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BOOK REVIEW

William VanDoodewaard. *The Quest for the Historical Adam: Genesis, Hermeneutics, and Human Origins*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015. xiv + 345 pp. Pbk. No ISBN. No list price.

Just as the "Quest for the historical Jesus" occupied the attention of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars, writes William VanDoodewaard, so today a similar "Quest for the historical Adam" exists as a topic of fierce debate among evangelicals. VanDoodewaard seeks to bring clarity to this disputed issue by engaging with what he identifies as the neglected witness of historical theology, or the record of what the Church has believed through the ages about the person of Adam. As an aside, this particular review copy has a note on the copyright page that it was a special edition prepared for the 2015 Shepherd's conference and is not for resale, so the page numbers referenced throughout this review will differ from those of the later hardcover edition made available to the general public. VanDoodewaard completed his PhD in 2009 at King's College (of the University of Aberdeen), specializing in eighteenth-century Scottish church history, and is currently Professor of Church History at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In his introduction, VanDoodewaard helpfully supplies his definition of "literal" interpretation. He eschews the common meaning of this term, "the reading of a text according to its literary genre," in favor of a more colloquial usage. For VanDoodewaard, a "literal" approach to Gen 1–2 must interpret it "as a nonfigurative, detailed, historical record of events and existence narrated as they actually were" (6). As a sort of prelude to the historical investigation itself, chapter 1 provides a brief

survey of biblical texts relevant to the creation of humanity, concluding that the Old and New Testaments consistently bear witness that Adam and Eve were the first people to dwell on the earth.

Chapters 2 through 6 comprise the main body of the book, and cover Christian (and relevant non-Christian) approaches to the historicity of Adam from the patristic period to the present day. The bulk of the focus is on the nineteenth century onward. Chapter 2, "The Patristic and Medieval Quest for Adam" is only thirty pages, while chapter 3, "Adam in the Reformation and Post-Reformation Eras" and chapter 4, "Adam in the Enlightenment Era" are together only eighty-two pages. This contrasts strongly with the combined one hundred forty-eight pages occupied by chapter 5, "Adam in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," and chapter 6, "The Quest for Adam: From the 1950s to the Present." As a result, more than half of the book concentrates on developments within the last two hundred years.

The content of these chapters is consistently well-organized and clear. VanDoodewaard generally proceeds by giving a series of short snapshots of significant interpreters, with some brief notes on their context accompanying the description and documentation of their approach to both Adam and Gen 1–2 as a whole. In the case of chapters 5 and 6, somewhat more space is devoted to narration of significant controversies or key debates. At all points, appropriate levels of footnote discussion allow the interested reader gain awareness of alternative readings of primary sources as well as significant secondary literature. In his summative thoughts at the end of each chapter, VanDoodewaard repeatedly stresses the normativity of belief in a literal six-day creation and a historical Adam throughout the vast majority of church history, and that divergences from this position inevitably stemmed from capitulation to alien philosophies or a denial of the authority of Scripture.

Chapter 7, "What Difference Does it Make?" thoughtfully sums up the major issues raised in the previous chapters by identifying the key theological implications of models that seek to synthesize Christianity with evolution. After reviewing three different models of how humanity could have been created "in the

image of God" through evolutionary biology, VanDoodewaard lists and reflects on ten areas of Christian thought and practice significantly impacted by evolution, such as hermeneutics in general, the ethics of the unique value of human life, and the nature of the fall and consequent universal depravity in Adam.

A short final chapter, "Epilogue: Literal Genesis and Science?" probes the issue of the necessity of special revelation for understanding the natural world. VanDoodewaard asserts, "Special revelation is required because general revelation is insufficient for fallen minds" (314). He further suggests that the apparent clashes between Gen 1–2 and modern science are best addressed by appealing to the earth having been created with the appearance of age. Consequently, he concludes that non-literal approaches to Gen 1–2 handle the text "poorly," and that their proponents "err in their exposition—and in their understanding of creation history and origins" (316).

With the basic contours and major conclusions of this book in mind, it is appropriate to survey some of its tendencies and recurring weaknesses throughout. First, VanDoodewaard transparently writes for a like-minded audience and makes little pretense of objectivity. This is made clear in his frequent evaluative statements. The proto-evolutionary synthesis of Erasmus Darwin is "a devastating shift of both interpretation and authority" (129), just as the acceptance of nonliteral understandings of Adam at Calvin College is "concurrent with a wider theological deterioration" (207) within the CRC. Peter Enns's denial of a historical Adam is in "complete continuity with nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theological liberalism" (234), and likewise the "cosmic temple inauguration" hypothesis of John Walton "unravels biblical Christianity" (273). While language like this is doubtless unobjectionable to VanDoodewaard's intended readership, it is unlikely to win him a sympathetic hearing from other parties.

A second and related issue is the frequent use of "slippery slope" argumentation, at times openly acknowledged by VanDoodewaard as such. In the case of Thomas Burnet (1635–1715), who denied a scientific referent for Gen 1–2, his eventual rejection of eternal conscious torment "proved his critics right"

(103). He also documents the (apparently instructive) case of the ultimate apostasy of theistic evolutionist Howard Van Till. Nowhere does he consider cases where those holding to Young Earth Creationism lost their faith. He even mounts an argument that the greater acceptance of the propriety of physical death in nature among theistic evolutionists has the effect of "diminishing anticipation for and awareness of the day of Christ's return" (310).

Third, VanDoodewaard displays a conspicuous and inexplicable degree of hostility towards the use of ancient Near Eastern creation texts for understanding Gen 1–2. Commenting on the early "comparative approach" of nineteenth-century scholar George Smith, who published a translation of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, VanDoodewaard states, "This view harmonized with the positivistic spirit promoted by August Comte, following his argument that ancient . . . descriptions of history and origins were primitive, if not mythical" (154), giving insufficient consideration to the *discontinuities* found between Genesis and ANE texts as well as the continuities. He further states the following regarding lines of dependence: "Those committed to the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures as the Word of God ably argue that the Genesis account is by necessity the original and stands as primary, whereas the Sumerian and ensuing accounts (Babylonian, Assyrian) are derivative and secondary" (154). (He reiterates this assertion during his assessment of John Sailhamer on pp. 264–65.) Even the most conservative dating of Genesis (approximately halfway through the second millennium BCE) would recognize that this is chronologically impossible, at least in the case of the Sumerian material. Further on, during his critique of the "analogical days" approach of C. John Collins, VanDoodewaard chides him as well as Peter Enns for neglecting "to distinguish between the fallible and incomplete sources of the ancient Near East, with no promise of the aid of the Holy Spirit" (242) and the (inspired) Bible, leaving the reader to wonder if he is claiming that the illumination of the Holy Spirit eliminates the need for the study of primary sources for background and context.

A fourth and somewhat ethically troubling area is the

handling of attitudes towards race throughout the personalities surveyed in *The Quest for the Historical Adam*. While VanDoodewaard is to be commended for documenting the chillingly bigoted views of "pre-Adamite" proponents such as the eighteenth-century philosopher (and friend of David Hume) Lord Kanes, who taught outright that the inhabitants of Africa were not part of the human species, he largely gives a free pass to the six-day creationists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who either supported slavery or promoted racist viewpoints such as the "curse of Ham." This can be seen in his treatment of the nineteenth-century Southern Presbyterian Robert Louis Dabney. In a footnote, VanDoodewaard acknowledges Dabney's advocacy of the propriety of slavery, and merely suggests that Dabney was mistaken in not distinguishing between the temporary debt-slavery described in the Pentateuch and the outright kidnapping that was the basis of African-American slavery; he never considers that Dabney's literalistic hermeneutic itself may have been partially responsible.

Fifth, and somewhat more generally, there are several confusing details throughout the book. After reviewing Carl Henry's rebuttal to the progressive creationist Bernard Ramm (specifically his consultation of ANE texts), VanDoodewaard turns his ire upon Henry for not being literal enough when he ventured that God's "speaking" in Gen 1 did not necessarily involve audible sound; he then in a footnote seems to favorably consider the "walking" of God in Gen 3:8 and elsewhere (in keeping with some patristic writers) "as occasions in which the preincarnate Christ makes himself visibly manifest in human form" (257). He repeatedly refers to the "literal" truth that Adam was made from the dust of the earth and Eve was made from his rib without significantly developing the difficulties this would involve. This is possibly the outcome of the somewhat simplistic definition of "literal" interpretation he adopts (see above). Finally, in his review of areas affected by belief in evolution, he identifies the precise point at which God created language as a problematic issue, although it is not clear why this would be the case; likewise hazy is his polemic against "evolutionary linguistics . . . that strongly emphasize contextualization in approaching early texts"

which is said to give rise to "a hermeneutic . . . that makes little or no qualitative differentiation between the Old and New Testaments and other ancient writings" (298). Here it is difficult to understand how he is using the term "linguistics."

Despite a tone throughout that will inevitably alienate readers who are not already committed to Young Earth Creationism, VanDoodewaard is to be commended for gathering an impressive number of historical sources. He more than ably defends his conclusion that belief in a historical Adam has been the normative stance of the Church throughout most of history (even in cases when the days of Gen 1 were not viewed "literally"). All readers who are interested in approaching the "Quest for the historical Adam" from a historical standpoint will benefit from this book.

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