefore, Walton makes space for the possibility that Adam and Eve, though historical persons, may not be the first humans who came into existence or the parents of all humankind.

While Walton acknowledges that evolution can be used in wrong ways (e.g., to argue for a purposeless, godless process), he believes that there is nothing inherently troubling with evolution "guided purposefully by an infinitely powerful and sovereign God." While Walton does not take a stance on evolution, rejecting it or accepting it, his model allows for the incorporation of evolution.

Additionally, the theological points Scripture makes in appealing to Adam (sin, death, second Adam, etc.) do not rest upon the belief that Adam and Eve are historically the first

45. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

and only persons or the parents of mankind. Their parenthood is to be viewed archetypally, not materially. Walton emphasizes that Scripture's inerrancy applies to explicit claims and affirmations of the text; since the Bible makes no scientific claims about our material human origins, inerrancy is not brought into question by various views on origins. One should not apply inerrancy, he argues, to claims the text does not make.

3. *A Historical Adam: Old-Earth Creation View*, by C. John Collins, Professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary. Collins is the author of *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist? Who They Were and Why You Should Care* and *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?*⁴⁶

Collins argues that Adam and Eve were real, actual, historical persons. A historical Adam and Eve make the best sense not only of the story line of Scripture, but also of our human experience as sinners, children of Adam, in need of redemption through the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

Collins takes Genesis 2 as describing historical persons, whom God created as those made in his own image. Genesis 2 sets the stage for the entire biblical story line and worldview, and Collins believes the biblical authors were aware of this. They were narrating salvation-history, specifically God's "great works of creation and redemption," and not merely a catalog of timeless truths. Sin came into the world through Adam, and the entire Old Testament is the story of how God enters into a covenant relationship with his people precisely because they have been estranged from him due to sin. God is on a mission, therefore, to rescue sinners, and he does so ultimately through the death and resurrection of the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

Collins also believes the New Testament authors affirmed a historical and biblical story line beginning with Adam. Christ himself believed in a historical Adam, according to Collins, and Paul compares and contrasts our death in Adam

46. C. John Collins, *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist? Who They Were and Why You Should Care* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011); idem, *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003).

to our life in Christ. Collins, therefore, concludes that the story line of Scripture demonstrates that (1) humankind is one family, originating from one pair of ancestors (Adam and Eve), (2) God created Adam and Eve supernaturally, and (3) Adam and Eve, the “headwaters” of humankind, brought sin into the world. Apart from this biblical narrative, which features a historical pair, the story line of Scripture makes little sense, as does our human experience as sinners, children of Adam, in need of redemption.

Collins’s affirmation of an old earth sets his belief in a historical Adam apart from the next contributor, Bill Barrick (young-earth creationist). Collins reads Genesis 1–2 in such a way that would not preclude some evolutionary processes or long intervals of time elapsing in the biblical days of creation. Moreover, Collins entertains the possibility that Adam and Eve, though the headwaters of the human race that follows, may not have been the only pair of humans in the beginning. So while Adam is a historical person, he may not have been the only person, but perhaps was the chieftain of his tribe. Nevertheless, while willing to affirm an old earth, Collins remains critical of theistic evolution, at least in its strongest forms, because he believes it fails to account for the uniqueness of human beings, as those made in the image of God, something that goes beyond mere natural processes.

Collins upholds inerrancy but argues that a literalistic view of, for instance, twenty-four-hour days in Genesis 1 is not necessitated by a careful and accurate reading of Scripture.

4. *A Historical Adam: Young-Earth Creation View*, by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament at The Master’s Seminary. Barrick contributed to the book *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, is the Old Testament editor of the Evangelical Exegetical Commentary series, and is the author of the Genesis commentary in that forthcoming series.⁴⁷

47. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury, eds., *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Publishing, 2008).

Barrick makes a case from Scripture for Adam as a historical person and as the originating head of humankind. Adam is not primarily an archetype (Walton) nor a product of biological evolution (Lamoureaux). Rather, he is the first person, supernaturally created by God, and the father of all mankind. Barrick argues that such a view is apparent not only in Genesis 1–2 but throughout the New Testament as well, especially in the writings of Paul.

Moreover, like Collins, Barrick believes numerous biblical doctrines follow from and are dependent on a historical Adam. Perhaps most important is the gospel itself. Appealing to Paul's argumentation in Romans 5:12–19, among other texts, Barrick stresses that without a historical Adam—and consequently a historical fall into sin—there is no need for a historical second Adam, namely, Christ Jesus, to undo Adam's sin and its consequences for Adam's children. Barrick contends that the arguments made against a historical Adam today are similar to those used by theological liberals of a past era to argue against Christ's historical resurrection.

Barrick argues that a historical Adam is foundational to a plethora of other doctrines as well, including a biblical understanding of God's creative activity, the history of the human race, the nature of mankind as made in God's image, the origin and nature of sin (e.g., original sin), the existence and nature of death, the reality of salvation from sin, the historical events recorded in Genesis, and Scripture's authority, inspiration, and inerrancy.

Barrick affirms a historical Adam within the bounds of a young-earth perspective, a view he believes Scripture strongly supports. In other words, the days of creation are twenty-four hour days. Therefore, Barrick rejects not only theistic evolution (Lamoureaux), but also old-earth creationism (Collins). He concludes that a historical Adam and a young-earth perspective are integral to one another.

Concerning the relationship between faith and science, Barrick argues that because Scripture is inspired by God and therefore inerrant, the author of Genesis (Moses),

superintended by the Holy Spirit, wrote an accurate, historical narrative of the days of creation. Accordingly, Moses, Jesus, and Paul did not adopt a mistaken view of the cosmos, but their assertions and assumptions written in Scripture, properly interpreted and understood, are correct and without error. Furthermore, Barrick affirms that the author of Genesis intended to record the material creation of the world, not just an archetypal representation of humanity's origins, and that Genesis is always to be given priority over ANE stories. The same principle applies to science: Where the claims and theories of modern science (i.e., evolution) contradict what the Bible says, one is to side with Scripture, for it alone is inspired by God and therefore inerrant and authoritative.

While these very brief summaries highlight the main tenets of each view, not only is there far more to be said, but how each contributor argues his case, bringing the evidence to bear on the issue, calls for careful attention from readers. But first, a most important question must be asked.

What Impact Does This Debate Have on the Christian Faith?

Too often in debates of this nature we fail to take the next step. While we may rise to the highest levels of intellectual debate, we easily neglect that which is most important, namely, applying the debate concerning Adam's historicity to the Christian life. Doing so is not easy. Nevertheless, it does allow us to see which views are able to be applied consistently and which views impact Christian living either positively or negatively. Therefore, at the end of this book we have included two pastoral reflections, by two scholars who have much experience in the church, Gregory Boyd and Philip Ryken, to represent two different stances on the debate and its impact on the Christian faith.

Gregory Boyd, who taught at Bethel University for sixteen years, is senior pastor of Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. As the title of his chapter indicates, Boyd argues that our faith is secure whether or not there was a historical Adam. On the other side is Philip Ryken, who had been pastor at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia since 1995 until being appointed president of Wheaton College

in 2010. In his chapter Ryken argues, opposite of Boyd, that without a real, historical Adam we cannot rightly understand the world or our Christian faith.

Both Boyd and Ryken enter the discussion having read the contributors' chapters and responses to one another. Their purpose is to write from the perspective of a pastor-theologian, not regurgitating all of the details that were covered in the four chapters of the book, but instead looking at the big picture and how this issue changes (or doesn't change) the Christian faith and the church. In doing so, they seek to address questions such as:

- Does Adam's existence or nonexistence affect the rest of the Christian faith and those doctrines Christians have historically affirmed throughout the centuries?
- Does Adam's existence or nonexistence shape a Christian worldview, especially the biblical story line from creation, fall, and redemption, to new creation?
- Does Adam's existence or nonexistence have an impact on the gospel, or how the gospel is preached and applied, specifically in the church?
- Does Adam's existence or nonexistence have influence on how we live the Christian life and "do church" as the body of Christ?
- Does Adam's existence or nonexistence make a difference in our evangelical witness to a watching world?
- What is at stake in this debate for evangelicals in the church today?

How Important Will This Debate Be for Evangelicalism?

In his chronicling of the historical Adam controversy, Richard Ostling asks the probing question, "Is the Adam and Eve question destined to become a groundbreaking science-and-Scripture dispute, a 21st-century equivalent of the once disturbing proof that the Earth orbits the sun?" He answers,

The potential is certainly there: the emerging science could be seen to challenge not only what Genesis records about the creation of humanity but the specie's unique status as bearing the "image of God," Christian doctrine on original sin and the Fall, the genealogy

of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, and, perhaps most significantly, Paul's teaching that links the historical Adam with redemption through Christ (Rom. 5:12–19; 1 Cor. 15:20–23, 42–49; and his speech in Acts 17).⁴⁸

For the traditional view, original sin, the image of God, redemption in Christ, and the reliability and inerrancy of Scripture, as well as how biblical history itself is to be understood, are all connected to Adam's existence as the father and representative of the human race. Therefore, to reinterpret Adam is not without serious consequences.⁴⁹

According to many theistic evolutionists, however, to continue reading Genesis 1–3 as recording actual history with Adam and Eve as the first human pair is a serious blunder, for it means that we have put our heads in the sand, ignoring the scientific evidence for human biological evolution. Therefore, theistic evolutionists conclude that the integrity of our faith is at stake in the Adam debate. To reject evolution is to reject science and intellectual honesty.

So who is right? Is Adam a historical person or not? And what is at stake in such a debate? We invite you to explore the answers to these questions in the chapters that follow.

48. Richerd N. Ostling, "The Search for the Historical Adam," *Christianity Today* 55, no. 6 (June 2011): 24.

49. For example, see D. A. Carson, "Adam in the Epistles of Paul," in *In the Beginning: A Symposium on the Bible and Creation*, ed. N. M. de S. Cameron (Glasgow: The Biblical Creation Society, 1980), 41; R. Albert Mohler Jr., "False Start? The Controversy over Adam and Eve Heats Up" (August 22, 2011), <http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/08/22/false-start-the-controversy-over-adam-and-eve-heats-up/>.