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## Religion and the Sciences

### Opportunities and Challenges

Edited by Ronald A. Simkins and Thomas M. Kelly

### 3. Scientific Nonsense, Historical Fiction, and Biblical Authority

#### The Historical Adam and Other Misguided Dogmas

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#### Introduction

The battles between religion and the sciences, broadly understood, have largely been fought for Christians on the battlefield of the Bible. Although the first salvo in any given battle began with science – a new discovery or the formulation of a new theory – the battle itself was usually fought over competing interpretations of the Bible: for example, whether the Bible assumes a heliocentric or a geocentric view of the world; whether the temporal framework in the Bible is compatible with the geologically derived age of the earth; and, of course, foremost among other conflicts, whether the stories in Genesis can be reconciled with Darwinian evolution (cf. Brown: 6). The new science was either rejected, in total or in

part, as incompatible with the truth revealed in scripture, or the science was for the most part embraced and the interpretation of the biblical texts was accommodated to this new knowledge. The crux of the debate, however, was not simply the meaning of one or another biblical passage, but rather the nature and source of biblical authority and its relation to other authorities. What ostensibly played out as a battle between religion and science was predominantly a conflict among church leaders, theologians, and biblical scholars over different modes of reading the Bible, expressing competing understandings of authority. As a result, the battles between religion and science cannot be resolved through recourse to newer and better science, or better science education, but rather must be addressed on the basis of the character of the Bible and the nature of its authority. Only when the Bible's authority is understood to be compatible with the procedures and results of science will the religion and science debates yield to mutual understanding.

### Two Modes of Reading the Bible

Through most of the history of Christianity, the Bible was read confessionally; it was a present, living word through which its readers heard the Word of God. Although made up of numerous texts, produced over hundreds of years, the collection of diverse biblical texts into a scriptural canon emphasized their unitary meaning. Moreover, the Bible was read through the unifying focal lens of the life and work of Jesus Christ – the gospel – as expressed through the creeds and Church teaching, and difficult or problematic biblical passages were interpreted in reference to other biblical passages. The Bible was perfectly harmonious, with no contradictions or mistakes; it was divinely inspired, given by God first to Israel and then to the Church.<sup>1</sup> The Bible's authority was embedded in the Church, which provided the context for its interpretation. Through this scriptural mode of reading, the meaning of the Bible was expressed through the Church and its authority was thus transparent. However, the rise of philology and textualization during the Renaissance and the fracturing of religious authority during the Reformation undermined this scriptural mode of reading the Bible and laid the groundwork for an alternative mode of reading.<sup>2</sup>

The academic mode of reading the Bible, which is characteristic of modern biblical studies, had its origin in the Enlightenment university of eighteenth-century Germany. According to the recent work of Michael Legaspi, this new, academic mode of reading the Bible developed as a political and moral response to the moribund Bible inherited from the Reformation. The division of the Western Church during the Reformation had disembedded the Bible from the Church so that its authority was located in the text alone. With the reformers' doctrine of *sola scriptura*, the Bible's new authority not only superseded the Church's right to pronounce authoritatively on it, but also enabled the Bible to be used in opposition to those parts of the tradition that the reformers viewed as pernicious. Because the Bible alone was authoritative, its meaning should be singular according to the plain sense

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<sup>1</sup> James Kugel argues that the scriptural mode of reading the Bible, for Jews and Christians, was based on four assumptions: 1) the Bible is fundamentally cryptic; 2) the Bible is filled with instruction for its readers; 3) the Bible contains no contradictions or mistakes; and 4) the Bible is divinely given.

<sup>2</sup> Much of the analysis in the first part of this section is dependent on the work of Legaspi, who articulates the two modes of reading and traces the development of the academic mode to the eighteenth century.

of the text. But such a unitary meaning often escaped its interpreters; instead, the authority and meaning of the Bible was contested by competing, emerging churches. The result was the Bible could no longer simply be read confessionally. Rather than promoting the unity of the Church, the interpretations of the Bible catalyzed and reinforced the fractures. By the eighteenth century, such scriptural readings of the Bible “only seemed to perpetuate war, obscurantism, and senseless religious division . . .” (Legaspi: 10).

While the Reformation separated the Bible’s authority from the Church, the legacy of the Renaissance served to undermine the authority of the Bible entirely. The Bible as sacred scripture was initially untouched by the discipline of philology because it was viewed as a uniquely authoritative text. It was incomparable to other texts because of its divine authorship, and so was immune to the vagaries of history. The differences between various versions of the Bible and their multiple manuscripts, however, raised the specter of error, and so philology was employed in the service of the Church to determine the authentic manuscripts. Nevertheless, Erasmus’ and the reformers’ use of philology also served to demonstrate that the Bible had a history. As more ancient texts came to light and as the Bible itself was textualized, humanist scholars began to recognize the Bible’s contingency – the Bible was not exceptional but rather the product of historical human authors. By the end of the seventeenth century, the Bible’s exceptionalism and the authority it engendered was no longer readily apparent (see McCalla: 28-39).

A new, academic mode of reading the Bible emerged in the eighteenth century as a way to shore up the failing authority of the Bible. For the German Enlightenment scholars – Gotthold Lessing, Johann Semler, and, most notably, Johann Michaelis, among others – the Bible belonged to a foreign, ancient world, and as such was a dead literary corpus like the Greek and Roman classics. Moreover, because the ancient biblical texts were discontinuous with contemporary Christianity, the Bible could no longer speak as a unifying scripture for the Church. Nevertheless, these scholars sought to preserve the cultural relevance of the Bible for public life; the Bible possessed a cultural authority, like the classics, which could reinforce the ideal social and political values of the modern state. The Bible was interpreted like the classics. Rather than interpreting the Bible within a confessional context, these scholars placed the biblical texts in their ancient historical and cultural contexts; they sought to get behind the texts in order to understand the events that produced them. “Instead of looking *through* the Bible in order to understand *the truth about the world*, eighteenth-century scholars looked directly at the text, endeavoring to find new, ever more satisfactory frames of cultural and historical reference by which to understand *the meaning of the text*” (Legaspi: 26).

The history of the academic and scriptural modes of reading the Bible, from the eighteenth century to the present, is too complicated to be rehearsed here (see the fuller discussion in McCalla), but it is enough to note that their often-contentious relationship underlies much of the so-called battles between religion and science. In the debate over Darwinian evolution, for example, the credibility of the science was only a secondary issue. The primary battle was over the nature and interpretation of the beginning chapters of

Genesis.<sup>3</sup> For those adopting an academic mode of reading, the stories in Genesis can be divided into two distinct traditions, each representing a distinct historical period in Israelite religion. Moreover, the similarities these traditions share with Mesopotamian creation myths (despite some historical and cultural differences) indicate that the biblical stories share a similar mythic worldview. For such readers, the Genesis stories, as ancient tales or myths, were irrelevant to the modern quest to understand human origins and biological diversity, which Darwinian evolution sought to explain. For those embracing the scriptural mode of reading the Bible, however, the academic interpretation of Genesis undermines the Christian faith more so than evolutionary science because it challenges the very authority and truth of the Bible. For scriptural readers, the stories in Genesis, in accord with the Christian tradition, attest to God as the one who creates humans in his image and brings all other life into being. Such a meaning of the Bible is inspired and infallible, and so cannot simply be dismissed as ancient mythic thinking. Similarly, the text makes no room for Darwinian evolution, which would deny the central role of God in the creation of life. Therefore, scriptural readers reject the academic interpretation of Genesis, along with its ally Darwinian evolution, as examples of fallen-human error.

Today, these two modes of reading the Bible are not always so distinct. Although the academic mode of reading came to dominate biblical scholarship and liberal Protestant Christianity,<sup>4</sup> while the scriptural mode of reading persisted in various forms in conservative ecclesial contexts,<sup>5</sup> especially in the United States, the scriptural mode in particular has been shaped in large part by the academic mode. Scriptural readers have learned from and embraced many of the same tools as academic readers. They have incorporated the insights of the academic reading of the Bible, often participating in this mode of reading themselves, in order to better understand the Bible in its context. But the scriptural mode of reading also developed in response to the academic mode as some of the latter's presuppositions and conclusions were rejected. The anti-supernatural bias of academic readers, for example, is believed to distort their understanding of the Bible. The Bible, for scriptural readers, does not reflect ancient superstitious or mythic thinking, but the actual engagement of God in our world. Moreover, scriptural readers are not content simply to understand the ancient

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<sup>3</sup> This was also the case for the Scopes trial of 1925, by far the most significant forum for the so-called religion and science debate in the U.S. According to the McCalla, only Clarence Darrow seemed to think the focus of the debate was the incompatibility between religion and science. "Everyone else, on both sides, recognized the trial as an outlying skirmish in the battle for Christian America between Fundamentalists and their theologically liberal and moderate opponents . . . whose embrace of biblical criticism and theistic evolution betrayed the inerrant Bible and the true faith" (164).

<sup>4</sup> Gordon Kaufman articulates the liberal Christian understanding of the Bible: it is a historical text of a people's experience and understanding of God. The Bible continues to be valuable, though not authoritative, as the principle historical reports about God, and therefore an indispensable source for the knowledge of God.

<sup>5</sup> Reading the Bible in the Roman Catholic Church follows a different history than in Protestantism largely because the authority of the Bible was never disembedded from the Church. Roman Catholics never embraced *sola scriptura* and so their scriptural mode of reading the Bible continued to be mediated by the teaching of the Church. On the negative side, conflicts with science, such as in the Galileo affair, pitted the authority of the Church against the new science. On the positive side, however, the Church could more easily learn from science and so its authority could clear the way for a fruitful dialogue between scriptural and academic readers of the Bible.

contextual meaning of the Bible; they also seek to read the text as the living Word of God, which continues to speak to contemporary believers. What ultimately distinguishes the two modes of reading, however, is the nature and scope of biblical authority.

According to the academic mode of reading, the Bible possesses no intrinsic authority, but only that which was historically ascribed to it by the Church or others. The meaning of the Bible is historically and culturally contingent, and its interpretation is subject only to reason and the growing canons of humanistic and scientific knowledge. This mode of reading the Bible cannot conflict with new scientific discoveries or knowledge. The scriptural mode of reading, in contrast, presumes the Bible is intrinsically and, in many ecclesial contexts, exclusively authoritative as the Word of God. Although the Bible is often recognized to have a history, the production of the Bible is nevertheless proclaimed to be divinely inspired. The Bible's interpretation is subject to the Bible itself, for the Bible's meaning, properly understood, is singular and without error. New scientific knowledge may indeed conflict with the scriptural reading of the Bible when the science challenges or contradicts the assumed meaning of the biblical text. Under such circumstances, the relationship between the Bible's meaning and the scientific knowledge will be negotiated in such a way as to preserve the Bible's authority (see Harlow; Kurka). In some cases, the scientific knowledge will be rejected as the product of fallen-human error, but in other cases, either the meaning of the Bible or the significance of the scientific knowledge will be accommodated to the other (see Schneider).

### **The Historical Adam and Other Misguided Dogmas**

Although debates over the meaning of the Bible in relation to the natural sciences have been the most public and sensational, they are far from being the most frequent and significant. Beginning in the nineteenth century, biblical higher criticism, which characterizes the academic mode of reading the Bible, has repeatedly challenged the scriptural reader's understanding of the nature of the Bible and its interpretation. First, biblical critics used philology and literary and form criticisms to construct new understandings of the origin, composition, and dating of the biblical texts. Second, scholars used historical analyzes and tradition criticisms in conjunction with archaeological results to rewrite an ancient history, which challenged the historical veracity of many of the Bible's foundational stories. Third, biblical critics placed the biblical traditions in the context of the history of religions and employed social-scientific criticisms to develop new understandings of the Israelite religion and worldview. This dismantled many of what had previously been understood as the Israelites' distinctive characteristics. In other words, most modern biblical critics, like their eighteenth-century forebearers, view the Bible as unexceptional and interpret it as a product of its ancient historical, cultural, and social contexts.

Scriptural readers have had varying responses to the work of academic biblical critics. For many scriptural readers, biblical higher criticism has provided much useful information for understanding the biblical world and the interpretation of the biblical texts, and such information is negotiated and appropriated in such a way as to not challenge the authority of the Bible. For other scriptural readers, however, the presuppositions of biblical higher criticism, which reject the intrinsic authority of the Bible, make this methodological framework untenable. Instead, they engage in a historical-grammatical approach to reading

the Bible – essentially using textual criticism and philology to clarify what the “original” Hebrew and Greek texts mean – or, in the extreme, they retreat to a literalistic reading of the Bible. Their commitment to biblical authority determines what methodological approaches to and interpretations of the Bible are or are not possible. These scriptural readers further bolster the biblical authority by emphasizing dogmas such as divine verbal inspiration and inerrancy, which preclude any debate that might challenge that authority (see the scholars discussed below).

Numerous examples could be marshaled to illustrate the conflict between the academic and the scriptural modes of reading the Bible, but two will be sufficient in this context: the debate concerning the historicity of Joshua’s conquest as recorded in Joshua 1–12, and the recent debate among Evangelicals over the historicity of the primeval couple, Adam and Eve, in Genesis 2–3.

#### *The Historicity of Joshua’s Conquest*

According to biblical chronology, the exodus occurred 480 years prior to the fourth year of the reign of King Solomon (1 Kings 6:1), placing the exodus around 1440 BCE and the conquest of Canaan by Joshua and the Israelites beginning at the end of that century. But this date is historically problematic, for during most of the Late Bronze period (approximately 1500–1200 BCE), Egypt’s powerful and expansive New Kingdom was firmly in control of the southern Levant, and competed with the Kingdoms of Mitanni and Hatti for control of the northern Levant. This biblical date is simply not a plausible time for the Israelites to have taken possession of the land of Canaan. In contrast, the biblical reference to the enslaved Israelites building the supply cities of Pithom and Rameses (Exodus 1:11) has led many scholars to date the exodus – if indeed it is a historical event, which many biblical scholars reject<sup>6</sup> – to the reign of Rameses II in the mid-thirteenth century BCE, after which time the Egyptians largely withdrew from the Levant as they battled the Sea Peoples and faced internal problems.

The historicity of the Joshua conquest narrative, however, is not simply an issue of date, but is challenged by literary, historical, and archaeological problems. First, the literary representation of the conquest in Joshua 1–12 is in conflict with its representation in Judges 1:1–2:5, among other texts, which is a story of a failed conquest. Second, the literary representation of Joshua as the warrior-leader of all Israel, united around the worship of YHWH, with fully developed cult and laws is idealistic and historically anachronistic, reflecting perhaps the conception of the late Judean monarchy. Third and most significant, the archaeological evidence is not consistent with the stories of Joshua. Although some notable towns – Hazor, Lachish, Megiddo – were destroyed at the end of the Late Bronze period, the only plausible date for the conquest, Jericho and Gibeon had no Late Bronze II

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<sup>6</sup> Although the exodus story plays a prominent role in the story of the Israelites, no evidence of Israelites in Egypt or of an exodus from Egypt exists. The first reference to Israel in the Egyptian records is found on a stela erected by Merneptah, the son and heir of Rameses II, in his fifth year (approximately 1208 BCE). According to the stela, Israel is a people located in the southern Levant, who were recently “laid waste, [their] seed is not.” Moreover, the exodus story does not present itself as history, so that, for example, the Egyptian king’s name is never mentioned and YHWH plays a particularly active role in the story. Thus, biblical scholars typically interpret the exodus story in literary or mythic terms rather than as a historical episode.

occupation, and Ai had been abandoned from the end of the Early Bronze age until the Iron I period. For these and other reasons, many biblical scholars have concluded that the stories in Joshua 1–12, especially the stories concerning Jericho, Ai, and Gibeon, are not historical. The stories are interpreted to be either legendary etiological tales, used to explain, for example, why Ai, whose name means, “the ruin,” was in fact a ruin and why the Gibeonites continued to live among the Israelites, or creative historical fictions used to emphasize the consequences of the Israelites’ obedience or disobedience to God’s laws (particularly, the Deuteronomic laws).

Although the evidence for the non-historical character of Joshua 1–12 has been contested by both biblical critics and scriptural readers – after all, what biblical interpretations are not contested – what is interesting in this context is why the evidence and interpretation is contested. Bryant Wood of the Associates for Biblical Research, for example, has spent much of his scholarly life arguing for the historical reliability of the Joshua narrative. He is well-educated and a good scholar, and his arguments are largely scientific. For example, he disputes the date of the final destruction of Jericho with a scientific analysis of the archaeological remains: He argues that Kathleen Kenyon’s date of 1550 BCE was based on the absence of imported Late Bronze I pottery in her excavation trenches – a methodologically unsound procedure – and that she ignored the presence of locally made domestic pottery that does date to the Late Bronze I period (1990). Thus, on scientific grounds Wood lowers the date of the destruction of Jericho to around 1400 BCE, which he attributes to the Israelites, based on the book of Joshua. For most scholars, this date is still much too early for the Israelites, but Wood follows the biblical chronology, dating the exodus around 1446 BCE (see 2005).

Wood’s analysis of the Ai story is similarly scientific. For him, the issue is not the long abandonment of Ai, but rather the identification of biblical Ai with et-Tell. Instead, he argues that biblical Ai should be identified with Khirbet el-Maqatir, to the north of et-Tell (he also re-identifies Bethel and Beth-aven with el-Bira and Beitin, which are geographically associated with Ai; cf. Joshua 7:2) (2008). During the recent excavations at Khirbet el-Maqatir, Wood and his associates discovered a small Late Bronze I fortress and a scarab, also dated to the Late Bronze I period, which Wood suggests may have been worn by the last king of Ai, who was defeated by Joshua and the Israelites. It should also be noted here that Wood believes his excavations at Khirbet el-Maqatir support the historicity of the biblical tradition because he dates the exodus to the mid-fifteenth century BCE. Without such an early date for the exodus, Khirbet el-Maqatir poses the same problems as et-Tell, for neither site has Late Bronze II occupation. Although Wood’s methodology is scientific, his motives are not. As he thanks supporters of his work in a preliminary report, he notes, “God is providing stronger and stronger evidence countering the attacks of critics and supplying reasons to believe for those seeking the truth.” His archaeological research, generally viewed as a scientific discipline, also has, according to him, “apologetic and evangelistic value,” for “It verifies and powerfully proclaims the truth of God’s Word in this scientific age of doubt, skepticism and moral decay” (2013).

Whether or not critical biblical scholars accept Wood’s arguments for the historical reliability of Joshua 1–12 will be determined on scientific grounds. At present, few have embraced his conclusions, and his early date for the exodus, based primarily on the biblical

chronology, without which his other arguments are moot, has no critical followers of which I am aware. Nevertheless, his work remains undeterred. What is at stake for Wood is the truth of the Bible, and he is confident that his research, with God's help, will verify its truth, which is expressed in terms of history in this case. The historicity of Joshua 1–12, for Wood, is not simply an academic question. It is an assumption based on his understanding of the Bible's authority, which can be demonstrated through rigorous scientific research. Yet, even with all his careful archaeological work, his conclusions remain dependent on a literal reading of biblical chronology, the veracity of which he does not question because of biblical authority.

### *The Historicity of Adam*

The recent Evangelical debates over the historical Adam are a direct result of the recent mapping of the human genome and subsequent genomic research (see Ostling). Prior to this recent research, scriptural readers of the Bible could accommodate varying degrees of evolutionary science without challenging biblical authority; their belief in God's special creation of humans was compatible with the evolutionary science.<sup>7</sup> They would argue, for example, that God intervened in the evolution of humans and created Adam and Eve as the first modern humans, from which all other modern humans are descended, or that modern humans were similarly created by God, but Adam and Eve were a more recent human couple, dating perhaps to the early Neolithic period, with whom God initiated a special relationship as representative of humankind (see Young). In either case, the biblical authority was defended and the truth of the Bible was upheld in relation to the overwhelming evidence of evolution. Moreover, the scientific research on mitochondrial DNA and Y-chromosome sequences seemed to support the biblical idea of a common human ancestor in the relatively recent past; human evolution had experienced a population bottleneck from which modern humans had emerged.

All this changed with recent genomic research. The genomic evidence suggests that the human population has not experienced an extreme population bottleneck for at least the last nine million years, and that modern humans descend from an interbreeding population of at least several thousand (Venema). In other words, the genomic evidence rules out the possibility that a historical Adam and Eve were the biological ancestors of all modern humans. This was, of course, not surprising news to academic biblical critics, who had long ago abandoned any pretense of a historical primordial couple. When compared with other ancient Near Eastern creation stories such as Atrahasis, Adapa, and Enuma Elish, biblical critics recognized that the Genesis creation stories are of the same genre and serve similar purposes, and while Adam and Eve have mythic and literary roles in the narrative, they are not historical figures. Scriptural readers of the Bible, however, could not so easily come to

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<sup>7</sup> The Catholic Church has essentially taught the same. In *Humani Generis*, Pius XII reluctantly accepted evolution, but insisted that "Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God" (36). Moreover, Pius insisted that any form of polygenism – that all humans did not originate from a single human pair (Adam and Eve) – must be rejected and is incompatible with the Church's teaching on original sin (37). John Paul II, writing before the mapping of the human genome and the understanding of its implications for human evolution, reaffirmed Pius' teaching, especially with regard to the soul, but also acknowledged that the Church's understanding of scripture must be informed by the results of the latest scientific research.

this conclusion because so much more was at stake for them. As a story of historical, that is, real individuals, the garden narrative in Genesis 2–3 explains how sin came into the world through human rebellion, accompanied by spiritual death. Moreover, Jesus seems to refer to a real Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:4), and Paul contrasts Adam’s sin, which brought death for all humans, with Jesus’ righteousness, which brings justification for all (Romans 5:12-20). For scriptural readers, the loss of a historical Adam challenges fundamental aspects of Christian theology, but more importantly, it challenges the authority of the Bible. It raises the question of whether the Bible is made up of a patchwork of true and false texts: if the story of human sin and death is fictional, can we trust the gospel, which offers the remedy? The loss of a historical Adam would appear to undermine the Bible’s authority as a whole, and so call into question the truth of the Bible.

A recent book on the historical Adam has brought together four evangelical scholars, each with a different relationship to evolutionary science, to discuss the significance of Adam’s existence or non-existence for Christian faith and practice and for the Christian worldview and theology (Barrett and Caneday). What is not at issue in the discussion is the authority of the Bible, which is assumed and fortified throughout the discussion. Instead, each scholar demonstrates how his interpretation of the Bible, in negotiation with or rejection of evolutionary science, reinforces the authority of the Bible for Christian life and theology.

At one extreme, William D. Barrick, a young-earth creationist, predictably rejects evolutionary science in favor of a literalistic reading of the Genesis creation stories, including a literal historical Adam. His view of biblical authority demands that the claims of science should be rejected if they contradict what the Bible says, because only the Bible is inspired and inerrant. The authority of the Bible ensures its truth.

At the other extreme, Denis O. Lamoureux embraces evolutionary creation and argues that Adam was not a historical person. Interestingly, he begins his discussion with a rather long rehearsal of his spiritual and intellectual pilgrimage in order to assure his audience that he is a faithful Christian. When he deals with the creation stories of Genesis, he places them in their Near Eastern context and makes the case that the biblical texts present the world in terms of an ancient science, which does not align with modern scientific facts. Nevertheless, and here is his scriptural move, God accommodated the biblical authors of Genesis by using the science-of-their-day in order to communicate his teaching. Similarly, God also employed “an ancient understanding of human origins – the *de novo* creation of the first man Adam – as an incidental vessel to deliver inerrant spiritual truths” (loc. 945). In other words, although there was no historical Adam, biblical authority remains secure because it was God, as the divine author of scripture, who told the fictional story about Adam; and God did so because only through such a story, using the ancient science of the day, could God’s truth be intelligible to the ancient biblical authors and the ancient Israelite audience. Biblical authority, for Lamoureux, guarantees the spiritual truth of the Bible, not its historical or scientific veracity (compare Enns 2012).

The intermediary positions of John H. Walton, who makes no stance on evolution, and C. John Collins, who is an old-earth creationist, demand more negotiation between science and their interpretation of Genesis in order to uphold the Bible’s authority. Walton’s unique

approach to the Genesis creation stories is his claim that they are not addressing material origins, but functionalities. The literary characters of Adam and Eve function as archetypes of humans in their relationship to God, and of men and women in God's created order. The Bible makes no scientific or historical claim about material human origins, and is thus compatible with a theistic evolution (though he does not embrace it). Nevertheless, Walton believes in a historical Adam and Eve, though they might not be the first humans, because they are linked into a genealogy and their historical actions best explain how sin and death come to all humans. Although the Bible does not make claims about the actual origin of humans, he believes it does make claims about the historical actions of Adam and Eve – that they were selected out from other humans by God for a unique archetypal (i.e., representative) relationship, yet they rebelled against God, condemning all humans to death through sin. For Walton, this interpretation affirms biblical authority and thus “adheres to inerrancy in that it is distinguishing between claims the Bible makes and, more importantly, to claims that it does not make” (loc. 2011; compare Walton 2012).

Finally, C. John Collins argues that because the garden story in Genesis 2–3 is the first part of the biblical story of salvation-history, which tells the story of God's creation and redemption through the ancestors, the exodus, and beyond, it should be interpreted as referring to real, actual, historical events. Both Jesus and Paul assume the garden story to be narrating real events, and so also affirm this interpretation. Thus, Adam and Eve should be understood to have been real, historical individuals who were not only supernaturally created by God in the image of God, but also the ancestors of humankind (see further Collins 2011). For Collins, the authority of the Bible demands that its story be recognized as real, as having actually happened, without a literalistic interpretation. The Bible does not give a scientific, historical description of the beginning, but rather tells the story “after the manner of a popular poet” (loc. 3034). In other words, Collins makes room for some forms of evolution and a geologically ancient earth, but nevertheless sees humans as the special creation of God. He recognizes the scientific problems with a single human couple as the progenitors of all humans, and so accepts the possibility that Adam and Eve were not the only humans at the beginning. If Adam and Eve were two among many humans, he suggests that Adam may have been the chieftain of the original human tribe, and thus representative of all humans. For Collins, biblical authority, and the inerrancy that derives from it, enables some accommodation of the interpretation of the Bible to modern science, but within the limits set by the real world that the Bible presents (compare Collins 2010).

In the case of each of these evangelical scholars, one's relationship to the science was predetermined by one's commitment to a particular understanding of biblical authority. Moreover, each of their understandings of biblical authority and its implications for interpreting Genesis is different, for the Bible's authority rests on the Bible alone; it is self-validating and not subject to or embedded in any ecclesial authority. There would appear to be no way to adjudicate between the different positions on biblical authority, and thus the volume in which the scholars engage leaves the reader uncertain about whether biblical authority requires the existence of Adam, or is compatible with the non-existence of Adam.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This uncertainty regarding the significance of Adam is highlighted in the final section of the book, where two scholars with pastoral experience comment on the significance of Adam for Christian faith. For Gregory Boyd,

### Conclusion: Biblical Authority and the Incarnation

Although religion and science debates are ostensibly about a new scientific discovery or formulation of a new theory, at issue in the debate is not the credibility of the science – though the argument may be aimed superficially in this direction – but rather the meaning and role of biblical authority. As such, religion and science debates are an expression of a longstanding conflict between two distinct modes of reading the Bible and the different understandings of authority in each. The academic mode of reading treats the Bible as an unexceptional collection of historically and culturally contingent texts, whereas the scriptural mode of reading treats the Bible as exceptional and divinely inspired. For the academic reader, authority is ultimately located in reason; the Bible is largely a dead text, whose authority is embedded in its history. For the scriptural reader, in contrast, the Bible is the living Word of God, through which God speaks infallible and inerrant words. The religion and science debates, therefore, cannot be resolved through more science, for the debates are rooted in theology rather than science. A theological resolution should thus demonstrate the compatibility of the academic and scriptural modes of reading the Bible. Admittedly, each of these modes of reading has its own distinct purpose, but neither should be able to claim exclusive understanding of the biblical texts.

Many Bible readers, in fact, attempt to embody both modes of reading. On the one hand, they critically read the Bible in its ancient context; on the other hand, they seek to hear a text that continues to speak the Word of God. Denis Lamoureux's interpretation of Genesis, for example, would appear to hold both of these readings in tension. Understanding the implications of modern science, he reads the creation story in terms of conceptions appropriate to the ancient Near East. Yet, he also reads the stories in terms of the spiritual truths they continue to teach. Lamoureux's approach to the two modes of reading is much like Stephen J. Gould's "non-overlapping magisteria": science can tell us about the historical and material world, whereas the Bible can tell us about the spiritual world. This may appear to be an adequate solution for understanding the relationship between religion and science in the context of the Genesis creation stories, but it does not adequately resolve the many conflicts between the academic and scriptural modes of reading the Bible, which by the nature of a shared text overlap. It is finally the interrelationship between these two modes that is at issue, not simply their co-existence: does one mode of reading have any bearing on the other, and how can conflict between the two modes be resolved?

In the brief space at the end of this paper I cannot do justice to the question raised, nor as a biblical scholar do I possess the theological acumen to complete the task. Instead, allow me to suggest a direction for future research and a metaphor for dialogue between biblical scholars and theologians (cf. Brown: 11-14, who offers a different solution). In *Dei Verbum*, the Vatican II dogmatic constitution on divine revelation, the divine inspiration of the Bible is compared to the incarnation of Jesus: "For the words of God, expressed in human

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the historical Adam is insignificant to Christian faith, and so faith is secure whether or not there was a historical Adam. For Philip Ryken, in contrast, a historical Adam is central to Christian faith, and without the historical Adam, one cannot rightly understand the world or Christian faith. It is unclear from the volume how these differences can be reconciled.

language, have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men” (13). This is not an infrequent comparison and can be traced as far back as Athanasius (Work: 36-50). Let me suggest that the incarnation could serve as a theological metaphor to clarify and explain the relationship between academic and scriptural modes of reading the Bible.<sup>9</sup>

*The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics* (1982), a companion piece to *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (1978), formulated by a large group of evangelical scholars under the auspices of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, also compares the nature of the Bible to Jesus’ incarnation, but for the purpose of defending the inerrancy of the Bible: just as the humanity of Jesus entailed no sin, so the human form of scripture entails no errancy (Article II). The comparison of human textual errors to the potential sins of Jesus, however, distorts the metaphor. Such errors are not sinful but are characteristic of humans and their productions. Although *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* gives lip service to the human character of the Bible, noting God’s accommodation of human language and the personalities of the authors, it so emphasizes God’s role as author, causing the human authors to use God’s very words, unencumbered by human finitude or fallenness, that the human character of the Bible seems to be little more than an apparition. Like Docetism in the Christological debates, the Bible only seems to be human (cf. the critique by Sparks: chap. 3).<sup>10</sup>

A more apt comparison for the human character of the Bible is Jesus’ own historical and material contingency. Let me clarify this with three observations. First, Jesus’ humanity was unexceptional. His body had all the limits and failings of our bodies, and his knowledge and worldview were as limited by his cultural and historical circumstances as is our knowledge and worldview. Second, the Jewish “no” to Jesus needs to be taken seriously. For the majority of Jesus’ own people, he remained unexceptional; he did not embody their hopes or expectations. Third, recognition of the significance of Jesus is attributed to the Holy Spirit in light of his resurrection. In other words, Christology is an *ex post facto* debate.

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<sup>9</sup> A compelling use of the incarnational metaphor is presented by Peter Enns, though for a different purpose. His work is apologetic and is aimed at assuring Christians that the human aspect of the Bible is not a threat to faith, but is analogous (he prefers, perhaps, parallel) to the human aspects of Jesus. For Enns, the human dimensions of the Bible are essential to its nature: “It is essential to the very nature of revelation that the Bible is not unique to its environment. The human dimension of Scripture is essential to its being Scripture” (2005: loc. 216). See also his response to a critical review, which challenges Enns on, among other issues, inerrancy (2006).

<sup>10</sup> Even Enns, who treats the Bible in its human situatedness and also claims that some scriptural readings of the Bible are Docetic, does not seem to yield fully to the human character of the Bible, as his incarnational metaphor would suggest. Embracing biblical inerrancy, he claims that “the Bible does not err because it is God’s Word and God does not err” (2006: 323, n. 20). But humans do err – it is part of human nature – and so a collection of humans’ texts, such as the Bible, should be expected to have errors. Whether or not the Bible contains human error is matter for investigation, not a matter of faith. However, perhaps Enns equivocates on what he means by “error,” for he also claims that the “human situatedness and diverse nature of Scripture, then, are not to be understood as errors corresponding to some putative sin on Christ’s part” (2006: 323). Human failings, for his part, are perhaps not truly “errors” because indeed they are not sinful. See further his comments on inerrancy in 2003: 279-81.

In a similar way, the Bible is wholly unexceptional, made up of diverse, independent texts, expressing historically and culturally contextual meanings. None of the scribes or authors of the texts considered their work to be divinely inspired; the Bible's inspiration and authority was recognized only gradually and was also subject to *ex post facto* debate. It is this human Bible that is the object of biblical criticism through an academic mode of reading. Nevertheless, such reading does not exhaust the meaning of the Bible. In the same way that Christians, through the Holy Spirit, attest to the divine and living Christ, so also they continue to hear the living Word of God through the Bible. According to this metaphorical relationship, the academic and the scriptural modes of reading the Bible should not be in conflict, for the academic mode focuses on what the Bible *meant* in its ancient context, whereas the scriptural mode gives attention to what the Bible continues to *mean* in the context of the Church.<sup>11</sup> The scriptural mode should not predetermine the Bible's contextual meaning, just as the academic mode should not limit the scope of meaning. Through an incarnational metaphor, both the human and divine aspects of the Bible can be heard.

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<sup>11</sup> This important distinction was originally made in the seminal essay by Krister Stendahl. Because his concern in the essay was to distinguish the two different tasks of the biblical interpreter, a distinction that many interpreters of his day were blurring, he does not thus offer a hermeneutical explanation that would connect the two tasks. The thesis of this essay is that the incarnation may serve as a metaphor that explains and clarifies the relationship between these two tasks, represented by the academic and scriptural modes of reading the Bible.

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