

## What Depends Upon a Historical Adam?

15 Comments

By [Steven Wedgworth](#)

Modern evangelicalism has always had something of an identity problem. Wanting to be neither Fundamentalism nor Liberalism, it has often found itself unable to sit comfortably in the middle. More often than not, and sometimes with a bit of pressure from either side, it ends up swinging back and forth between the poles, often unable to explain why it isn't one or the other. Traditionally a commitment to Biblical inerrancy was the one sure thing that all evangelicals could agree upon, but even that, in light of contemporary challenges, is proving inadequate. The question of hermeneutics must (again) be dealt with, as more and more professing evangelicals are re-reading the opening chapters of Genesis as myth. While the particulars of the discussion are not fully uniform (whether one must or should be a "literal" six-day creationist or not), the question of the historical Adam is now quite definitely the new lynchpin. We would like to here lay out some of the consequences of denying the historical Adam in order to substantiate our claim that this is a boundary of orthodoxy, but first a bit of context.

The reason that evangelicals are losing the historical Adam are several, but they all boil down to the dominance of the Darwinistic evolutionary theory, both in the academies and in the media. For both academic and cultural reasons, the denial of this evolutionary theory is shameful, and it is becoming increasingly clear that this theory also demands a sort of polygenesis. Thus the historical Adam cannot be retained. There are certainly those on both sides of the issue who hold out hope for a middle position, but as it currently stands, naturalistic science is basically agreed that the early chapters of Genesis cannot be historical. And so, in the face of this pressure, evangelicals are falling in line.

One of the more high-profile cases of late has been Dr. Peter Enns. Initially Dr. Enns claimed to be calling for conversation and open dialogue, particularly in the subject of hermeneutics, but upon his release from Westminster Theological Seminary, he has felt free to come out into the open. For Dr. Enns, now at least, there is no good reason, Biblical or otherwise, to believe that Adam was a singular historical person. <sup>1</sup>

Another former Westminster Theological Seminary professor, Dr. Tremper Longman, has been slightly more reserved on the issue. For him, the answer to the question of whether there was a historical Adam is a resounding "maybe."

While The Biologos Forum hosted Dr. Longman's opinion with an editorial caveat, it is clear that their mission to promote some form of theistic evolution is willing to accommodate such views. A recent graduate of the same Westminster Theological Seminary and now Fuller professor, J. R. Daniel Kirk, has just written his own article explaining that the Bible does not require belief in a historical Adam. The reader will notice that these three examples all come from the once ultra-conservative Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. The evidence would only multiply were we to move out into the more historically "moderate" institutions.

### **Motivations, Metanarratives, and Metaphysics**

What are the reasons for such a dramatic shift in such short time? Again, the persuasive force of evolutionary science is perhaps at its strongest point. At the turn of the 20th century, Herman Bavinck believed that the academic community was losing confidence in evolution. <sup>2</sup> At the turn of the 21st, nothing could be further from the case. With this academic pressure comes the perennial desire for the Christian faith to not stand in opposition to reason and evidence. This is actually a noble desire, at its root, and one which we fully share, provided the definitions are inspected and the intellectual integrity is equal in all disciplines. Unfortunately our qualifications have not been carefully attended to by our progressive evangelical writers, and instead of a confident drive into the midst of the challenge, they are instead very quickly and too-easily discarding the exegetical and theological disciplines. The cognitive pressure seems to run in only one direction. Ironically this is directly parallel with the older "fundamentalist" reaction that only sought to challenge the scientific consensus and not inspect its own assumptions. With the old bully on the block safely dispensed of, the persecuted minority is now turning the corner into a persecuting majority. It is clear that only Biblical exegesis remains in the dock.

Indeed, what we are seeing in theological circles is a new refusal to exegete at all. Instead of demonstrating the ways in which the rest of the Bible supports a figurative or mythical reading of Genesis, we are told that it doesn't matter if even the Old and New Testament writers were mistaken. Dr. Kirk asks, "Is it possible to affirm the point Paul wishes to make—that God's grace, righteousness, and life abound to the many because of Christ—without simultaneously affirming the assumptions with which he illustrated these things to be true?" His answer is typical of the new hermeneutical shift:

*To accompany Paul on the task of telling the story of the beginning in light of Christ, while parting ways with his first-century understanding of science and history, is not to abandon the Christian faith in favor of science. Instead, it demands a fresh act of faith in which we continue to hold fast to the truth that has always defined Christianity: the crucified Messiah is the resurrected Lord over all. Belief in Christ's resurrection was a stumbling*

*block for the ancients, and it is a stumbling block for us moderns as well—and increasingly so as we learn more about our human story and the biological processes entailed in life on this Earth. We do not give up on the central article of Christian faith when we use it to tell a renewed story of where we came from. On the contrary, we thereby give it the honor which is its due.*

Buried in this layered answer is the simple affirmative. Yes, “Is it possible to affirm the point Paul wishes to make... without simultaneously affirming the assumptions with which he illustrated these things to be true.” This is possible because “the story” is not really dependent upon history, at least not until we get to the crucifixion and resurrection. We can “retell the narrative” and “reimagine the story” just so long as we retain the Christological center. There is an essential kernel to the faith which can be intelligibly removed from the its husk, and we thus reminded the words of the Preacher: “There is nothing new under the sun.”

Here the reader sees the situation as it is. The dispute is not an exegetical one. It is barely a hermeneutical one. Rather, the current debate is a *metaphysical* one. The answers will be dependent upon prolegomena. Must the Biblical story be grounded in real history, or will it suffice if only “the Christ event” is so? What is never openly discussed, however, is the way in which separating “the Christ event” from its backstory changes the story itself. In fact, the story can no longer enjoy a definite article in the world-scope. Apart from its foundation in creation, it must rather become a story.

What exactly does this reimagining accomplish? The none-too-insignificant answer is that it changes our narrative of reality altogether. The Scriptures, and our religion, no longer tell a story about the structure of reality, but rather only of a particular subset of experience within it. In short, this retelling and reimagining also accomplishes a significant privatization of religious truth.

### **An Excursus on the Roman Catholic Position**

At this point we need to make an aside regarding the Roman Catholic position on the question of human origins. Lately some more academically-minded evangelicals have taken to looking to the Roman Catholic ministerium for leadership on social matters. The thinking goes that since the Roman Catholic clergy is generally both highly educated and very conservative, it will be a reliable guide. And since many lay catholics hold to evolution with little perceived trouble, the assumption is that most of the controversy is wholly internal to evangelicalism. And this is, in our current day, seen as a critique in itself. They believe that evangelicals are always missing the perspective of a bigger and more sophisticated institution.

There are several problems with this sort of approach to determining the

ecumenical status of the question, but the most basic is that it happens to be false. Relatively few people today, whether Roman Catholic or evangelical, actually know the Roman Catholic position on evolution and human origins. In *Humani Generis*, Pope Pius XII outlines the parameters of acceptable views on this topic, and while open to certain contributions from evolutionary theory, Darwinism as a whole is clearly condemned. The document as a whole is quite guarded with some very clear boundaries.

Fittingly, Pius begins with a discussion of hermeneutics and historicity, condemning the theologians of the *Nouvelle Théologie* for their, to put it in more Protestant terms, neo-orthodoxy. In the words of the subtitle, such views threaten “to undermine the foundation of Catholic doctrine.” He writes:

*14. In theology some want to reduce to a minimum the meaning of dogmas; and to free dogma itself from terminology long established in the Church and from philosophical concepts held by Catholic teachers, to bring about a return in the explanation of Catholic doctrine to the way of speaking used in Holy Scripture and by the Fathers of the Church. They cherish the hope that when dogma is stripped of the elements which they hold to be extrinsic to divine revelation, it will compare advantageously with the dogmatic opinions of those who are separated from the unity of the Church and that in this way they will gradually arrive at a mutual assimilation of Catholic dogma with the tenets of the dissidents.*

*15. Moreover, they assert that when Catholic doctrine has been reduced to this condition, a way will be found to satisfy modern needs, that will permit of dogma being expressed also by the concepts of modern philosophy, whether of immanentism or idealism or existentialism or any other system. Some more audacious affirm that this can and must be done, because they hold that the mysteries of faith are never expressed by truly adequate concepts but only by approximate and ever changeable notions, in which the truth is to some extent expressed, but is necessarily distorted. Wherefore they do not consider it absurd, but altogether necessary, that theology should substitute new concepts in place of the old ones in keeping with the various philosophies which in the course of time it uses as its instruments, so that it should give human expression to divine truths in various ways which are even somewhat opposed, but still equivalent, as they say. They add that the history of dogmas consists in the reporting of the various forms in which revealed truth has been clothed, forms that have succeeded one another in accordance with the different teachings and opinions that have arisen over the course of the centuries.*

Pius’s concerns about viewing dogma as the reporting of mere forms or as intellectual clothings which only exist over and around the true reality is precisely the problem we are dealing with today. He goes on to reject this skepticism

towards tradition and philosophy, and he even says that it is “wrong to depart from” some of the historic philosophical approaches to formulating doctrine.

Pius moves beyond philosophy and hermeneutics to the question of Scripture itself. As if anticipating the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, he states:

*For some go so far as to pervert the sense of the Vatican Council's definition that God is the author of Holy Scripture, and they put forward again the opinion, already often condemned, which asserts that immunity from error extends only to those parts of the Bible that treat of God or of moral and religious matters. They even wrongly speak of a human sense of the Scriptures, beneath which a divine sense, which they say is the only infallible meaning, lies hidden.*

Readers familiar with the history of 20th-century Protestant theology will find this all too familiar. The “new theologians” of Rome were arguing for essentially the same doctrine of inspiration as were the Protestant modernists. And this same position is being set forth again by our contemporary progressive evangelicals.

The encyclical goes on to address the matter of exegesis. While Pius certainly allows for figurative and even allegorical exegesis, these must still be grounded in the literal sense (see point 23). He even calls for all priests to be trained in Thomism, since “the method of Aquinas is singularly preeminent both of teaching students and for bringing truth to light; his doctrine is in harmony with Divine Revelation, and is most effective both for safeguarding the foundation of the faith and for reaping, safely and usefully, the fruits of sound progress” (point 31).

Moving more directly to the matter of evolution, Pius lays out the parameters of what is allowed by the Roman church:

*36. For these reasons the Teaching Authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions, on the part of men experienced in both fields, take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution, in as far as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter – for the Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God. However, this must be done in such a way that the reasons for both opinions, that is, those favorable and those unfavorable to evolution, be weighed and judged with the necessary seriousness, moderation and measure, and provided that all are prepared to submit to the judgment of the Church, to whom Christ has given the mission of interpreting authentically the Sacred Scriptures and of defending the dogmas of faith. Some however, rashly transgress this liberty of discussion, when they act as if the origin of the human body from pre-existing and living matter were already completely certain and proved by the facts which have been discovered up to now and by*

*reasoning on those facts, and as if there were nothing in the sources of divine revelation which demands the greatest moderation and caution in this question.*

Here the hypothesis that the material substance from which the human body was created may have been the product of evolution is allowed, so long as it is not thought to be a settled and certain conclusion. Still, there is a significant restriction placed upon this form of inquiry. The soul may not be included such a process. The point of human ensoulment must be wholly distinct and supernatural. Prior to Adam, there were no humans as we now use the term.

The theory of polygenesis is also condemned in no uncertain terms:

*37. When, however, there is question of another conjectural opinion, namely polygenism, the children of the Church by no means enjoy such liberty. For the faithful cannot embrace that opinion which maintains that either after Adam there existed on this earth true men who did not take their origin through natural generation from him as from the first parent of all, or that Adam represents a certain number of first parents. Now it is in no way apparent how such an opinion can be reconciled with that which the sources of revealed truth and the documents of the Teaching Authority of the Church propose with regard to original sin, which proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which, through generation, is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own.*

It should now be obvious that the Roman Catholic Church does *not* give carte blanche affirmation of Darwinian evolution. Nor does it allow the opening chapters to be deemed mythical or non-historical. "In a particular way must be deplored a certain too free interpretation of the historical books of the Old Testament." Pius states that while the first 11 chapters of Genesis may not be written according to strict historical methods, they "do nevertheless pertain to history in a true sense, which however must be further studied and determined by exegetes." He adds:

*If, however, the ancient sacred writers have taken anything from popular narrations (and this may be conceded), it must never be forgotten that they did so with the help of divine inspiration, through which they were rendered immune from any error in selecting and evaluating those documents.*

*39. Therefore, whatever of the popular narrations have been inserted into the Sacred Scriptures must in no way be considered on a par with myths or other such things, which are more the product of an extravagant imagination than of that striving for truth and simplicity which in the Sacred Books, also of the Old Testament, is so apparent that our ancient sacred writers must be admitted to be clearly superior to the ancient profane*

*writers.*

And so we see that the older Roman Catholic position is qualified and bounded by strict principles of truth, historicity, and even Biblical inerrancy. While the material substance used for Adam's body may have been the product of evolution, his soul could not have so been, and in any event, he must be deemed a true and historical figure from whom all subsequent humans descend. Furthermore, the opening chapters of Genesis must be considered "history in a true sense" and not equivalent to other world mythologies.

We have spent this time on the Roman Catholic position not to agree with the Pope's explanations or reasonings, nor to continue to encourage Protestants to look to Rome for their intellectual lead, but rather to set the question of history and Christian diversity straight. There is still considerable tension between the teachings of Rome and that of the modern scientific community when it comes to the doctrine of evolution, and even the Papacy views the historical Adam as a standard of orthodoxy. We evangelicals today are not making a mountain out of a molehill, nor are we overly paranoid to connect this question to the larger one of modernist and postmodern philosophy.

### **So, What Depends on a Historical Adam?**

We return to our main question, and we offer this unreserved thesis: The historicity of Adam determines the public nature of our religion. If Adam was a historical individual, then the Bible makes authoritative claims about all of humanity and indeed all of the cosmos. It can, at least in theory, be falsified, and it is thus a legitimate topic of dialectical discourse. It is rational and not a retreat to commitment. If Adam was not a historical individual, and if instead the Genesis account is a sort of mythical story which was employed in order to make a uniquely religious point, then Christianity is necessarily rendered merely metaphorical, expressing truths of the human condition through symbols. The Bible in this case is no longer an authoritative account of human origins, history, and final destiny. It no longer addresses all men in all places and times, but rather expresses one faith-narrative that seeks to convey a meaningful but wholly internal truth.

Put more simply: if Adam is mythical, then so is redemption. While it does not follow that if Adam is mythical, then the historicity of Jesus must also be denied, it *does* follow that if Adam is mythical, then the historicity of Jesus as Second Adam must be denied. And Christianity is founded on Jesus as Second Adam.

In order to support this claim, we must first define our terms and conversation. We are not here concerned with the age of the earth. That study is certainly important and rewarding, but it is not our immediate question. It touches only indirectly on our concerns, but nothing we say here depends upon one position

or the other in that field. We are not even dealing with Genesis chapter 1. It is conceded, nearly by all Christians, that the events of Genesis 1 are presented in a stylized form, with chapters 2–3 retelling the same events from a different perspective, in a somewhat different fashion. We could, in theory, set chapter 1 completely aside, and Genesis 2–3 would still provide us with sufficient exegetical material for our question. And so for this argument, neither the “literal six-day” position, nor the Day-Age Theory, nor the Framework Hypothesis, nor the Analogical-Day Theory is necessarily determinative. We are concerned *only* with the historicity of Adam, whether he was a real and singular person from whom all human beings descend and whose actions are the cause of all sin, suffering, and death.

In addition to explaining the origin of sin and death, the opening chapters of Genesis explain the foundation for human society. Genesis 2:18–22 makes much out of Adam’s initial lonely condition, his relationship to the animals, and then the rationale for the creation of woman. In Christian theology, this last issue is typically included under the language of “creation ordinances.” But if these ordinances are not actually related to creation, as it happens, then the nature of their moral claim falls as well. They are simply “ordinances,” not “creation ordinances.”

This Eden situation, described as occurring in real time and space and affecting all subsequent world history, must be dealt with in all discussions of evolution and human origins. To simply dismiss it, while perhaps making the scientific investigation easier, does not actually satisfy the exegetical or theological questions. Such a move does not even take the questions seriously. And as we will see, both spiritual and temporal claims are dependent upon the answers to these questions.

### **The Historical Adam in Pauline Theology**

In two different places the Apostle Paul appeals to the details of Genesis 2 and 3, including their chronological order, to support his views of sexual identity and the complementary relationship between the sexes. First Corinthians 11:8–9 says, “For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.” Many modern readers, not being entirely happy with the Apostle’s views regarding men and women, and also finding his larger argument for head coverings entirely off-putting and incomprehensible, prefer to avoid this passage altogether. It is not our goal to comment on the particulars of those issues, but rather to show how Paul reasoned. He did not simply rule by executive fiat. He did not appeal to Mosaic law or even the positive teachings of Jesus. Rather, Paul pointed to the creation account and argued that creation’s “*is*” implied a perpetual “*ought*.” The way that humans were created determines how they should exist today. Since Eve was created “for” Adam, to be his helpmeet and complement, so too women in the church today ought to do the



same in relation to their husbands. In verses 13–14 the Apostle connects this to the nature of reality.

Another controversial and disliked passage along the same lines appears in 1 Timothy 2. Verses 13–14 say, “For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” Again, many readers simply reject the *content* of these verses, but our concern is what they show us about how Paul argued. Since Adam was formed before Eve, and since Eve was deceived by the Serpent in the garden, then women ought not to teach men or have authority over them. Paul reasons from the way in which the creation account occurred, particularly its sequential order, along with also the manner in which the Fall came about, in order to ground a moral and social truth for the present.

In both of the above passages, the Apostle’s argument depends upon his assumptions and premises. If they are false, then so too are his conclusions. And those assumptions and premises are themselves wholly dependent upon a historical Adam and a historical reading of Genesis 2 and 3. If the events did not actually happen in the manner which Genesis records, then the Christian position on sexual identity is not actually a faithful reading of nature and the fabric of reality, but merely a “religious” conviction. Complementarianism would actually not be something grounded in nature at all, but rather, ironically, it would be a unique product of Christian theology. In such a case, it would mean that there *is* actually male and female in Christ after all, and under this sort of reading, it would seem, the Bible finds them only there.

### **Historical Adam, Historical Jesus**

Most prominent, however, and directly related to the Christological center of our religion, is Paul’s explanation of the relationship between Adam and Jesus. For the Apostle, as even many of our current progressive evangelicals admit, the work of the messiah is predicated upon a belief in the historical Adam. All that the historical Adam brought into the world, Jesus is understood to have reversed. For example, Romans 5:12–19 says,

*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned – (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted*

*in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)*

*Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.*

Also, 1 Corinthians 15:20–28:

*But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.*

Both of these passages find the cause of sin and death in the willful action of Adam. This supposition is what the messiah then takes upon himself and solves. These texts are common to the discussion of the historical Adam, and we would not pretend to be the first to highlight them. However the point that must be continually pressed is that these passages claim that the spiritual solution found in the messiah most definitely affects the external world and the human body itself. The messiah's reign is precisely over that dominion that was lost by Adam. And the death and resurrection of the messiah is a thing which was *like* the original Fall of Adam and what the final resurrection of the body will be *like*. The concepts stand together.

If the first Adam was mythical, then the nature and work of the Second Adam, precisely as Second Adam, would have to be mythical as well. This does not mean that the Judæan man whom Paul identified as the Second Adam was himself a myth, nor that his life did not unfold in real history. Rather it would mean that his redemptive identity, along with the nature of what He said was his work, was merely mythical, not an objective event with objective effects. He would have been seeking to fulfill a myth.

The resurrection sometimes figures in this discussion in an especially complicated way. Its historicity is undeniably a hallmark of orthodoxy, a non-negotiable doctrine whose status as such has been hard-fought in the last century. Some of those who wish to deny the historicity of Adam think they can take a stand on the doctrine of the historical resurrection. We must remember, however, that our belief in the historical resurrection is not merely a product of proof-texting, as if 1 Corinthians 15:12–19 simply commands fideistic assent. No, the historicity of the resurrection is tied in with the historicity of death and the sure reality of the world to come. The resurrection is where Christ completes the recapitulatory atonement, and so again, if the Adamic backstory is mythical, so too is the recapitulation.

Death is, according to the Bible, a judgment based upon Adam's sin. If that original sin was not itself real, an event occurring in this world, then the judgment is arbitrary and unjust. We should also say that if death is simply a natural part of the created order, the normal process of decay inherent in the evolutionary model, then it is not actually a "problem" at all. It is just a feature of the universe. This then must attribute death to God's original design, a species of Gnosticism.

Romans 8:20–25 makes it abundantly clear that human sin is the reason for death, decay, and futility:

*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.*

Sin is not only an internal and personal problem for the Apostle Paul. It is an ontological issue, affecting the very creation itself, the entire cosmos. Because of Adam's sin, "the creation was subjected to futility." Corruption is quite plainly unnatural. And the Apostle says that our hope is that one day it will no longer exist. This world will be free from all corruption, decay, suffering, sorrow, pain, and death, and this is because Jesus Christ has reversed the fall of Adam.

What is important to note is that in each instance where the Apostle Paul connects the work of redemption to the world beyond the human soul, he relates it as a direct parallel to the work of Adam. All of those outdated assumptions that the progressive evangelicals claim as periphery to the central point are precisely the ones that make Paul's gospel relevant to this world. Indeed, we might say that they are the incarnational assumptions! What use is an incarnation without

first a historical *caro* (“flesh”)?

In fact, this exposes a larger problem with the “Christocentric” methodology. It employs the language and categories of redemption with seemingly no need for the preceding language and categories of *creation*. This makes religion a mostly arbitrary thing. It might be very useful as a folk story, or allegory for certain ideas of therapeutic sociology and anthropology, but it is no longer in itself a true universal statement about objective reality. And thus the Christological center need also not be historical. The progressive evangelicals certainly believe in the historical Jesus. But apart from an earlier historical Adam, they have no coherent *need* to do so.

### **Creation and the Commonwealth**

And this brings us back to the point about privatization. If Adam was not historical, then Christ need not be either. He might be historical, of course (and to be sure, no evangelicals currently doubt his historicity), but nevertheless the claims that he and the early Christian Church made about that history beyond his bare physical existence are no longer essential. What is important, once we recast the narrative, is how the story affects men today. And as soon as the issue is expressed in this way, Christianity loses its claim to be public truth.

As we said earlier, without creation there can be no creation ordinances. We might state it another way and say that if the Bible doesn’t speak to nature, then it also doesn’t speak to natural law. And so again, religion becomes a thing removed from creation and from nature. It is wholly spiritual, but only now the term “spiritual” has been redefined. After all, in classical philosophy, one’s spirit was still a part of nature. It was certainly not grace. Neither was it supernature. And spirits were expected to live in conformity with nature. But now our theologians are severing the two more radically than any Platonist of old. Not only does our spirituality *not* have to be united to our natural lives, it need not even make accurate claims about nature. And this means that it must, of necessity, be relegated to private status (particularly in a modern political society). If religion is only interacting with a subset of creation, then it would be incoherent and even unjust for it to make totalizing claims about that creation, whether it be concerned with its morality or its future destiny. And if the Christian social vision is disconnected from creation, then it should not attempt to reorder creation. And so the “narrative” which was supposed to be, if not historically true, at least socially liberatory, turns out to have no warrant to be that either.

### **Conclusion**

We have seen that this is a matter neither of merely theologoumenal significance nor an intramural evangelical debate. In the face of scientific and cultural

pressure, our progressive evangelicals are actually redefining the nature of our religion. While they claim to uphold the doctrinal concepts at the core of Christianity, they only do so after excising them from history. And thus, in this very process, they de-historicize the religion itself. Through the use of postliberal theological constructs, Christianity becomes a private articulation of community experience. While the proponents of this new theology would protest such a description, appealing to their emphasis on community life and the decentered self, they still nevertheless abandon the Bible's claim to speak the world as a whole and the entirety of the human race, including its origins and its future destiny.

To mythologize the first Adam is to mythologize the work of the second, and this affects our future destiny, as the Apostle teaches in 1 Corinthians 15. If the New Testament is mistaken in its understanding of who Adam was and how he brought about the fall into sin, then it is mistaken about its understanding of the nature of the sin problem in general. And this means that it must also be mistaken in its understanding of the nature of the solution. A Jesus that fulfills community-narratives might well bring comfort to a weary soul in this life. But he cannot bring ultimate comfort to both body and soul unless he also means to recreate the heavens and the earth. Apart from a historical Adam you can still cast a meaningful story that seeks make sense out of the troubled modern condition. What you cannot do is reasonably claim that Jesus Christ is actually setting the world to rights.

#### Notes:

1. Interested readers can consult this critique of Dr. Enns' book by Dr. C. John Collins for more information and interaction.
2. See his commentary in *Reformed Dogmatics* 2:514–16 (part 5, cap. 11). For example: "Now, then, with however much authority this theory of descent has suddenly come upon us, from the beginning it encountered very serious contradiction, not only among theologians and philosophers, but also among natural scientists; and that contradiction, so far from having been muted over the years, has made itself heard with increasing volume and vigor."

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*. If you would like to discuss this article in our online community, please visit our [RPM Forum](#).

### Subscribe to RPM

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [RPM](#), please select this [link](#).