

Feature Article: JAF2376

## PAUL, SECOND ADAM, AND THEISTIC EVOLUTION

by Garrett J. DeWeese

This article first appeared in the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL, volume 37, number 06 (2014). For further information or to subscribe to the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL, go to: <http://www.equip.org/christian-research-journal/>.

---

### SYNOPSIS

A growing number of evangelicals are accepting theistic evolution, generally without considering the weight of biblical theological evidence against evolution. However, important theological considerations strongly count against the common descent of Adam and Eve, and so count against theistic evolution.

Beginning with definitions, it is not at all clear that theistic evolution is consistent with the Neo-Darwinian Synthesis as commonly understood. This is because Darwinian (or naturalistic) evolution is purposeless, unguided, unplanned, while theistic evolution necessarily includes some degree of divine planning and guidance.

But even allowing for divine purpose, there remains an apparent conflict between theistic evolution and traditional theology. Within a framework of considerations for resolving apparent conflicts between science and theology, the consideration that asks about the degree of ingression of a claim—either scientific or theological—in its respective domain becomes salient. Biblical evidence, especially the Apostle Paul’s extended analogy in Romans 5:12–21, comparing the First Adam to Christ as the Second Adam, together with the orthodox theology of original sin based on that analogy, is very deeply ingressed in orthodox theology as it has been traditionally understood. The analogy and the theology based on it demand a literal Adam and Eve.

Examining recent publications of three representative theistic evolutionists finds that by denying the existence of a literal Adam and Eve, and so no literal “fall,” they have no explanation for the entrance of sin in the human race. It seems then that the theology based on St. Paul’s analogy is not compatible with an evolutionary theory of

common descent (whether theistic or naturalistic). Evangelical Christians should reject an account of evolution that entails denial of a central theological claim grounded in Paul's Second Adam analogy.

---

Many Christians view the Bible as authoritative, and study it according to the principles of historical-grammatical interpretation. They also have a healthy respect for science, and want to take seriously what seems to be the consensus of most knowledgeable scientists. Surely one vexing issue is how the theory of evolution fits alongside the Bible. Is some theistic version of evolution a viable option? Many evangelicals seem to think so.

In what follows, I'll argue that taking seriously what Paul says about Christ as the Second Adam gives us reason to reject evolution in any but its most innocuous forms.

### DEFINING EVOLUTION

Let's begin by distinguishing different senses of "evolution." While at least nine different meanings of the word appear in the literature, here I'll stick to three broad meanings. (1) Evolution as a general term means simply change over time; in biology, evolution refers to the change in heritable traits (alleles) in a population (gene pool) from one generation to another. Evolution in this innocuous sense poses no problem for Christians. (2) As commonly used, evolution refers to the Neo-Darwinian Synthesis—that is, Darwin's theory plus genetics—the process by which all biological diversity on earth arose by common descent with undirected genetic modification together with some mechanism of favoring certain modifications over others (generally, natural selection). In what follows, I'll use the term evolution in this sense—Darwinian evolution, for short (DE). (3) Theistic evolution (TE) refers to the process by which God providentially arranged the contingencies of the history of life on earth (and indeed the history of the evolution of the entire cosmos) so that the end result would achieve His purposes (not conceived specifically as *Homo sapiens*, but more generally as sentient creatures with whom He could have a relationship).

Before moving on, I need to highlight a crucial distinction between DE and TE.

The first essential ingredient of evolution—both DE and TE—is the thesis of common descent: all organisms alive today share a common ancestor somewhere back in history.

A second essential ingredient of DE is that it is unplanned, undirected, purposeless—in a word, dysteleological. Let me cite just a small sample of evolutionary biologists: first, George Gaylord Simpson: "Man is the result of a purposeless and

natural process that did not have him in mind.”<sup>1</sup> Then Ernst Mayr: “When it is said that mutation or variation is random, the statement simply means that there is no correlation between the production of new genotypes and the adaptational needs of an organism in the given environment.”<sup>2</sup> I’ll let Jacques Monod sum it up: “The universe was not pregnant with life, nor the biosphere with man. Our number came up in a vast Monte Carlo game.”<sup>3</sup>

Now, we need to be careful here—Darwinian evolution is often described as random, but it is random in a particular sense. Richard Dawkins, famous for his “blind watchmaker” analogy, defines Darwinism as “the non-random selection of randomly varying replicating entities by reason of their ‘phenotypic’ effects.”<sup>4</sup> That is, Darwinian evolution is not random through and through; genomic mutations that result in the variation of traits in a population are randomly caused, but the traits that are differentially favored in reproduction are not randomly selected but are selected because they confer a survival advantage on the organisms that bear them. Still, the important point is that evolution in the Darwinian sense is grounded in the random, purposeless mutations of the genome.

In its commitment to God’s superintendence of evolution, whether through active providence or simply by decreeing the laws and initial conditions that deterministically achieved His purposes without His direct involvement, TE is clearly at odds with DE. While atheistic proponents of evolution see this, proponents of TE are reluctant to admit that this is a significant difference between the two evolutionary views. Both, however, are united in embracing common descent and therefore reject the notion that Adam and Eve were literal individuals, the product of intentional divine intervention.

As new avenues of investigation such as genetics, genomics, and evolutionary-developmental biology (“evo-devo”) have exploded in recent years, the case for common descent has seemingly grown stronger. In light of this development, more and more Christians, including many evangelicals, have embraced TE as an attempt to harmonize science and Scripture, retaining a role for God as creator and sustainer, providentially arranging the process of evolution to produce what He desires.

Yet there are still evidential and conceptual gaps in all versions of evolutionary theory, and in my view, evolution would not be defended as vociferously as it is, and alternative views would not be denounced as vehemently as they are, were it not for the fact that for naturalists, evolution is the only game in town to explain biological diversity. Still, I think it is wrong for Christians to dismiss the evidence and refuse to engage seriously with the complexities of modern evolutionary biology. However, such engagement lies outside my purposes here.<sup>5</sup>

## RESOLVING SCIENCE/THEOLOGY CONFLICTS

The issue of the relationship of science and theology is an old one, as we all know. Elsewhere I've discussed standard models of this relationship and have proposed a model that I call Convergence.<sup>6</sup> According to Convergence, science and theology (together with other theoretical disciplines) converge on a truthful description of the world. Science and theology sometimes tell us different kinds of things, and sometimes the same kinds of things, about the world. When done ideally, they will not conflict but will converge on a unified description of reality. However, at any point in history, conflict is possible due to the incomplete or inaccurate theories/doctrines and descriptions in one or the other (or both) of the disciplines. When conflict occurs, theology may correct science, or science may correct theology, or judgment may be withheld, with decisions made on a case-by-case basis.

But we are not now in possession of an ideal science or theology. So if Convergence advises handling apparent conflicts on a case-by-case basis, how do we go about adjudicating apparent conflicts? One very important consideration must be the degree of ingression of a particular claim in science or theology. The degree of ingression may be evaluated by asking how dramatically the discipline would be changed if the belief were discarded. For example, the belief that Jesus was God incarnate is very deeply ingressed in Christianity; without this belief, the result would not be Christian in any meaningful sense. Similarly, the claim that the natural world uniformly behaves in conformity with well-established laws of nature is deeply ingressed in science.<sup>7</sup>

There's no question that common descent is deeply ingressed in contemporary biological science. However, I don't think that settles the issue. First, the gradualism assumed by almost all versions of evolution is not supported by the fossil record. While "punctuated equilibrium," proposed by Stephen Jay Gould and Niles Eldredge,<sup>8</sup> has not been widely accepted, it does seem to explain the fossil record better than gradualism. It is also congruent with a form of progressive creationism according to which God intervened at certain points in the history of life to produce novel body plans—what Genesis 1 calls "kinds"—perhaps by creating new genetic information not derivable from mutational recombinations of the DNA of extant organisms. Further, common descent has been the operative hypothesis in biology for only about 150 years; arguably, the Neo-Darwinian mechanisms could be taken in an antirealist sense (as convenient fictions, much as even professional astronomers speak of celestial objects "rising" and "setting") and modern biology would continue to flourish.

On the other hand, the degree of ingression of belief in a literal Adam and Eve, and the theology that flows from that, is very strong in Christianity. First, this would be the very natural way to read references to Adam and Eve throughout Scripture. Several

genealogies in both the Old and New Testaments trace ancestry to Adam, with no hint that he is not to be regarded as a literal man. And there is additional significant evidence. Genesis 3 describes the rebellion of the pair in the fall, the event by which sin entered into the human race. This event is quite deeply embedded in orthodox theology, and it is hard to see how common descent could incorporate a realist view of the fall.

### PAUL'S SECOND ADAM

But it gets worse for TE. In at least two places, the apostle Paul makes a significant theological point grounded in the analogy of Adam as the first man, and Christ as the Second Adam (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:20–22). It seems clear that the theological point is vitiated if Adam were not a literal individual. Consider Paul's extended analogy in Romans 5:12–21. In this passage, Paul repeatedly works out the implications of taking Adam as a *type* of Christ, and does so in a way that seems inescapably to demand a literal Adam.

<b>Adam - Type</b>	<b>Christ - Antitype</b>
One man: Adam (12, 15, 19)	One man: Christ (15, 19)
Sin entered through one man (12, 15)	Grace entered through one man (15)
One act of sin (18)	One act of righteousness (18)
Judgment on all because of one sin (12, 16, 18)	Justification to many because of one gift (16, 17, 18)
Death reigned through one man (12, 15)	Many reign in life through one man (17)
Many died by trespass of one man (12, 15)	Grace overflowed by gift of one man (15)
Many made sinners by one man's disobedience (19)	Many made righteous by one man's obedience (19)
<b>Extended Analogy in Romans 5:12–21</b>	

Not all New Testament (NT) scholars understand it that way, of course. Historically, the primary reason to weaken or deny the analogy has been the desire to avoid doctrines of inherited or imputed guilt and/or corruption. More recently, the motive has been the incompatibility of a literal Adam with evolution.<sup>9</sup>

Yet it surely seems that Paul's analogy demands a historical Adam. Douglas Moo comments, "Indeed, it is difficult to see how Paul's argument in Rom. 5:12–21 hangs together if we regard Adam as mythical. For Adam and Christ are too closely compared in this passage to think that one could be 'mythical' and the other 'historical.' We must be honest and admit that if Adam's sin is not 'real,' then any argument based on the presumption that it is must fall to the ground."<sup>10</sup>

Two primary—and not mutually exclusive—interpretations of the effects of Adam's sin trace back as far as Irenaeus, Origen, Ambrosiaster, and Chrysostom. First, there is the interpretation that because of Adam's sin, human nature is corrupted and thus all Adam's progeny sin on their own. This interpretation requires us to supply a missing premise in Paul's argument: "One man's sin resulted in the corruption of human nature which caused all people to sin."<sup>11</sup> Likely support for the missing premise can be found elsewhere in the NT, for example, Ephesians 2:3: "All are by nature children of wrath."

The second interpretation links v. 12 more tightly with vv. 18–19, understanding the guilt of all people in terms of the solidarity of the human race and Adam as the "federal" or representative head of humanity; Adam's guilt was thus imputed to all his descendants. All people sinned "in Adam," and indeed Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:22 that "as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." This draws on Paul's frequent use of "in Christ" terminology: the contrast between those "in Adam" and those "in Christ" is stark and pointed.

In our hyperindividualist culture, the doctrine of imputed guilt is often rejected as unfair. Pannenberg says, "It is impossible for me to be held jointly responsible as though I were a joint cause for an act that another did many generations ago and in a situation radically different from mine."<sup>12</sup> But many others, while recognizing the theological and philosophical challenges of the view, still regard it as the best explanation of the biblical and empirical evidence.

Hence we have two interpretative traditions regarding original sin: inherited corruption and inherited guilt. Both have strong support in the history of orthodox Christian theology. And both seem to demand a literal Adam.

It is next to impossible to reconcile common descent and the gradual emergence of *H. sapiens* with the theology Paul develops in Romans 5. Adam's fall, the spread of Adam's sin to all humanity, and the origin of the sin nature, contrasted to the work of the Second Adam through whom comes grace, justification, and the imputation of righteousness—the rich theology here runs deep in historical, orthodox Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

## THEISTIC EVOLUTIONIST RESPONSES

Surprisingly, given the centrality of Romans 5:12–21 both in the argument of Romans and in Christian theology, almost none of the many books and articles written in support of TE discuss the passage. I'll briefly survey three that do.

In *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution*,<sup>14</sup> Dennis Lamoureux has extensive biblical references, invokes biblical infallibility and inerrancy at least forty-two times, and cites Romans 5:12–21 at least thirteen times. So we might expect some serious interaction with the text. We'd be disappointed. Here's what he says:

*Paul was a first century man steeped in the historical and scientific categories of his generation....Paul had no choice but to believe in the historicity of Gen 3 and the causal connection between the sin of Adam and the entrance of pain and mortality into the world. Romans 5:12–19 and 1 Cor 15:20–49 are evidence of this fact.*

*However, the historicity of Adam, the attribution of divine judgmental action for his sin, and the origin of physical suffering and death as a consequence are notions conceived from an ancient phenomenological perspective. These events in Gen 3 never happened because they are based on ancient history and ancient science, and Paul had no way of knowing this.*<sup>15</sup>

Lest we miss the point, the final chapter begins by asserting, "My central conclusion in this book is clear: Adam never existed, and this fact has no impact whatsoever on the foundational beliefs of Christianity."<sup>16</sup>

Lamoureux's argument, as best as I can reconstruct it, seems to be this: because Paul based his analogy and his doctrine of the fall on ancient science and ancient history, therefore the fall never happened. Now, if this is an argument, the reader must supply the missing premise. About the only premise that will yield the conclusion would be something like this: "Any claim based on ancient science or history is false." But surely that premise is false. As an argument, this is a howler.

And although Lamoureux speaks repeatedly about sin, when it comes to giving an account of the origin of sin within the framework of TE, he evades the question. He poses his own questions (not those any competent exegete or biblical theologian would pose), declares definitively that they can't be answered, and then concludes that no explanation of sin is possible, so it must remain a mystery.<sup>17</sup>

In *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?*<sup>18</sup> Denis Alexander proposes several models that attempt to integrate evolution into the biblical account, and slightly favors one of them:

*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. It is not that there were no settled farmers beforehand, but from now on there would be a community who would know that they were called to a holy enterprise....It is for this reason that this first couple, or community, have been termed Homo divinus, the divine humans, those who know the one true God, the Adam and Eve of the Genesis account. Being an anatomically modern human was a necessary but not sufficient condition for being spiritually alive.<sup>19</sup>*

The problem here is that Adam and Eve—or a community of Adams and Eves—as Neolithic farmers, would not be the first pair of *H. sapiens*. Alexander may well try to do justice to a literal Adam (or at least a community of Adams, although it's not clear how that helps with biblical fidelity), but by denying Adam's role as progenitor of the human race, Alexander fails to account for the theology Paul teaches in Romans 5. The connection between any action of theirs and the sinfulness of humanity is broken, leaving Paul's analogy vacuous.

Peter Enns, in *The Evolution of Adam*,<sup>20</sup> conclusively accepts common descent as "beyond any reasonable doubt,"<sup>21</sup> and immediately acknowledges that the problem with evangelical Christians accepting TE is not necessarily the Genesis account, but rather Paul's use of Adam in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. "The problem is self-evident. Evolution demands that the special creation of the first Adam as described in the Bible is not literally historical; Paul, however, seems to require it."<sup>22</sup>

Enns claims that in rejecting a literal Adam, "what is lost is Paul's culturally assumed explanation for what a primordial man had to do with causing the reign of death and sin in the world....The reality of sin, death and the resurrection, however, belong to a different category entirely."<sup>23</sup>

Enns claims that Paul's analogy in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, linking Adam with the entrance of sin into the human race, occurs nowhere else in Scripture and is a product of Paul's contemporary cultural setting in Second Temple Judaism.

Following "the New Perspective on Paul,"<sup>24</sup> Enns sees the burden of Romans not as the soteriological problem of sinful humanity but as the sociological problem of reconciling Jews and Gentiles as one people. Paul's point is to show that Jews and Gentiles participate equally in sinful humanity and in their need of the universal offer of redemption in Christ. As for the entrance of sin, "if Adam is not the cause of sin and death for all humanity, why then do humans sin and die? As we have seen, 'why' (original sin) does not seem to be a question that Scripture is prepared to answer."<sup>25</sup>



Enns faces the same difficulty as Alexander and Lamoureaux. If Adam is not the progenitor of *H. sapiens*, then the doctrine of the fall as it has been understood in Christian theology for two thousand years is false, and the entrance of sin into humanity remains a mystery.

So where does this leave us? I conclude that proponents of TE have not offered us any cogent interpretations of Romans 5 that do justice to Paul's theology of original sin and redemption in Christ—a theology that is a most central part of historical, orthodox Christianity.

While I can't develop this point here, it does seem to me that there is a strong correlation between accepting TE and rejecting substitutionary atonement as an antiquated doctrine rooted in medieval retributive thinking. And that's not surprising. For if sin is just an intrinsic part of evolved human nature, then some other theory of the atonement—moral exemplar, Christus Victor—would be more acceptable. Accepting TE, then, tends to lead to modifications of another doctrine held by the church for centuries.

Although I regard the scientific evidence for common descent (including its coherence and explanatory power) as strong, at the end of the day, I am persuaded by the exegetical and theological arguments. The doctrine of original sin has been deeply ingressed in Christianity for two thousand years, while common descent has been ingressed in science only for 150 years. On this issue, I've reached a place of "reflective equilibrium." I think I'll keep Paul's theology of Christ as the Second (literal) Adam, and reject theistic evolution.

**Garrett J. DeWeese** (ThM, Dallas Theological Seminary; PhD, University of Colorado) is professor of philosophy and philosophical theology at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University.

---

## NOTES

- 1 George Gaylord Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution*, rev. ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 344–45.
- 2 Ernst Mayr, *Toward a New Philosophy of Biology: Observations of an Evolutionist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 99.
- 3 Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity* (New York: Vintage Press, 1972), 145–46.
- 4 Richard Dawkins, "Universal Darwinism," in *The Philosophy of Biology*, ed. David L. Hull and Michael Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 32. First published in D. S. Bendall, ed., *Evolution from Molecules to Men* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 5 See, e.g., Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

- 6 Garrett J. DeWeese, *Doing Philosophy as a Christian* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 287–97; “Theology and Science: Converging on Reality,” *Christian Research Journal* 35, 1 (2012): 36–39.
- 7 For a discussion of at least seven considerations that apply to resolving cases of apparent conflict, see the references in note 6.
- 8 Stephen Jay Gould, *The Structure of Evolution*, 6th ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Chapter 9 of this massive work has been published as *Punctuated Equilibrium* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007). The central theses of punctuated equilibrium are these: “1. Stasis: Most species exhibit no directional change during their tenure on earth. They appear in the fossil record looking pretty much the same as when they disappear; morphological change is usually limited and directionless. 2. Sudden appearance: In any local area, a species does not arise gradually by the steady transformation of its ancestors; it appears all at once and ‘fully formed.’” Stephen Jay Gould, “Evolution’s Erratic Pace,” *Natural History* 86, 5 (1977): 14.
- 9 For example, Hans Conzelman, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 197; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), 129.
- 10 Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, *New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 325n53.
- 11 Moo, 326.
- 12 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 124.
- 13 For example, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.2; Martin Luther, *Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans*; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I. Q85.5. Such examples could be multiplied.
- 14 Dennis Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008).
- 15 *Ibid.*, 324–25.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 367.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 288.
- 18 Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* (Oxford, UK: Monarch Books, 2008).
- 19 *Ibid.*, 236–37.
- 20 Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn’t Say about Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2012).
- 21 *Ibid.*, ix.
- 22 *Ibid.*, xvi.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 124; emphasis in original.
- 24 The “New Perspective,” championed by such scholars as N. T. Wright and James D. G. Dunn, holds that “justification” in Paul is not a legal status conferred by God on one who trusts Christ as savior, but rather a statement of one’s standing in the Jewish covenant community. Justification, on this view, is not central to the Gospel, or about “getting into” God’s family, but instead is about how to tell who is already “in.” For a solid critique from an evangelical perspective, see John Piper, *The Future of Justification* (Crossway, 2007).
- 25 *Ibid.*, 126; emphasis in original.