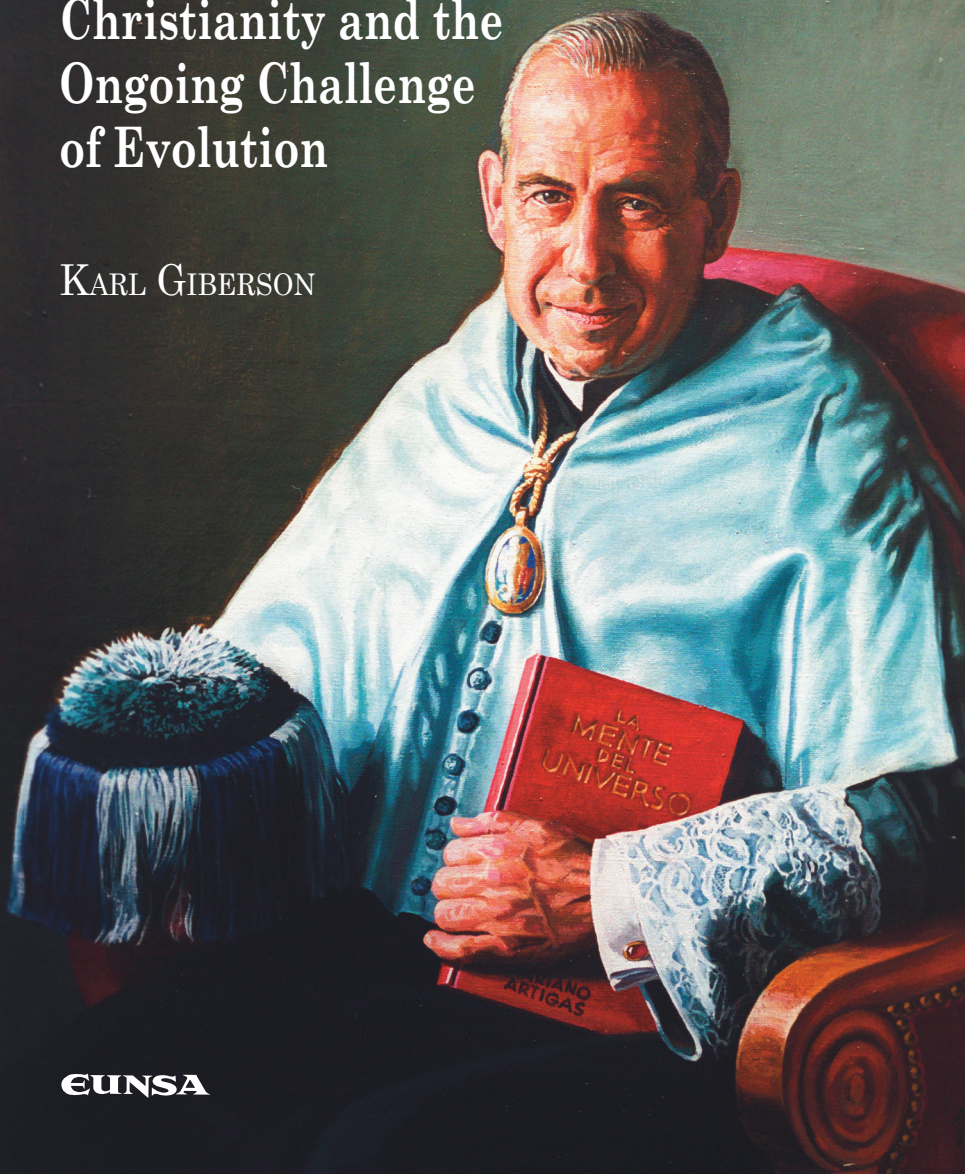


LECCIÓN CONMEMORATIVA
MARIANO ARTIGAS
MEMORIAL LECTURE

**All Coherence Gone:
Christianity and the
Ongoing Challenge
of Evolution**

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EUNSA

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*We can represent our world as an unfinished
symphony where we have a role to play*

MARIANO ARTIGAS

In 1572 a new star appeared in the heavens. It was an impossible event. An astronomical tradition going back to Aristotle had declared that the heavens were perfect and unchanging, a generalization that had gone unchallenged for two millennia. Thomas Aquinas had declared, more than three centuries earlier, that the perfection of the heavens —everything beyond the orbit of the moon— reflected the untainted grandeur of God's original perfect creation. Adam's sin had scarred only the earthly realm, turning it into a debauched sphere of satanic ruin that extended to the moon and no further. So how was it that the unchanging heavens were suddenly sporting a new star?

The new star also challenged the Christian doctrine of creation, in which everything was created over the course of six days, after which God ceased his creative work and rested. How did this new star originate, some six thousand years after God had announced that his work was finished, and the completed creation was «very good»?

The most celebrated observer of the new star was the great astronomer Tycho Brahe who, because he was a great astronomer, found himself «amazed...as-

tonished and stupefied.» His response, naturally, was to verify the strange new member of the unchanging heavenly pantheon:

When I had satisfied myself that no star of that kind had ever shone forth before, I was led into such perplexity by the unbelievability of the thing that I began to doubt the faith of my own eyes... And at length, having confirmed that my vision was not deceiving me, but in fact that an unusual star existed there... immediately I got ready my instrument. I began to measure its situation and distance from the neighboring stars.¹

The new star of 1572 threatened the comfortable division of the world into the «heavens and the earth,» a convenient dualism begun with the first verse in the Bible, independently reinforced by Aristotle's astronomy, and upgraded into Christian theology by Aquinas. Indeed it was the shattering of this dualism that would be the primary challenge to Copernicus's claim, championed most famously by Galileo, that the earth was located in those perfect heavens, orbiting about the sun.

Galileo's assault on this theologically comforting dualism came to a head in 1632 with the publication of his most famous work *Dialogue on The Two World Systems*. A year later he was kneeling before the Inquisition in Rome, recanting his Copernican heresy. This is the original «Galileo Moment» which continues to re-

1. Francis Reddy, «High Speed Star Flees Tycho's Blast», *Astronomy Magazine*, November 3, 2004, <http://astronomy.com/asy/default.aspx?c=a&id=2571>, accessed March 31, 2007.

verberate through Christianity as an enduring reminder of how not to respond to the advance of science.

The great British poet John Donne was born in the year that Brahe's supernova appeared. He died in 1631, while Galileo was finishing his infamous book. It was a tumultuous six decades for educated European Christians as they watched their tidy medieval universe disintegrate.

In 1611, during the early stages of Galileo's confrontation with the Church, Donne, whose career also included significant tenures in both politics and the Anglican priesthood, penned these memorable lines, eloquently expressing the anxiety of a culture losing its way:

And new philosophy calls all in doubt,
The element of fire is quite put out,
The sun is lost, and the earth, and no man's wit
Can well direct him where to look for it.
And freely men confess that this world's spent,
When in the planets and the firmament
They seek so many new; they see that this
Is crumbled out again to his atomies.
'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone,
All just supply, and all relation;
Prince, subject, father, son, are things forgot,
For every man alone thinks he hath got
To be a phoenix, and that then can be
None of that kind, of which he is, but he.

The phrase «all coherence gone» aptly summarizes the 17th century's «Galileo Moment.» «Moment» how-

ever, does not capture the enduring anxiety of Christians whose planetary home was forcibly removed from its natural, logical and comfortable location at the center of the world and placed, inexplicably, randomly, and tenuously in the third orbit about the sun. Nominally a puzzling «promotion» from the sinful center of the world into the perfect and unfallen heavens, the location of the newly planetized earth was in fact an announcement that the entire organizational scheme—heavens and earth— had collapsed: «Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone.»

The theological anxiety attending the movement of the earth eventually quieted as Christians made their peace with it. The conventional wisdom is that even the most committed fundamentalists eventually came around, the last holdout being the ultra-conservative Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church, that finally made their peace with Copernicus in 1905. At the present time I am unaware of a single faith community that rejects the notion that the earth goes around the sun. And so the story ends, with Christianity—even in its more conservative manifestations— having made peace with Copernicus after some modest adjustments in the areas of biblical interpretation and theology.

The lesson to be drawn from the Copernican controversy—most famously spotlighted by Galileo's trial before the Inquisition—is often applied to evolution as though that controversy has been successfully resolved and is now a model for how to handle such things.

Those of us struggling to promote evolution to skeptical evangelicals—as I have been doing for three

decades— invoke this history, hoping by analogy to open closed minds to the possibility that evolution might be both true, and compatible with Christian faith, just as heliocentricity has turned out to be both true and compatible with the Christian faith. Indeed in my first book, written almost a quarter century ago I wrote: «The Galileo incident, when extracted from the significant political and personal milieu in which it was embedded, can serve as a paradigm for the present conflict.»² My thinking —far from original— was that Christians should deal with Darwin and evolution, just as they dealt with Galileo and heliocentricity. I am no longer convinced this analogy works.

The present controversy over the historical Adam is being labeled in some circles as another «Galileo Moment,» although the present controversy is really just the ongoing battle over evolution, recently intensified by emerging genetic evidence against a literal first man. As I have looked more closely at the arguments defending Adam and assaulting evolution, however, I have come to see that the present controversy is really quite continuous with the one that gave John Donne such pause in the 17th century, namely, the longing for coherence and the demand that it not be lost.

17th century concerns about what Copernicus and Galileo did to the earth were not primarily about its location or movement *per se*. There were, to be sure, a few

2. Karl Giberson. *Worlds Apart: The Unholy War Between Religion and Science* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1993) p. 50

awkward Bible verses about the earth being «fixed» but they were easily handled as figurative or observational, once it became clear that the earth was indeed in motion. The real issue was the loss of the *order* that created the structure on which the Christian worldview had been based. In particular, the well-defined earthly realm, extending only to the moon where the corruption of sin ended, provided a comforting limitation on the extent of the curse placed by God on the creation. When Donne says «The sun is lost, and th'earth, and no man's wit can direct him where to look for it» he is lamenting that the new location of the earth makes no sense in the theological scheme of things. Why are we looking in the perfect heavens for the imperfect earth? Why do we seek the perfect sun at the center of the world, as far from God as possible? What parts of the world share in the curse of sin? Where is the boundary between the heavens and the earth, between perfect and imperfect, between changing and eternal?

Note how the following 17th-century objection to Copernican astronomy is based entirely on the way it disrupts the system of religious thinking, rather than the challenges it poses to a literal reading of the Bible:

It upsets the whole basis of theology. If the earth is a planet, and only one among several planets, it cannot be that any such great things have been done especially for it as the Christian doctrine teaches. If there are other planets, since God makes nothing in vain, they must be inhabited; but how can their inhabitants be descended from Adam? How can they trace back

their origin to Noah's ark? How can they have been redeemed by the Savior?³

Today's anxiety about the historical Adam takes this same form. The literal meaning of the Bible verses about his origin—created from dust in a perfect garden in the Middle East about 6000 years ago—is up for grabs, just as the literal meaning of biblical references to the fixity of the earth has long been up for grabs. Only the most fundamentalist Christians who reject most of science anyway feel no pressure to modify their interpretations of Genesis. For Christians who take science seriously the *biblical* Adam is not as important as the *theological* Adam—that is, Adam as the source of sin, death, and the Curse is what matters, not when and where he lived. In other words, Adam has a role to play in keeping the theological system *coherent* just as a centralized earth had such a role.

Today's controversy over evolution and the historical Adam is best understood as the ongoing controversy over the Copernican revolution because of the great degree of overlap between the central concerns raised by each—concerns about how the *overall* Christian understanding of the world and its history, especially the central theological role played by humans, fits with the reality disclosed by science.

A historical Adam fits into the Christian Theology scenario known as «Creation-Fall-Redemption»: God

3. Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (New York: Free Press, 1965), p. 130

created everything perfect in the beginning; a human choice to reject God and commit sin messed up the perfect creation—all of it; Jesus’s work of salvation redeems humans from that sin, a precursor to God redeeming all of creation at the end of time, creating a «new heavens and a new earth.» Phrases like the «unified biblical narrative» are often applied to this simple scheme.⁴

The theological *system* here contains the following elements: 1) God created a perfect world free from sin, consistent with his nature and omnipotence; 2) God gave his creatures freedom; 3) The creatures—Adam and Eve—abused their freedom and sinned; 4) the source of all the imperfection, evil, death, and suffering is the sin of Adam, and God is in no way responsible for it—he created only perfection; 5) God, working through Christ, redeems humans from their sin; 6) God wraps it up at the end.

This scenario entwines naturally with the medieval worldview. God creates the world with two realms—earthly and heavenly—both perfect. When Adam sins, God curses the earthly realm, the human part of the world, conveniently bounded by the orbit of the moon. This curse creates thorns, carnivores, and germs that produce sickness. God does not curse the heavens since that part of the creation is completely separate from the realm where Adam lived.

4. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/november/big-story-of-scripture-creation-fall-redemption.html>

The entanglement of the two concerns —the location in space of the earth and the location in time of Adam— emerges when we look at two related theological questions: 1) the special role played by humans in the divine drama; and 2) the spatial and temporal extent of the Fall. If the earth orbits the sun what is the *spatial domain* of the Curse? When Neil Armstrong stepped onto the moon was his footprint on perfect soil? Does the Mars rover explore a perfect planet that could never be home to weeds and thorns? Is the outer solar system photographed by the Voyager spacecrafts different than the region around the earth? Are aliens on distant planets sinful? Would aliens like Star Trek's «Mr. Spock,» with one human parent, inherit Adam's original sin? These questions seem strangely out of place in an age of science and yet a curse on the physical creation has long been a central Christian doctrine, discarded only by liberal theology.

In the same way, the *temporal domain* of the curse is impossible to pin down in time without a historical Adam at the beginning of time. If sin and death entered the world with Adam's sin, how did so many species go extinct before he sinned? If nature was indeed «red in tooth and claw» before sin, is God then responsible for so much suffering? Did God *intend* the lion to chase down the hapless zebra as we see on nature shows? Or is that grisly scenario a consequence of human sin? If we evolved from earlier life-forms, how did our sinful natures arise? And at what point in the development of ever more intelligent primates does the concept of «sin» begin to make sense? Do we even have sinful na-

tures? If there is no fall from perfection, then what does salvation mean? Is it «all in pieces, all coherence gone»?

Searching for Coherence

Most Christian thinkers agree that there exists no satisfactory resolution to the origin of sin, the nature and extent of the curse, and the closely related *problem of evil*. This mystery extends to Adam and Eve, and whatever role they may have played in this perennial theological problem. A 2013 edited volume to which I made a modest contribution, titled *God and Evil*, begins by noting that «There are few topics in the history of Christianity —indeed, of Western thought in general— about which more has been discussed than this one.»⁵ Adam's role in bringing evil into the world figures prominently in the discussions. In fact, it would be fair to say that Adam plays a significant role in all 20 of the discussions.

Tensions inherent in taking «God's Two Books» seriously are nowhere more apparent than in this controversy. Elaborate explanatory scenarios align along a near-continuum from a biblical literalism that rejects science to a theological liberalism that summarily rejects troubling Biblical claims. In between the ex-

5. Chad Meister and James K. Dew, Jr., eds. *God and Evil: The Case for God in a World Filled with Pain* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013) p. 9

tremes are creative efforts to keep the Two Books in conversation.

The British biochemist and leading science-and-religion scholar Denis Alexander has tried to sort this out. He identifies five categories into which the scenarios fall:

1) An «ahistorical view» with «no connection at all between the theological and biological narratives.» Adam and Eve are mythological characters unrelated to any humans from any period in history. Genesis is making a purely theological point about «the role and importance of humankind in God’s purposes.» This, of course, is not without its complications since many scientific developments suggest that humankind does not look all that special.

2) A «gradualist protohistorical view» that, while not historical in any conventional sense, does «refer to events that took place in particular times and conditions.» The story of Adam is not history, but the narrative points at a history «that took place over a prolonged period of time during the early history of humanity in Africa.» Humanity gradually became aware of God and responded to God’s calling in «obedience and worship.»

3) A «gradualist protohistorical view» that takes biblical events and locations seriously, locating them «within the culture and geography that the Genesis text provides.» The assumption is that actual, theologically relevant historical episodes lie «behind the text,» but that science and history—including human evolution—should not be distorted to make room for them.

Adam and Eve are firmly rooted in history, but are not necessarily identical to the couple in Genesis.

4) An interventionist «old earth creationism» view that, in the concordist tradition discussed in previous chapters, seeks a creative but literal reading of the Bible that can be squared with the well-established, scientifically undeniable, and theologically benign notion that the earth is old.

5) A science-denying «young earth creationism» that rejects claims that the «Book of Nature» is itself a revelation from God, with authority on par with the Bible. Science is rejected or speculatively reframed to preserve a «natural» reading of the Bible in English.⁶

The balance between the Bible and science in this set of models can be struck in a variety of ways, all of which create dramatic and very different versions of the story of Adam, sin, the curse and evil.

Creating Adams

Not surprisingly, America's resilient and prospering young earth creationists continue to astonish with their elaborations of their science-free model in the light of new scientific discoveries, like the possibility of life on other planets.

Not long ago the media buzzed with speculation about a newly discovered planet far from our solar

6. Denis Alexander. *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2008) p. 254-256

system, Gliese 581g. The new planet could possibly be inhabited since its temperature was compatible with water being a liquid, the most important ingredient in a biosystem. The news promoted speculation, as it always does, about the existence of aliens and how they would relate to us. Ken Ham, America's leading young earth creationist, weighed in and argued that the alien planet, like the earth, would have been victimized by the Fall: «The Bible makes it clear that Adam's sin affected the whole universe» he said. «This means that any aliens would also be affected by Adam's sin.»

This is an unimaginably strange claim. Ham is suggesting that, were there aliens on Gliese—which is trillions of miles from the earth—they would have suddenly seen a dramatic transformation of their planet about 6000 years ago when God punished Adam and Eve by cursing everything. Gliese would have been a sinless paradise, like the Earth before Adam sinned—assuming the Gliesans had not sinned. The Gliesans would have been happy, immortal (since there was no death before Adam sinned), and getting along fine with docile herbivores, and the laws of physics would not be causing everything to decay—no need for Gliesan dryers to have lint filters. All of a sudden, because of an act on a planet trillions of miles away, Gliese would have been stricken with inexplicable suffering, death, and different laws of physics. And, adding insult to injury, even though human sin on a distant Earth wrecked their planet, the poor Gliesans «can't have salvation,» says Ham. «Only descendants of Adam can be

saved.» To even «suggest that aliens could respond to the gospel is just totally wrong,» he says.⁷

Ham's commitment to a cosmic domain for the Curse flows directly from the challenge of Copernicus, which is why we need to tie them together. As long as the heavens and the earth could be separated, the effects of the Fall could be naturally constrained to an earthly realm. But, once the earth is lifted into the heavens the natural boundary for the influence of sin disappears, as the hapless Gliesans may have discovered 6000 years ago. Needless to say, Ham's view is incompatible with even a rudimentary scientific worldview, but it follows naturally from the commitments at the heart of young earth creationism, which is embraced by more than a third of Americans.

The view known as old earth creationism represents a giant scientific step forward in terms of the age of the earth although evolution is still rejected. Hugh Ross and his Reasons to Believe apologetics organization energetically defend old earth creationism with a traditional day-age concordist reading of Genesis, of the sort that 19th century geologists proposed. Ross is quick to deny that his concordism represents a compromise with science, insisting that a careful reading of the entire Bible —and not just the Genesis creation accounts— points clearly to the days of Genesis being long periods.⁸ Ross and his colleagues at

7. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/karl-giberson-phd/are-the-gliesans-going-to_b_751761.html

8. <http://www.reasons.org/articles/the-age-of-earth>

Reasons to Believe also insist that the «death» that was inaugurated at the Fall is just human death, accusing Ham and the young earth creationists of misinterpreting the critical comments of Paul on which that claim is based.⁹

Ross goes even further. Not only is death before the fall a part of the natural order but it was ordained by God to provide oil and other organically based raw materials that would eventually be used by humans. The benefits to humanity of these earlier life forms, says Ross, renders their suffering, death, and even extinction a good thing, and not an evil needing to be explained as a consequence of sin.

Ross holds a Ph.D. in astrophysics from a leading university and is widely regarded for his creativity and cleverness. He ingeniously locates the Garden of Eden in Africa to align with the discovery that humans originated there. He pushes Adam and Eve so far back their origins can be 100,000 years ago. He «predicts» that Y-Chromosome Adam has to be younger than Mitochondrial Eve since all males are descended from Noah's family after the flood, which is millennia after Eve, from whom all the mitochondrial DNA comes.¹⁰ Ross's approach borders on eccentric however; most people find it hard to imagine, for example, that the

9. <http://www.reasons.org/articles/animal-death-before-the-fall-what-does-the-bible-say>

10. Fazale Rana with Hugh Ross. *Who is Adam? A Creation Model Approach to the Origin of Man* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2005) p. 45

extinction of the dinosaurs was a «good» thing that God did to provide oil for our cars.

America's leading intelligent design theorist William Dembski holds the more mainstream position that death is indeed a real evil challenging Christian theology, and not a procedure to produce petroleum. Dembski, trained in mathematics and theology, is one of the most aggressive anti-evolutionists in the country but, like Ross, does accept that the earth is very old. His approach to the Fall, however, strains credulity.

Dembski holds the conventional view that God created a perfect world, without death, suffering or any kind of evil. Adam's sin and the resulting curse are responsible for every imperfection. He describes his book, *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World*, as an attempt «to resolve how the Fall of Adam would be responsible for all evil in the world, both moral and natural IF the earth is old and thus IF a fossil record that bespeaks violence among organisms predates the temporal occurrence of the Fall.» The description of the problem is mainstream, but his resolution is anything but.

Dembski proposes that «the effects of the Fall can go backward in time.» Insisting on the conventional view that Adam's sin is the cause of evil, he proposes a «retroactive view of the Fall, in which God by anticipation allows natural evil in consequence of the Fall.»¹¹

11. <http://blog.epsociety.org/2009/11/interview-with-william-dembski-end-of.asp>

Denis Alexander's own view is option (3) from the list above. Alexander accepts the great age of the earth, evolution—including human evolution—and millions of years of death, suffering and extinction prior to the arrival of humans. Consistent with his embrace of science he accepts that the evidence rules out the possibility that the human race ever consisted of one man and one woman.

Alexander is unwilling to jettison key Biblical ideas that play meaningful roles in Christian Theology. He seeks events that might lie «behind the text» that would make sense of the theological content of the biblical accounts, without insisting that the biblical accounts are themselves accurate portrayals of history. He suggests that the Genesis account is based on a historical episode where God reached into history and established a special relationship with humans:

«God in his grace chose a couple of Neolithic farmers in the Near East, or maybe a community of farmers, to whom he chose to reveal himself in a special way, calling them into fellowship with himself—so that they might know him as a personal God.»¹²

Consistent with others who hold similar views, Alexander calls these early humans *Homo divinus*, «the divine humans, those who know the one true God, the Adam and Eve of the Genesis account.»

12. Denis Alexander. *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2008) p. 236

«*Homo Divinus* were the first humans who were truly spiritually alive in fellowship with God», says Alexander. «*Homo divinus* marked the time at which God chose to reveal himself and his purposes for humankind for the first time.»¹³

My own work promoting evolution to Christians falls within the contours of (4) above. In my book, *Saving Darwin*, I suggested that what is labeled theologically «sin,» remains a useful insight into human nature, even after we abandon a historical Adam, his fall, and the original sin he passed on to us. I note, in fact, that G. K. Chesterton once quipped that original sin was the only Christian doctrine that could be empirically verified.

My proposal, shared by many Christians who have abandoned a historical Adam, is that evolution actually provides a *better* way to understand the origins of sin. The evolutionary process, we note, demands that creatures look out for themselves, leading naturally to «creatures with pathological levels of selfishness.» «Creatures inattentive to their own needs would not have made it. By these lights, God did not «build» sin into the natural order. Rather, God endowed the natural order with the freedom to «become,» and the result was an interesting, morally complex, spiritually rich, but ultimately selfish species we call *Homo sapiens*.»

13. Denis Alexander. *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2008) p. 237

This view is similar to Alexander's in that humans are understood as evolved creatures. But it does not require a historically unsupported intervention by God to account for the theologically interesting parts of human nature. On the other hand, it also challenges the notion of human uniqueness, suggesting that incipient or prototypical human characteristics related to religion —morality, worship, belief in God(s)— are present in our evolutionary ancestors and nearest primate relatives. This notion, clearly implied by evolutionary theory, is theologically controversial, to say the least.

So where are we?

I leaped into this conversation about human origins in 1988 with the publication of a short essay titled «Trustees of the Truth,» the first pro-evolution piece to appear in the denominational magazine of the Church of the Nazarene, my religious affiliation at the time. I was also teaching physics at Eastern Nazarene College. The president of the college reviewed the piece and asked me not to publish it as he thought it would generate more heat than light and possibly create problems for the college by upsetting fundamentalists. I ignored him but made the small concession that my by-line would not identify me as a professor at Eastern Nazarene College. The editor of the magazine told me later that my pro-evolution piece held the record for hate mail for over two years and was

only eclipsed by a controversial piece related to sex that appeared a few years later. Nothing on the topic has appeared since.

I published my first book on this topic in 1993, with the denominational publisher. It would have appeared earlier but it got caught in a firestorm of controversy, with powerful leaders of the Church of the Nazarene seeking to block its publication, even though a contract had been signed and the manuscript approved by the editorial staff. The chairman of the publisher's book committee, the Church of the Nazarene's leading theologian the time, lost his position for his role in the project, which included writing a foreword.

By the time I left the Church of the Nazarene in 2010, I felt beaten up and pessimistic about this conversation, at least as it occurs within the evangelical world. I had spent countless hours defending well-established science against attacks from people who knew nothing about science, beyond the challenges it posed to a literal reading of the Bible. Although the Church of the Nazarene explicitly rejected biblical literalism and its scholars were almost unanimous in endorsing evolution, the grass roots hostility to evolution was overwhelming—and leadership was simply unwilling to stand up for science. I was constantly subjected to negative attacks from fundamentalists, most of them deeply influenced by biblical literalists like Ken Ham. On many occasions pastors would write me letters demanding I explain my views and insisting that I was a leading students astray. The reaction when I responded that they could find my views in books I

had written was that they would certainly not be buying my books and providing me with royalties.

I had a similar experience with my work at the BioLogos Foundation, a project started by Francis Collins who, as of this writing, is the head of the National Institutes of Health and the former director of the human genome project. Collins is also the leading evangelical scientist in the world, by a considerable margin, and author of the bestseller, *The Language of God*. BioLogos was launched with the explicit mission to help evangelical Christians make peace with evolution, a conversation Collins had begun effectively in *The Language of God*.

Collins and I, together with a few other evangelical leaders, began the project convinced that we needed to help evangelical Christians understand that evolution had been established as true and they needed to accept it. None of us thought that Adam and Eve were historical characters and we were convinced that this was the primary problem that evangelicals had with evolution. If we could demonstrate that abandoning a historical Adam did not completely undermine the Bible and sink Christian Theology to the bottom of an ocean of heresy, the door would be open to an embrace of evolution. This turned out to be naïve.

The backlash against the BioLogos agenda was considerable. Donors, potential donors, pastors and other key players made it clear that the historical Adam was not up for grabs. The Old Testament scholar Peter Enns and I were both terminated because we were too clearly identified with this position. The BioLogos organization

backed away from strong advocacy of theistic evolution, and all that comes with it, to a more moderate conversation in which theistic evolution merely has a voice at the table. Perhaps this is as far as America's hundred million evangelicals are prepared to go at this point.

As it stands now, theistic evolution speaks with a quiet, often muted voice in America, and recent polls show it is losing ground.¹⁴ Young Earth Creationism, in contrast, is strongly and effectively promoted by several organizations, including Answers in Genesis with an annual budget of 20 million dollars. Old Earth Creationism is represented by Hugh Ross and Intelligent Design by the Discovery Institute, both with multi-million dollar budgets.

I have trouble envisioning progress on evolution and the question of the first man, given the size of the projects opposing evolution and their unwillingness to compromise. Efforts to refashion Adam so he can fit somewhere in natural history are met with great hostility by Biblical literalists, but literalists, of course, can't agree on what the Bible says. As close as they may be theologically, Ham and Ross sound like enemies when they debate what the bible says about the age of the earth.¹⁵ The Discovery Institute is positively venomous in its attacks on evolution, equating it with everything from atheistic materialism to Nazism.¹⁶

14. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/155003/Hold-Creationist-View-Human-Origins.aspx>

15. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWXqHeaVl2c>

16. <http://www.discovery.org/a/5159>

Prominent Southern Baptist theologian Al Mohler insists that the denial of Adam—or any other part of the bible— leads to the total collapse of Christianity: «Evangelical Christians will either stand upon the authority and total truthfulness of the Bible, or we will inevitably capitulate to the secular worldview.»¹⁷

Protestantism, alas, has no pope to adjudicate these conflicts and, as a consequence, its community is filled with religious entrepreneurs who build megachurches, creation museums, and television networks, founded on their own idiosyncratic understanding of Christianity, and generally unaffiliated with any larger religious tradition. Their projects are strengthened by the presence of enemies, real or imagined. They are free to convert theological trivia from the margins into orthodoxy, as the creationists did with the age of the earth.

Protecting the historicity of Adam is a central concern for many well-funded organizations and evangelical colleges. They are prepared to counter claims to the contrary and, if those claims come from within the evangelical community, marginalize and even expel the dissenters. Ironically, however, the Adams advanced and claims made on his behalf are often not biblical. The biblical Adam lived in the Middle East, not in Africa, as Ross suggests. The biblical Adam was created shortly after the earth, not billions of years later as Dembski and Ross propose. Adam and Eve were the

17. <http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/10/25/total-capitulation-the-evangelical-surrender-of-truth/>

first two humans, not members of a tribe of Neolithic farmers as Alexander proposes. And there is certainly no biblical warrant to suppose that Adam's sin changed the living conditions on other planets—a concept utterly foreign to the biblical authors— as Ham insists. Adam, like John Donne's earth, is lost, and no man's wit can tell us where to find the elusive first man.

A concluding scientific postscript

Christianity became the defining worldview of Western Culture at a time when the best understanding of the natural world supported its theological claims in remarkable ways. The theological centrality of God's incarnation as a humble first century Jew was reinforced by the centrality of the earth, the absolute need for a supernaturally created first couple, the uniqueness of the human species, and the obvious but profound effects of sin.

Science no longer provides the same sort of reinforcement and Christians remain deeply divided on how to respond to its sometimes grim revelations. The Copernican revolution has really not run its course. We have accepted that the earth is a planet, moving about the sun, in a solar system at the edge of the Milky Way galaxy but we don't know what to do with that knowledge. The earth is lost and we don't know where to look for it. Christian theologians continue to speak of the «Creation» as though it refers to the entire universe and even to the other universes that cosmol-

ogists tell us may exist. Many times I have heard theologians claim that «All creation is fallen.»

Unfortunately, the Biblical accounts are so parochial they offer little insight into how we might incorporate the new scientific picture into our theology. The first verse of Genesis should really have been translated «In the beginning God created the sky and the land,» to remind us that the account refers only to what the ancient scribe could see. We go beyond the biblical text, perhaps unjustifiably, when we enlarge the «heavens» to include galaxies of which the ancients had no knowledge.

Nowhere is this parochialism more apparent than in the account of the first couple, Adam and Eve. The narrative centers around them, from the naming of the animals, to the focus of the serpent's attention, to the curse and expulsion from Eden. The central plot-line of the Christian story leads to Jesus, with an accompanying genealogical table establishing that he is descended from Adam, and is best understood as a second Adam, as St. Paul wrote.

Ironically, at the same time that science challenges the notion of a Christian cosmos or a first human, we find ample scientific support for the very message that empowers the story of the first and second Adam: Humans are troubled creatures in need of salvation. Recent scientific work in evolutionary psychology, primatology, and sociology has illuminated our complex and troubled moral natures and our need to find meaningful lives within our communities. We grow, at least in the deeply religious United States, ever more

comfortable and ever more lonely. Our affluence enables us to make choices that work against our own happiness. We withdraw into gated communities with privileged neighbors we never get to know; we seek leaders who assure us that we have no responsibility for the less fortunate, outside the high walls of our gilded retreats. We get our news from sources that reinforce our self-absorption. Our idealistic youth, not surprisingly, flee religious communities that seem more interested in protecting Jesus's «Second Adam» status than embracing anything that Jesus taught, especially about caring for «The Least of These.» Pope Francis has become a prophetic voice for all Christians—not just Catholics—in his call for us to return to the teaching and priorities of Jesus.

I conclude on this note because I am convinced that Christianity's intramural quarrel about the historicity of the first man is, when all the briefs have been filed, all the systems constructed, all the creeds and confessions finalized and, of course, all the heretics run off, theologically irrelevant. The simple message of Jesus that we should live in loving community with each other, looking out for the less fortunate, ever aware of our own sinful nature and our tendency to put ourselves first, should trump any concerns about the nature and even the existence of the first man.