

[MJTM 15 (2013–2014)]

#### BOOK REVIEW

Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday, eds. *Four Views on the Historical Adam*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013. 288 pp. Pbk. ISBN 0310499275.

*Four Views on the Historical Adam* addresses a contentious yet pressing topic, namely the matter of human origins specifically, and the age of the earth generally. The four primary contributors range considerably on the issue itself: Denis Lamoureux, Associate Professor of Science and Religion at St. Joseph's College in the University of Alberta, advocates the Evolutionary Creation position; John Walton, Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College Graduate School, the Archetypal Creation view; C. John Collins, Professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary, the Old-Earth Creation view; and William Barrick, Professor of Old Testament at The Master's Seminary, the Young-Earth view. Two pastoral responses are given at the end of the book by Greg Boyd, pastor of Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul's, Minnesota, and Philip Ryken, president of Wheaton College.

The format of the book offers an accessible, precise, and didactic introduction to the theme of the historical Adam, and origins for that matter. In each chapter, following the section that delineates the respective view of the author, the three remaining authors all respond to that particular essay, bringing specific questions and concerns in order to create positive engagement on the issue. Each chapter begins with a concise summary of the view to facilitate the explication that will follow, helping the reader follow the argument. The two pastoral responses give a different yet valuable voice as the implications of this important topic reach farther than the academic details of the debate. They affect the lives of Christians regarding how they conceive of

their faith, the place of modern sciences, and primary and peripheral issues. And because of these significant factors that are always at play within the debate itself, the essays provide personal accounts and reflections on how the writers came to their present convictions—all coming from the evangelical tradition.

Lamoureux argues that Adam was not an actual historic individual. He begins by confirming his commitment to the triune God revealed in Christ and the authority of Scripture, while also describing his gradual acceptance of evolutionary creation for exegetical reasons. Lamoureux maintains that the biblical authors of the Old Testament understood their world according to a definite Ancient Near Eastern worldview (diagram on 48), which included features like a flat earth and a solid firmament above; in similar ancient fashion, they understood that kind reproduced after kind and according to immediate acts of creation producing static species. Using the example of the womb (embryological mechanisms; 44), he argues that natural means are proper to the creative ways of God. Therefore, Paul and others understood Adam according to ancient biology, but nevertheless communicated “inerrant spiritual truths” (37).

Walton responds by saying that Lamoureux makes leaps in his argumentation (e.g., his conclusion that the shortcoming of ancient science necessitates no historical Adam; and that he fails to address a middle ground between literal readings and full accommodations [68]), and that does not address how the New Testament seems to use the historic Adam for theological (not merely scientific) purposes. Collins critiques his use of the womb as example, for who would not acknowledge that God works within creation? Barrick argues that Lamoureux concedes to “overwhelming” evidence for evolution, failing to allow Christian witness to determine such matters (80).

In Walton’s section, he argues that Adam and Eve were both historical individuals, although the text of Scripture makes claims on behalf of their *archetypal role* evinced in the formation accounts of Genesis (particularly ch. 2). Genesis, he argues, is not making claims of Adam’s *material* origins (i.e., actual dust); rather, Genesis describes the world’s *functions* and thus the account applies to all of humanity (e.g., “we are all formed

from dust, and we are all gendered halves” [89]). In this case, Adam and Eve may or may not be the first people, the implications being that Genesis is not in competition with modern science. This archetypal function is represented in other ANE literature, at times applied to kings or rulers. Walton understands Adam and Eve to be real individuals who were elected to commune with God and represent humanity on the whole. The Genesis narratives invest their calling with the universal implication that their representative role would have. Thus, their sin effected judgment for the world, as God so chose to act in response to this couple on behalf of the entire human race.

Lamoureux argues that Walton’s understanding of Genesis as functional does not adequately explain the appearance of ancient science in the Genesis accounts (e.g., the creation of a “firmament” [121]), and the archetypal interpretation of dust does not fit with the evidence that it clearly appears to be the mode of material origins to ancient science (see 123). Collins argues that the divide between functional and material is unfair to the unity of the text, and that the moral implications of these archetypal figures do not do justice to the God of Scripture (130). Barrick suggests Walton fails to read “simply . . . in the way the account declares” (135) and that his limiting of Adam to archetype contradicts his understanding of Jesus as both thoroughly historical and archetypal.

In Collins’s chapter, he argues that Adam and Eve were real people and “at the headwaters of humankind” (143). While other authors lean heavily on the Genesis account and particular New Testament passages for their understanding of Adam and Eve, Collins suggests that the cohesive narrative, the “larger biblical story line” (143), offers an additional case for the historicity of Adam and Eve: first, the biblical authors “self-consciously” described their world according to this worldview story (157); second, a basic notion of biblical authority requires us to respect what the “writers see” (157); and finally, the biblical authors used these figures to explicate our lives (things like our craving for God and need for forgiveness). After giving an account of history that is neither literalistic nor mythical, Collins argues that Genesis leaves room in its telling of Adam and Eve for various

theories on the age of the earth (146–48).

Lamoureux replies by saying that, while Collins's understanding of the centrality of the biblical story line is appropriate, it does not necessitate a historical Adam; in addition, he suggests that Collins attempts to match the science of Genesis with modern science ("scientific concordism," which he denies as a legitimate possibility) and defends unique acts of God within a broadly natural process of creation (which, we should note is thought to be explicit in the Genesis account) and therefore represents a "God-of-the-gaps" theory (177). Walton criticizes Collins for failing to address the logical implications of calling for a historical Adam without accounting for his material origins (e.g., the nature and impact of sin). Barrick commends Collins's reading of Genesis historically, but claims that the timeline ought to be viewed as such (e.g., the reading of days as 24-hour periods; 188).

Arguing for the Young-Earth view of creation, Barrick understands Adam and Eve to be real historic people precisely as the Genesis account would have it. This, he argues, is more than a matter of interpretation, rather it is essential to critical Bible doctrines and constitutes a watershed issue for upholding the "inerrancy" of Scripture (197). The author of Genesis was "superintended" by the Holy Spirit to give an accurate and trustworthy account of the original six days of creation, a reality that gives no room for evolutionary science (197). The text of Genesis, and the New Testament for that matter, hold priority in our reasoning, therefore its narrative informs our understanding of ANE literature and modern science. In addition, Jesus would not be needed if Adam was not historical: "the biblical description of sin depends entirely on the historicity of Adam. He must be a real individual who rebels against a clear divine directive at a specific moment in real time in a real place" (220–21).

Lamoureux responds by saying that the reality of sin and its remedy in Christ does not necessitate a historical Adam. He also challenges Barrick's argument that if one is to take Christ historically then one must also take Adam historically, as Barrick says that the New Testament authors speak of Christ's resurrection and the creation of Adam as equally historical. Lamoureux sug-

gests Barrick fails to appreciate the difference in literature and content between Genesis and the resurrection accounts (229). And Walton, distinguishing between what Scripture *says* and what it *claims*, argues that Barrick misunderstands archetype (failing to ask “what applies to them, and what applies to everyone?”) while spending large portions of his essay dedicated to refuting criticisms that were not made in this volume instead of providing additional evidence for his position. Collins suggests that Barrick operates with a “literal” hermeneutic and fails to understand the nuance entailed in reading biblical history (244).

Following the book’s major discussion, there are two pastoral responses on the state and nature of this issue for the church. Greg Boyd gives an open and vulnerable account of his wrestling with this important issue. He chronicles the devastating effects of losing his dogmatic affirmation of young-earth creationism in university, ultimately turning from faith to a nihilistic view of life that proved all too much to bear. He prompts the church, regardless of its position, to understand this issue as peripheral. Philip Ryken expresses his concern for a church that fails to take the historicity of Adam as a critical Christian conviction. Ryken says, “[Adam’s] story explains what *happens* because it tells us what *happened*” (268). He then goes on to demonstrate the importance of Adam in Christian life and doctrine.

This book does not provide extended or comprehensive discussion of the issues at hand, which is to say that it cannot be considered to be the central or primary resource for understanding the representative theories. And while its personal, and at times testimonial, features can be a positive aspect of the book’s appeal, it further limits the technical elements of the discussion. More specifically, Barrick’s (Young-Earth Creationism) essay does not appear to take advantage of the book’s interactive format as he does not attempt to defend the basic premises that the Young-Earth position often forwards (hermeneutical and otherwise) and consistently resorts to quoting authors who simply state his own opinion and using them as evidence (202; see also Walton’s critique [236]). And while Walton (archetypal) and Lamoureux (non-historical) cover significant arguments for a non-literal view, it would have been valuable to see a typological

contributor, as theological interpretation has garnered significant momentum within evangelical scholarship.

Therefore the book offers an accessible and readable introduction to a topic that has a high level of personal and academic interest. It will help a generation become familiar with the various opinions at the table in this debate and encourage positive interaction. Its primary readers will be lay-persons, pastors/ministers, and undergraduate/graduate students.

Justin Mandela Roberts  
McMaster Divinity College  
Hamilton, ON