

# Review article: Two Contrasting Views on the Historical Authenticity of the Adam Character in the Genesis Creation Narratives

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Collins CJ 2011. *Did Adam and Eve really exist? Who they were and why you should care*. Wheaton: Crossway.

Enns P 2012. *The evolution of Adam: what the Bible does and doesn't say about human origins*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press.

## Abstract

In this review article, a comparison is made between the recent publications authored by C. J. Collins and P. Enns concerning the historical authenticity of the Adam character (and to a lesser extent Eve) in the Genesis creation narratives. The first section introduces and provides the rationale for the essay. Next, in the second and third sections, an overview of each author's respective books is undertaken. Then, the final section concludes by comparing the presuppositions made and deductions put forward by each author. The intent is not to adjudicate whether the exegetical choices and theological positions advocated by either writer have greater or lesser value. Instead, it is to provide concerned readers with a fresh perspective of how two representative biblical scholars

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

address a topic that is pertinent to the wider discussion on science and religion.

## 1. Introduction: the Rationale for this Essay

Within the religious and secular media, there is renewed interest in the academic question of whether the Adam of Genesis 1–3 was a historically authentic character. For example, the June 2011 issue of *Christianity Today* (a widely-read evangelical periodical) contains an article titled 'The search for the historical Adam'. The lead-in states that the 'center of the evolution debate has shifted from asking whether we came from earlier animals, to whether we could have come from one man and one woman' (Ostling 2011). Later, in August 2011, *NPR* (a news and cultural programming media organization) aired a story titled 'Evangelicals question the existence of Adam and Eve'. The lead-in asks, 'Did they exist, and did all humanity descend from that single pair?' (Hagerty 2011).

It goes without saying that the debate over whether there ever was a literal Adam (and Eve) is longstanding within religious academic circles (cf. the extensive, representative bibliography in Lioy 2011). Still, the recent media attention devoted to this issue has helped give rise to two recent scholarly publications, one by C. J. Collins, and the other by P. Enns. On the one hand, Collins (2011) advocates that Adam (along with Eve) really existed, while on the other hand, Enns (2012) maintains there never was a first *homo sapien* from whom all other humans descended. In their respective books, both authors address the same basic issues, examine a similar range of scientific and biblical data, and tend to arrive at opposite conclusions. While Collins devotes some attention to the question of Eve's historicity, Enns focuses specifically on the Adam character. Likewise, this essay mainly deals

with the question of whether a literal Adam ever existed, though it is understood that the position taken on the former issue influences what one affirms about the Eve character.

In the light of the preceding observations, the purpose of this review article is to focus the attention of researchers, theologians and pastors, once more, on the disputed issue of Adam's historical authenticity. With the latter objective in mind, the following sections of this essay undertake an overview of Collins (2011) and Enns (2012). Then, the final section compares the respective presuppositions made and deductions put forward by each author. As a disclaimer, the author of this journal article favours a predominately classical, evangelical, and orthodox interpretive approach to the Judeo-Christian scriptures (cf. Lioy 2011:4–5). That said, the intent of this essay is not to adjudicate whether the exegetical choices and theological positions advocated by either Collins or Enns have greater or lesser merit. Instead, it is to provide concerned readers with a fresh perspective of how two representative biblical scholars address a topic that is pertinent to the wider discussion on science and religion. For additional focused, scholarly deliberations concerning the historical authenticity of the Adam character in scripture, cf. Carson (1980) and Pretorius (2011). Also, for recent critical reviews of the two works being compared in this essay, cf. Collins (2012) and Enns (2012).

## **2. An Overview of Collins (2011), *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?***

### **2.1. A brief synopsis of the author and the contents of his work**

The author, who did his PhD at the University of Liverpool, is professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A. In the acknowledgments, he notes that his book grew out of an 'invited paper for the American Scientific Affiliation' (p. 9). The work has the standardised opening (introduction) and closing (conclusions) chapters, along with four intermediary chapters providing an in-depth treatment on a select group of interrelated subjects: the shape of the biblical story (ch. 2); particular texts that speak of Adam and Eve (ch. 3); human uniqueness and dignity (ch. 4); and can science help us pinpoint 'Adam and Eve'? There are three appendices dealing with the following topics: ancient Near Eastern texts and Genesis 1–11; review of James Barr, *The garden of Eden and the hope of immortality*; and the date of Genesis. Footnotes are placed at the bottom of the respective pages where they occur. Finally, the back of the volume includes a bibliography and two indexes (namely, a general index, a scripture index, and an Apocrypha index).

### **2.2 A detailed synopsis of the individual chapters of the author's work**

#### **2.2.1. Introduction (ch. 1)**

Collins begins by noting that throughout much of church history, the standardised view was that the 'biblical Adam and Eve were actual persons' (p. 11), that from this first pair of *homo sapiens*, 'all other human beings are descended', and that the couple's 'disobedience to God brought sin into human experience'. The author acknowledges that

‘educated Western Christians’ are dismissive of this ‘historical consensus’, just as they are of other outdated views. The latter includes the notion of the world being created in the ‘recent past over the course of six calendar days’, and the opinion that the ‘earth was the physical center of the universe’. Collins affirms that there is a place for ‘effective revisions’, especially when they originate from a ‘closer reading of the Bible’, and that such alternations in belief do not necessarily ‘change the basic content of Christianity’.

The author is familiar with the various explanations given for abandoning ‘traditional beliefs about Adam and Eve’ (p. 12). Some of the numerous reasons include the following: rejecting the possibility that whatever others might have ‘done long ago’ could now impact modern humans at their ‘deepest level’; contending that since the Genesis creation account is comparable to ‘stories from other ancient Near Eastern cultures’, the former is likewise ‘mythical’ in its purposes and implications; and observing that ‘recent advancements in biology’ undermine the obsolete notion of an ‘original human couple through whom sin and death came into the world’.

The preceding arguments notwithstanding, Collins sets out to ‘show why’ (p. 13) he thinks it is reasonable to ‘retain a version of the traditional view’. His basis for the latter thesis is that it ‘does the best job of accounting not only for the biblical materials, but also, for our everyday experience as human beings’. With respect to the ‘material in Genesis’ (p. 16), he maintains that whoever wrote it was ‘talking about what he thought were actual events’. Also, this person used ‘rhetorical and literary techniques to shape the readers’ attitudes toward those events’.

While Collins is well aware of the scientific data, his firmly held theological convictions lead him to adopt interpretations that agree with what he finds being taught in other portions of the Bible, along with information arising from 'Second Temple Jewish texts' (p. 13), and insights gleaned from 'everyday moral and religious experience'. It is against that backdrop that the author turns his attention to 'some sample scenarios for a scientific understanding of human origins' (p. 14). His goal is to appraise how closely they align with his understanding of the biblical teaching concerning a first human pair. He states that he is not seeking to commend 'any one scenario'; instead, it is to 'explore how the traditional position might relate to questions of paleoanthropology'. The author is overt in requiring that in order for any 'scientific understanding to be good' (p. 15), it has to 'account for the whole range of evidence'. For him, the latter includes the 'deepest intuitions' people have concerning their 'own existence'.

### *2.2.2. The shape of the biblical story (ch. 2)*

The interpretive approach Collins takes in this and the following chapters is connected with several key premises he states in his Introduction (ch. 1). Specifically, he notes that the writers of scripture were 'self-consciously interpreting their world in terms of an overarching worldview story' (p. 19). Moreover, the 'rhetorical and literary techniques' (p. 17) they used were predominately characterised by 'pictorial and symbolic language'. In Collins' view, it would be incorrect to conclude that the 'presence of symbolism means the story is *merely* symbolic' (p. 18). Put differently, he thinks it is sensible to hold that, depending on the context, the 'images' depicted in scripture could convey truth about what is genuinely historical and factual.

In the light of the preceding suppositions, Collins sets out, in chapter 2, to discuss the 'story and worldview' (p. 23) found in the Bible. His

preferred approach in reading biblical narratives includes four predominant literary ‘features’ found in the sacred texts: (p. 1) the ‘narrator ... serves as the voice and perspective of God’ (p. 24); the ‘narration’ puts ‘emphasis on direct action and interaction of the characters’; (p. 3) the ‘narratives ... focus on what is essential for the narrative’; and (p. 4) the presence of ‘elevated diction of a speech is evidence of its significance’. Collins draws upon the findings of research in ‘linguistics’ (p. 25) to stress the importance of using inference to discern what the writers of scripture sought to convey in their narratives. Genesis 3 is cited as an example in which the biblical text ‘never uses any words for sin or disobedience’. Yet, it is maintained that one can straightforwardly deduce from the passage that in the view of the writer, ‘Eve and Adam’ (p. 26) were guilty of ‘sin’.

Collins explores whether the notion of ‘myth’ is the best way to label the types of ‘stories’ found among the ‘Egyptians, Mesopotamians, or even the Hebrews’ (p. 28). He notes that it is common to presume that whatever is regarded as ‘myth’ is thereby ‘untrue’ and ‘unhistorical’. The author takes issue with this premise when it comes to the biblical narratives. He argues that ‘ancient, pre-modern, prescientific cultures’ (p. 29) are not alone in using ‘stories’ to convey actual truths. Likewise, ‘modern Western culture’ employs comparable literary conventions. His broader point is that, even though the biblical writers used the literary convention of ‘stories to convey a worldview’ (p. 31), this does not invalidate the underlying ‘full historical truthfulness’ of the accounts.

A dose of ‘caution’ (p. 33) is advocated by the author when referring to the term ‘history’. Specifically, in contrast to people in the modern world, those in the ancient Near East had a different mind-set when it comes to the way in which they related events they believed actually

occurred. For instance, Collins maintains it would be incorrect to assume that in order for the 'creation story of Genesis' to be historically factual, it must not employ 'figurative elements', and it has to be read in a strictly 'literal' manner. Put differently, he asserts that it is possible to regard the opening chapters of the Judeo-Christian scriptures as using 'imaginative' literary conventions to depict 'events' (p. 34) that 'really happened'. Moreover, he thinks the essential historicity of the biblical texts remains intact, even when what they relate is not 'complete in detail' (p. 35), 'free from ideological bias', or 'told in exact chronological sequence'.

### *2.2.3. Particular texts that speak of Adam and Eve (ch. 3)*

In the first two chapters of his work, Collins establishes the goal (ch. 1) and elaborates the presuppositions (ch. 2) for the remainder of his volume. Specifically, his objective is to 'show why' (p. 13) it is important to 'retain a version of the traditional view' of Adam and Eve. Also, he emphasises that it is crucial to be aware of the 'overarching worldview-shaping story' (p. 26) that dominates scripture, including the creation narratives found in the opening chapters of Genesis. In chapter 3, the author turns his attention to 'specific Biblical texts about Adam and Eve' (p. 51). This includes 'references' that are 'clear', along with those that are 'disputed' (p. 52). Also included is information 'from the Apocrypha' (p. 52), since 'these texts illustrate the world of Second Temple Judaism'. His intent is to 'see how' (p. 51) the data links to the 'larger picture' (p. 51) set forth in God's Word.

Collins first examines Genesis 1–5, beginning with the relationship between the 'two different creation accounts' (p. 52), namely, 1:1–2:3 and 2:4–25. He acknowledges the prevailing scholarly consensus, which regards these two texts as being 'difficult to reconcile with each other'. Nonetheless, based on his 'own literary and linguistic studies'

(p. 53), he regards the two passages as being characterised by ‘coherence’. In particular, he sees the first text providing an ‘overall account of the creation and preparation of the earth as a suitable place for humans to live’. The second text, then, is an ‘elaboration of the events of the sixth day of Genesis 1’, especially God’s bringing into existence the ‘human couple that we know as Adam and Eve’ (p. 54). The author affirms that there was a first man named ‘Adam’ (p. 56), and his ‘actions are in some sense representative of all mankind’. For instance, from him, ‘we learn something about how temptation works’ (p. 57).

Collins holds that the presence of ‘figurative elements and literary conventions’ (p. 58) precludes any ‘reading’ of the biblical text that is overly ‘literalistic’. For all that, he thinks ‘real events form the backbone of [the] story’. In line with other specialists, Collins refers to the information in the opening chapters of Genesis as ‘prehistory’ (p. 57) and ‘protohistory’. By ‘prehistory’, he means the ‘period of human existence before there are any secure written records’. He defines ‘protohistory’ as narratives of events concerning the ‘earliest stages for which there are records’. The author acknowledges that the biblical account ‘bears a relationship with the narratives of prehistory found in Mesopotamia’. In his view, though, ‘Genesis aims to tell the true story of origins’ (p. 58). He argues that the substantial dissimilarities between the Mesopotamian and Genesis versions have to ‘do with the radically differing ideologies’ (p. 59) of their respective ‘prehistories’.

Next, Collins shifts his focus to other portions of the Old Testament. His objective is to ‘show how the themes of Genesis 1–5 are played out in the rest of the Hebrew’ (p. 67) sacred writings. He begins by questioning the validity of the common assertion, that ‘references’ to Adam and Eve and the ‘fall story’ are either ‘rare’ or ‘nonexistent’ in

other portions of the Tanakh. For instance, the author notes that the 'genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 connect the primal pair to subsequent generations' (p. 68), especially to 'Abraham'. Likewise, the text 'presents Noah ... as a kind of new Adam' (cf. 6:18–19; 9:1, 8–17). Additionally, 'God's blessing on the original human pair' (cf. 1:28) is reflected in the 'call of Abraham' (cf. 12:2–3; 17:20; 22:17–18; 26:3–4, 24; 28:3, 14). Furthermore, there is a strong thematic link between Adam and Eve's 'offspring' (cf. Gen 3:15; 4:25; 1 Chro 1:1) and that of the patriarchs and their descendants (cf. Gen 12:7; 13:15–16; 15:3, 5; 17:7–9, 19; 22:17–18; 24:60; 26:3–4; 48:4; Ps 72:17; Gal 3:16).

Collins regards Ecclesiastes 7:20 and 29, with their focus on rectitude and transgression, as echoing the 'fall story' (p. 70) of Genesis 3. Similarly, the expression 'return to dust' in Ecclesiastes 3:20 and 12:7 bring to mind Genesis 3:19. The author draws attention to Hosea 6:7 and advocates rendering the 'hotly disputed' verse as 'like Adam'. Because he considers the latter to be the 'simplest interpretation of the Hebrew words' (p. 71), he does not favour two other alternatives, namely, either 'at (the place called) Adam' (p. 70), or 'like any human beings'. Collins also cites Job 31:33, in which it is possible to translate the original to read 'as Adam did' (p. 71). In terms of the latter verse, the author leaves as an 'open question' whether it is actually referring to the first man God created.

Next, Second Temple Jewish literature receives consideration. Because of the uneven literary and theological quality of this material, Collins is more selective and abbreviated in his discussion. He mentions Tobit 8:6, which provides an 'historical recital' (p. 73) of God's creation of Adam and Eve. Likewise, the author cites the Wisdom of Solomon 2:23–24 (cf. 7:1; 10:1), which treats the account of the Fall recorded in Genesis 3 as an 'historical event' (p. 74). Collins notes various passages in Sirach that take the 'creation' and 'fall' of humankind as 'historical'

(p. 75) events (cf. 14:17; 15:14; 17:1; 25:16–26; 33:10; 40:1). Particularly noteworthy is 49:16, which treats Adam as an ‘historical person’. Moreover, in the writings of Josephus, Adam and Eve are looked upon as ‘actual people’ (p. 76) who existed ‘at the head of the human race’ (cf. *Antiquities* 1.2.3, line 67; 4.8.2, line 180).

From there, Collins deals with the gospels. For example, Matthew 19:4 and Mark 10:6 record Jesus’ quote from Genesis 1:27, in which he asserted that when God created the world, he brought the first ‘male and female’ into existence. Then, Matthew 19:5 and Mark 10:7 record Jesus’ quote from Genesis 2:24, in which he upheld the sanctity of marriage. The author observes that Jesus’ statements about the creation and fall of humankind are premised on his regard for the literary interdependence of Genesis 1 and 2, and the historical authenticity of Adam and Eve (p. 77). Collins considers the ‘historicity of Adam’ (p. 66) to be ‘assumed’ in the genealogy of Luke 3:38. Furthermore, the author holds Jesus’ statement in John 8:44 to be a ‘passing reference’ (p. 77) to the ‘serpent as the mouthpiece of the Evil One’. The implication is that Jesus understood Adam and Eve to be ‘actual people’ (p. 78), whose ‘disobedience changed things for ... their descendants’.

Collins, then, discusses the Pauline writings. The author includes both the undisputed and ‘disputed’ letters, as well as the Book of Acts. He notes that passages, such as 1 Corinthians 11:7–12, 2 Corinthians 11:3, and 1 Timothy 2:13–14, refer to ‘parts of Genesis 1–3 in passing’. Collins sides with the view that the preceding ‘references share the usual assumption of Second Temple Jews, that Adam and Eve were historical’. The author states that other Pauline texts are more overt in their treatment of the opening chapters of Genesis. For this reason, Collins devotes considerable attention to Acts 17:26, Romans 5:12–19, and 1 Corinthians 15:20–23. His supposition is that Paul accepted the

'narrative about Adam and Eve' to be historical. Indeed, the author maintains that the foundation of Paul's comparison of Adam and Jesus is based on the apostle's conviction that Adam was an 'historical character' (p. 80). Expressed differently, 'Paul's argument does presuppose Adam as an actual character in the [Genesis] narrative' (p. 82) and that all humankind is biologically descended from an 'original pair' (p. 84).

The final portion of chapter 3 overviews 'incidental' (p. 90) references 'elsewhere in the New Testament' to the opening chapters of Genesis. Collins concedes that the evidence is 'inconclusive as to whether the historicity' of Adam and Eve is 'tightly bound up with the New Testament claims'. That said, the author posits Hebrews 11 (especially vv. 4–7) as a 'likely exception'. Based on his analysis of the text, he concludes that the 'author of Hebrews assumes the historicity' (p. 91) of the various 'characters' narrated in Genesis 4–5. Similarly, Collins sees 'no reason to exclude Adam and Eve from the same assumption'.

#### *2.2.4. Human uniqueness and dignity (ch. 4)*

In this chapter, Collins deliberates the 'nature of human life and God's expectations for human communities' (p. 93). Collins asserts that the way in which scripture deals with 'these subjects takes for granted some kind of common origin of all human beings in Adam'. Furthermore, the author maintains that the Bible's doctrinal impulses 'actually link up with everyday human experience'. Put another way, the 'biblical picture' does the best job of clarifying this 'experience'.

A case in point is Genesis 1:26–27 and its declaration of humankind being made in the 'image of God'. Collins summarises three common views and affirms the validity of each: (1) people are 'like God' (p. 94) in the realm of their 'intellectual, moral, and aesthetic experience'; (2)

the ‘image of God’ denotes the ‘way that humans are appointed to rule the creation on God’s behalf’; and (3) the divine image is seen when people coexist in ‘community’. The author holds that, in contrast to the rest of the creatures in the world, every ‘human being’ (p. 95) is a ‘body-soul tangle that expresses God’s image’ (cf. Gen 9:6; Jas 3:9). Collins espouses that the ‘proper functioning’ of the divine ‘image’ has been ‘damaged by human sin’. Moreover, he holds that God’s image is being ‘renewed’ in his ‘faithful people’ (cf. Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).

Collins openly asks how God’s ‘image’ (p. 96) came ‘to be bestowed’ and the manner in which it is ‘transmitted’. Based on the author’s assessment of scripture, he dismisses the notion that the ‘outcome’ was solely due to ‘natural processes’. This necessitates that the ‘first human’ was the ‘result of a special bestowal’. Additionally, based on the author’s study of Genesis, he postulates that the ‘image is transmitted by procreation’ (p. 99). Collins acknowledges that ‘other animals’ (p. 96) possibly display ‘features that are analogous’ to what are found in humans. Even so, the author insists that the ‘total assembly of characteristics’ appearing in people is ‘distinct’, ‘transcends their immediate bodily needs’, and is something far more than a ‘merely natural development of the capacities in other animals’.

The final portion of chapter 4 considers the ‘universal human experiences’ (p. 100) of ‘yearning for justice’ and a ‘need for God’. Collins observes that when Adam and Eve sinned, it ‘corrupted’ their ‘created constitution’. In turn, this led to a tear in the ‘social’ fabric binding humans relationally together, an escalation of injustice, and a rampant ignorance of the creator. The author comments that there is a ‘general human sense of being lost’ (p. 102), which is best accounted for in Genesis (p. 103). Moreover, he regards the opening chapters of Genesis as having the most explanatory power concerning the fallen

human condition when the biblical text is 'read ... as some kind of history'. Collins holds that with the advent of the Messiah and the promise of his future kingdom, there is an 'embracing' (p. 100) among believers of their 'common humanity as heirs of Adam', who have been 'rescued by God's grace'. Collins insists that, even now, it is a 'major goal of all church life to bring this ideal into more and more complete and convincing expression' (p. 101).

### *2.2.5. Can science help us pinpoint 'Adam and Eve'? (ch. 5)*

In keeping with what Collins stated earlier in his work, he asserts in chapter 5 that a 'good theory must account for *all of the data*, and not just the biochemistry' (p. 105, italics are the author's). He begins by assessing the efforts of some to 'coordinate the findings of science with the teachings of Genesis' (i.e. 'concordism', p. 106). To be specific, the author questions the efficacy of a procedure in which 'scientific theories change' from one generation to the next. That said, he disagrees with the claim that there is absolutely no 'connection' (p. 107) between the historical 'subject matter' recorded in scripture and the 'results of other fields of study'. Collins expresses receptivity to the 'view that the proper relationship between science and faith' is characterised by 'complementarity'. However, he challenges a 'strict insistence on science-faith complementarity' (p. 108), since he maintains there are some incidents recounted in scripture that also have both 'natural' and 'supernatural components'. Moreover, he anticipates there will be situations in which, against the backdrop of prevailing scientific assertions, a decision is required concerning whether the 'Bible can actually refer to real persons and events'.

With respect to the creation accounts recorded in the opening chapters of Genesis, Collins thinks it is 'reasonable to expect' (p. 109) that scripture employs 'imaginative description' to relate 'actual events'.

The author remains firm in this view, even after taking into account the ‘literary conventions, rhetorical purpose, and original audience’. He avers, that while Genesis might ‘speak of the phenomena that the sciences study’ (p. 110), it would be misguided to expect scientific precision from what the Bible teaches. The author regards the intent of Genesis not as conveying ‘technical’ details, but rather placing ‘already-known facts into a proper worldview context’. In particular, the ‘world’ operates as it does ‘because it is the good creation of a good and magnificent Creator’. Collins postulates that ‘anachronism’ (p. 113) could be evident in the Genesis narratives. Put another way, the biblical ‘text ... described aspects of the older times’ using literary conventions and vocabulary ‘familiar’ to the original readers. The author argues that the latter need not call into question the essential ‘historicity of the text’, for it ‘still refers to actual events’ (p. 114).

Collins puts forward the following four ‘criteria’ (p. 120) to ‘stay within the bounds of sound thinking’ regarding ‘traditional views of Adam and Eve’: (1) given ‘how distinctive’ is the ‘image of God’, the ‘origin of the human race goes beyond a merely natural process’; (2) the ‘unified experience’ of people across the globe throughout the centuries is best accounted for by regarding ‘Adam and Eve at the headwaters of the human race’; (3) the ‘universal sense of loss’ common to all people offers the most reasonable explanation for the ‘historical’ and ‘moral’ corruption or ‘fall’ of the human race; and (4) at the dawn of the human race, if there existed ‘more human beings than just Adam and Eve’ (p. 121), these should be thought of as a ‘single tribe’. In the latter case, ‘Adam would be the chieftain of this tribe’; also, ‘Eve would be his wife’. Consequently, the entire ‘tribe’ morally transgressed ‘under the leadership’ of their ‘representative’ head. In light of the preceding

criteria, the author's non-negotiable touchstone is 'human uniqueness and unity in both dignity and need' (p. 124).

### **2.2.6. Conclusions (ch. 6)**

Collins begins by clarifying that the intent of his work is not to find a solution to 'every problem' (133) or evaluate 'every possible objection' connected with the opening chapters of Genesis. Instead, in light of a broad range of representative biblical and scientific information, he attempts to establish 'why the traditional understanding of Adam and Eve' merits the believers' 'confidence and adherence'. This includes regarding the pair as the 'first parents' of *homo sapiens* who 'brought sin into human experience'. The author maintains that what he has advocated 'does justice to specific Biblical texts' (e.g. Genesis, the gospels, and the Pauline writings). Likewise, he considers the 'traditional understanding', including its 'notions of representation and covenantal inclusion', to furnish a 'meaningful explanation for everyday experience'. Furthermore, he regards the 'alternatives' to be 'less satisfactory' and potentially 'even disastrous' interpretive options.

## **3. An Overview of Enns (2011), *The Evolution of Adam***

### **3.1. A brief synopsis of the author and the contents of his work**

The author, who did his PhD at Harvard University, is professor of biblical studies at Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. In the acknowledgments section, he notes that his interactions with various Christian professionals who wrestle with 'how their faith and scientific work can coexist' (vii) is one of the reasons for him undertaking this 'project'. The work has the standardised opening (introduction) and closing (conclusion) sections, along with seven intermediary chapters, divided into two parts, providing an in-depth

treatment on a select group of interrelated subjects. Part one: Genesis and the challenges of the nineteenth century (ch. 1); when was Genesis written? (ch. 2); stories of origins from Israel's neighbors (ch. 3); and Israel and primordial time (ch. 4). Part two: Paul's Adam and the Old Testament (ch. 5); Paul as an ancient interpreter of the Old Testament (ch. 6); and Paul's Adam (ch. 7). Finally, the back of the volume includes endnotes, a bibliography, and two indexes (namely, a subject index and a scripture index).

## **3.2. A detailed synopsis of the individual chapters of the author's work**

### ***3.2.1. Introduction***

Enns begins by explaining why he wrote his book. He notes the 'relentless, articulate, and popular attacks on Christianity by New Atheists' (ix). According to these proponents, 'evolution has destroyed the possibility of ... a faith like Christianity'. The author also points to the recent 'advances in our understanding of evolution', particularly the conclusive evidence that 'humans and primates share common ancestry'. He observes that 'many Christians' regard 'evolution' as a 'challenge' to the 'story of origins presented in the Bible'. The latter circumstance motivates the author's primary objective in his work, namely, to 'focus solely on how the Bible fits into' the subject of 'human origins'. Enns seeks to 'clear away some misunderstandings' (p. x), as well as offer 'different ways of thinking through some perennial problems'. His hoped-for result is placing 'interested readers on a constructive path' of being able to 'accept evolution, and also value scripture as God's Word' (p. ix).

The author identifies as his 'primary audience' (p. x) those belonging to evangelicalism, especially within an 'American context'. He describes these individuals as having a 'deep, instinctual commitment to Scripture', and the conviction that 'evolution must be taken seriously'. For them, he offers a 'synthesis between a biblically conversant Christian faith and evolution'. The philosophical underpinning of the author's endeavour is the premise that in order to read 'sacred Scripture' (p. xi) appropriately, one must accept that God's Word is a 'product of the times in which it was written' and the 'events' occurring when the texts were originally produced. He draws upon the 'analogy of the incarnation' to affirm that while the Judeo-Christian canon is 'ultimately of divine origin', it likewise is 'thoroughly a product of its time'.

The 'historical approach' (p. xii) Enns adopts in his work is based on three interrelated presuppositions: (1) the way in which interpreters 'understand the Old Testament' (p. xi) is substantially influenced by their 'knowledge of the cultures that surrounded ancient Israel'; (2) God's Word is characterised by 'significant theological diversity', as seen in its 'collection of discrete writings from widely different times and places', which were 'written for diverse purposes'; and (3) the 'New Testament authors' were 'creative' in the way they interacted with the Hebrew sacred writings, and this approach 'reflects the Jewish thought world of the time'. Enns considers the preceding affirmations to be an indication of 'God's great love' (p. xii) to accommodate himself to his 'creation', particularly humanity. Moreover, the author regards his emphasis on the 'historical circumstances' (p. xii) to be a defining characteristic of 'what it means to be a responsible reader of Scripture' in one's own 'time and place'.

Enns argues, that the way in which believers understand the Adam character in scripture 'must now be adjusted' (p. xiii) as a result of two

interconnected factors: (1) ‘scientific evidence supporting evolution’; and (2) ‘literary evidence from the world of the Bible’ that determines the proper way in which to interpret it. The author maintains that taking into account the preceding two influences is a ‘way that respects and honours the authority of the Bible’. Also, in his view, it fosters ‘keeping Scripture and natural science in conversation’ (p. xiv). He regards that interaction as being promoted when it is affirmed that God’s Word has ‘an ancient view of the natural world, not a modern one’, and ‘simply speaks in an ancient idiom’, not a contemporary scientific one.

The author is candid in stating that the findings of evolution are a ‘game changer’. For instance, *homo sapiens* are the ‘end product of a process of trial-and-error adaptation and natural selection’, not the result of a ‘special creative act by God’. Hence, according to Enns, it is implausible to maintain the ‘instantaneous and special creation of humanity’ found in the opening chapters of Genesis (i.e. 1:26–31; 2:7, 22). He also finds to be inadequate all ‘hybrid’ attempts to merge ‘modern and ancient accounts of human origins’ (p. xv). The latter includes any effort to expand the definition of the ‘image of God’, to include such notions as ‘reason, self-consciousness, or consciousness of God’. Based on the author’s understanding of the ‘ancient Near Eastern world’, the *imago dei* only denotes ‘humanity’s role of ruling God’s creation as God’s representative’.

For Enns, then, the unavoidable difficulty is coming to terms with the differences between ‘Genesis and evolution’, with respect to human origins. He claims that part of the reconciliation process includes ‘thinking through the parameters’ of the ‘problem’. Central to this endeavour is achieving some sort of ‘synthesis’ with what is found in the Pauline writings. Enns maintains that while there is a ‘virtual silence in the Old Testament’ (p. xvi) concerning ‘Adam’, he ‘makes a sudden

and unprecedented appearance in two of Paul's Letters' (i.e. Rom 15:12–21 and 1 Cor 15:20–58). Yet, in light of the findings of modern science, the author thinks it is a 'mistake' to affirm the 'dominant Christian view' that 'both Adam and Jesus must have been historical figures'. The author acknowledges the magnitude of the tension, for scripture is dealing with 'questions of who we are and why we do what we do' (p. xvii).

Enns puts forward four options to address the preceding issue: (1) 'accept evolution and reject Christianity'; (2) 'accept Paul's view of Adam as binding and reject evolution'; (3) 'reconcile evolution and Christianity by positing a first human pair (or group) at some point in the evolutionary process'; and (4) 'reevaluate what we have *the right to expect* from Genesis and Paul' (xviii; italics are the author's). Enns maintains that the first three options do an inadequate job to 'properly address Genesis as ancient literature and Paul as an ancient man'. For this reason, he regards the fourth option as the best way to 'think synthetically about how Christianity and evolution can be in dialogue'.

In the author's view, part of the task includes considering 'when Genesis was written and why'. For him, this involves affirming that 'Genesis is an ancient Israelite narrative written to answer pressing ancient Israelite questions'. Likewise, in agreement with 'modern scholarship', Enns considers the first book of the Judeo-Christian canon to be 'Israel's statement of national self-definition in the wake of Babylonian captivity'. This leads him to assert that 'science and Scripture speak two different languages and accomplish quite different things' (p. xix). With respect to the Pauline writings, the author thinks the apostle's 'use of the Adam story serves a vital theological purpose', namely, to elucidate to his 'ancient readers the significance for all humanity of *Christ's death and resurrection*' (italics are the author's). Notwithstanding this, Enns insists that Paul's 'use of the Adam story'

need not deter ‘biblically faithful Christians’ from adopting ‘evolution as the scientific account of human origins’.

### *3.2.2. Genesis and the challenges of the nineteenth century: science, biblical criticism, and biblical archaeology (ch. 1)*

Enns begins by undertaking an overview of the ‘legacy of the nineteenth-century and its lasting impact on Genesis’ (p. 3). He regards what occurred in the past as influencing the ‘nature of the conflict that still exists for some today’. By ‘first looking back’, the author seeks to ‘ease evolution and Christianity toward meaningful dialogue’. One pivotal factor was ‘natural science’s advance’ (p. 4) in establishing the ancient age of the planet. Connected with this was the ‘theory of human origins’ put forward by Darwin, which ‘challenged the biblical view of the origin of life’.

A second factor was the rise of ‘biblical criticism’, especially its emphasis on a ‘historical investigation into the date and authorship of biblical books’. The latter called into question the prevailing opinion that Moses alone was ‘responsible for writing’ the Pentateuch. Instead, the new scholarly consensus was that these ancient sacred texts reached their final form in the ‘postexilic period’ (p. 5) and in ‘response to the Babylonian exile’. Accordingly, Enns observes that the purpose of the ‘Genesis creation narrative’ was not to teach ‘natural science’. Instead, it was to ‘say something of God’s and Israel’s place in the world as God’s chosen people’.

A third factor was the findings of ‘biblical archaeology’. As the author notes, the focus of this was ‘texts and artifacts from the ancient Near Eastern world’ (p. 6). This information clarified the ‘intellectual world in which the Bible was written’, which enabled specialists to ‘compare

and contrast Israel's religious beliefs with those of the surrounding nations'. In turn, this undertaking influenced the way in which 'Israel's primordial stories' were understood, including the most appropriate way to interpret the Genesis account of the Adam and Eve characters. For instance, the Adam and Eve characters in Genesis, along with the entire Pentateuch, were a 'means of declaring the distinctiveness of Israel's own beliefs from those of the surrounding nations'. Enns raises the issue of the 'historical value of Genesis', especially in light of the fact that the 'ancient Israelites', in creating a 'polemic', saw fit to 'freely adapt the themes of the much-older stories of the nations around them'.

### *3.2.3. When was Genesis written? (ch. 2)*

Enns begins by noting that the inquiry of 'modern scholarship' (p. 9) concerning when 'Genesis and the Pentateuch' were 'written' arises directly from the biblical texts. He acknowledges that his discourse is a 'step back from the evolution discussion' (p. 10). His intent in doing so is to 'sketch a bigger picture of what the Old Testament is'. In turn, he considers this rendition as determining what readers 'have the right to expect' from the Hebrew sacred writings. Moreover, the author regards the latter as establishing the 'larger backdrop' to 'any meaningful talk of Adam's place' in deliberations about the 'relationship between evolution and Christianity'.

The author elucidates the 'problem of the Pentateuch' by listing a series of representative 'questions' (p. 11) raised by the 'earliest known biblical interpreters'. He maintains that these and other similar queries call for 'some sort of answer for people who look to the Bible for divine guidance'. He also acknowledges that the task 'requires skill and learning to handle well' (p. 12) the 'ambiguities and inconsistencies' connected with the 'authorship and date' of Genesis. He then notes that

the consensus of ‘modern biblical scholars’ (p. 13) goes against the ‘traditional view that Genesis and the Pentateuch’ were penned by Moses in the ‘second millennium BC’. Enns provides a historical summary of how ‘Jewish and Christian interpreters’ (p. 11) wrestled with the issue and, eventually, arrived at the following two conclusions: (1) ‘parts of the Pentateuch were composed over several centuries’ (p. 20); and (2) the ‘Pentateuch as a whole was not completed until after the Israelites returned from exile’.

More generally, according to the author, the prevailing view is that the ‘Old Testament as a whole owes its existence to the postexilic period’ (p. 26). He states that ‘Israel’s national crisis’ was the ‘driving factor’ (p. 27) behind the literary activity that led to the creation of an ‘official collection of writings’. Enns maintains that the Israelites used this body of edited ‘older works’ (p. 28) and newly created documents to define themselves as ‘God’s chosen people’ (p. 27), and reaffirm their claim of ‘Yahweh’ (p. 28) as their ‘God’. In short, the entire Old Testament is a ‘theological history’ (p. 30) that serves as a ‘response to the exile’. For the author, these conclusions ‘help reorient’ (p. 32) the ‘expectations’ of believers concerning ‘what questions’ the Judeo-Christian scriptures, especially Genesis, are ‘prepared to answer’. He contends that they address ‘ancient questions of self-definition’ (p. 33), rather than ‘contemporary ones of scientific interest’. Likewise, he argues that the ‘New Testament writers’ creatively reimagined ‘Israel’s story’. Expressed differently, in light of the Saviour’s crucifixion and resurrection, a new generation sought to explain what they thought it meant to be the ‘people of God’.

### 3.2.4. *Stories of origins from Israel's neighbors (ch. 3)*

In this chapter, the author's intent is to place 'Genesis side by side with the primordial tales of other ancient cultures' (p. 35). This includes 'ancient Mesopotamian stories' (p. 37; e.g. the *Enuma Elish*, the *Atrahasis Epic*, and the *Gilgamesh Epic*) that bear close resemblance to the 'first creation story' (Gen 1) and the 'flood' (Gen 6–9). He grants that the endeavour calls into question 'certain traditional Christian notions' (p. 36) about the 'historical and revelatory nature' of the creation narratives. For instance, in what sense do 'Israel's stories refer to fundamentally unique, revealed, historical events?' (p. 37). These points of concern notwithstanding, Enns thinks the effort is worthwhile in providing readers with a 'clearer understanding of the nature of Genesis' (p. 35), as well as 'what ... contemporary readers' can reasonably 'expect' from the biblical text. The author explains that 'Israel's creation stories' were never intended to address issues raised by 'modern scientific or even historical studies' (p. 36). Instead, Genesis uses 'ancient ways of understanding origins' to deal with 'ancient issues'. He contends that it is only when the 'theological' intent of Genesis is fully appreciated that a 'meaningful conversation between evolution and Christianity' can occur.

For instance, Enns points out that there are both 'conceptual' (p. 40) parallels and 'significant differences' between the 'Babylonian and biblical stories'. Also, he states that Genesis 1 was produced after its Mesopotamian counterpart, and 'interacts with the far older Babylonian theology of the dominant culture' (p. 39). Moreover, the author notes that the *Enuma Elish* is not primarily a tale about 'creation' (p. 154). Instead, it is a 'story about the ascendancy of Marduk'. Marduk was the 'patron god of Babylon'. Hence, the *Enuma Elish* promotes its 'main theme' by providing an 'account of cosmic origins'. Enns sees Genesis 1 as offering a sharp theological counterpoint or polemic to the

Babylonian tale. Specifically, the God of Israel is ‘portrayed as truly mighty in that he is solely and fully responsible for forming the cosmos’ (p. 54). Additionally, Yahweh is depicted as being ‘superior to the gods of the surrounding nations’.

The author’s broader observation is that Genesis 1 puts forward an ‘ancient, nonscientific, ahistorical’ (p. 42) approach to conceptualising ‘primordial time’. Likewise, he maintains that the ‘Adam story’ (p. 50) recorded in Genesis 2–3 is neither an ‘historical account’ (p. 51) nor a ‘scientific explanation’. Instead, Enns maintains that ‘Israel’s second creation story’ (p. 50) conveys ‘religious beliefs’ (p. 51) strongly held by God’s people. To make his point, the author details the extensive ‘differences’ between the ‘two creation accounts’ and asserts that these variances should be ‘respected rather than harmonized’. He maintains that from a ‘theological’ (p. 52) perspective, ‘Genesis 1 tells the story of creation as a whole by the one sovereign God’. In contrast, ‘Genesis 2 focuses early and specifically on *Israel’s* story’ (italics are the author’s). Enns provides a detailed comparison of the *Atrahasis Epic* and Genesis 2–8 to stress that the latter, like the former, ‘share a common way of describing the primordial world’ (p. 53). Based on this information, he concludes that the ‘biblical text’ should not be considered a ‘historical’ account.

### 3.2.5. *Israel and primordial time (ch. 4)*

Enns notes that people in ancient Near Eastern cultures tried to explain the enigmas of their lives by crafting stories about the ‘activities of the gods in primordial time’ (p. 61). Put differently, as a way to make sense of ‘meaning and existence’, these prescientific societies drew upon tales about ‘divine activity in the deep past’. The author likewise states that ‘ancient peoples’ believed that ‘formative primordial divine actions’ in

some way 'intersected with the events of history', including what occurred in 'present earthly reality'. Correspondingly, he maintains that the 'creation stories' of Israel shared this common cultural heritage. So, like the sagas propagated by their 'neighbors' (p. 62), those of Israel put forward their version of how God brought the 'cosmos' into existence and continued to remain actively present in the world.

The author's observations represent a continuation of his assertion in chapter 3, that the opening segments of Genesis, along with other passages in the Old Testament, 'cry out to be read as something other than a historical description of events' (p. 58). For instance, he emphasises that the 'historical evidence' (p. 62), particularly from the findings of archaeological research, calls into question the biblical rendition of 'Israel's presence in Egypt, the exodus, and the conquest of Canaan'. While he concedes the possibility of 'some type of authentic historical memory' (p. 156) being present, he contends these depictions of Israel's past are 'greatly embellished' (p. 62). In his view, the intent of the editors and redactors was not to furnish a 'blow-by-blow' report of 'historical events'. Instead, it was to proclaim that the 'God of the primordial past' likewise remained involved in Israel's 'formation as a nation'.

For Enns, a case in point would be the 'primordial cosmic battle themes' found in 'ancient Near Eastern stories', as well as in the first chapter of Genesis. He observes that the Israelites used a similar literary motif to narrate their 'deliverance from Egypt' and 'departure from Babylon' (p. 65). The line of reasoning is that just as God 'defeated' (p. 62) his 'enemies' in the 'primordial' past, so too, he is the 'victor' over 'Israel's historical enemies' in the present. Expressed differently, God's subjugation of the dark forces of chaos at the dawn of time is 'revisited' (p. 63) and becomes the basis for relating contemporary episodes experienced by the Israelites. The author dismisses the notion that these

‘cosmic-battle overtones’, in which Yahweh is depicted as a divine warrior king, signifies ‘poetic exaggeration for effect’. Instead, Enns primarily regards these sagas as bold ahistorical theological declarations.

In keeping with the preceding observations, the author argues that the ‘Adam story’ (p. 65) is not ‘about universal human origins but Israel’s origin’. For example, just as the primordial tale depicts God creating ‘Adam out of dust’ (p. 66), so too scripture portrays the ‘creation of Israel at the exodus’. The divine ‘command’ prohibiting Adam from eating fruit from a certain ‘tree’ is mirrored in the ‘commandments’ recorded in the ‘law of Moses’. The ‘garden paradise’ corresponds to the ‘land of Canaan’. Finally, the first human couple’s transgression leading to ‘exile’ and ‘death’ is echoed in Israel’s violation of the law and eventual deportation from the Promised Land. In short, the Adam character is not a historical figure (e.g. the first *homo sapien*), but ‘proto-Israel’ or an archetypal ‘preview’ of ‘Israel’s national life’. As Enns sees it, the Adam character was part of the nation’s effort at ‘self-definition’ (p. 69) and thus not germane to the ‘modern question of *human* origins’ (emphasis is the author’s).

### *3.2.6. Paul’s Adam and the Old Testament (ch. 5)*

Enns recaps the preceding chapters by stating that a ‘literal reading of the Genesis creation stories’ (p. 79) is at variance with what is known about the ‘past’. He then directs his attention to Romans 5:12–31 and 1 Corinthians 15:20–58, in which the Adam character is portrayed as the ‘first human being and ancestor of everyone who ever lived’. The author observes how these biblical texts depicted ‘Adam’s disobedience as the cause of universal sin and death’, which in turn became the basis for the redemption of ‘humanity ... through the obedience of Christ’.

Enns proposes that one read the Adam tale as an ahistorical 'wisdom story' (p. 80) from which theological insights can be drawn. The author regards this as the way in which Paul dealt with the Adam character. According to this view, Paul is one example of a 'variety of ancient Jewish interpretations of Adam'. In each case, the intent was to 'grapple with the significance' (p. 81) of the primeval saga for its 'time and place'.

Enns argues that Paul used the 'hermeneutical conventions' of his day—specifically that of 'Second Temple Judaism'—to engage the relevant biblical texts in 'creative' and 'imaginative ways'. In doing so, the apostle reinterpreted the 'ancient stories' (p. 76) to enable them to speak to the 'present, higher reality of the risen Son of God' (p. 81). Enns maintains that Paul had a 'rhetorical reason' for introducing the fictitious Adam character into the theological 'argument' of Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. Specifically, this ahistorical figure serves as a worthy, archetypal counterpart to the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Enns contends that the historicity of Adam is 'not a *necessary* component' (p. 82) either to Paul's line of reasoning or the redemptive work of Jesus of Nazareth being a 'fully historical solution' to the 'universal plight ... of humanity'.

The author maintains that 'explicit reference' to Adam in the Hebrew sacred writings is 'relatively absent'. Enns concedes that the Adam character is a 'dominant theological motif in the Old Testament'. Moreover, he affirms that these writings depict 'humanity in general and Israel in particular as out of harmony with God' (p. 84). The latter is where the author puts the theological emphasis of the story involving Adam, namely, whether 'Israel' (p. 86) will 'obey and receive blessing, or disobey and suffer consequences?' So, for the author, the implication is that Genesis 2 and 3 narrate an ahistorical incident that is 'Israel-centered rather than universal' (p. 90). This supposition seems even

more ‘compelling’ for him when he approaches these chapters as a ‘wisdom text’ (p. 91), namely, a ‘narrative version of Israel’s failure to follow’ the ‘path of wisdom’ advocated in Proverbs.

Enns asserts that it is difficult to find in the Hebrew sacred writings ‘any indication that Adam’s disobedience is the cause of universal sin, death, and condemnation’ (p. 82). Hence, he thinks it is misguided to ‘extrapolate’ (p. 158) from the Adam character ‘a theology of original sin’. As for the ‘role that Paul assigns to Adam’ (p. 81), Enns surmises that it is not only ‘largely unique’ to the apostle ‘in the ancient world’, but also ‘moves well beyond what Genesis and the Old Testament have to say’. Put another way, ‘what Genesis says about Adam and the consequences of his actions does not seem to line up with the universal picture’ (p. 92) found in the traditional reading of Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15.

### *3.2.7. Paul as an ancient interpreter of the Old Testament (ch. 6)*

Enns maintains that while Paul was ‘guided by the Spirit of God to proclaim his gospel’ (p. 93), nevertheless, the apostle was a ‘first-century Jew’ who expressed his theological views within his own ‘cultural context’. Put another way, according to Enns, Paul typified an ‘ancient way of thinking’ (p. 94) when he made observations about ‘physical reality’, including (for example) a ‘three-tiered cosmos’ (p. 93). In short, the ‘assumptions’ (p. 94) the apostle ‘shared with his contemporaries’ about the ‘nature of physical reality’ point to a ‘faulty ancient cosmology’, especially against the backdrop of insights provided by modern science. Enns extends his line of reasoning to what Paul understood about ‘human origins’ (p. 95), as seen in his remarks concerning ‘Adam in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15’. This includes

whatever the apostle might have 'assumed about Adam as the progenitor of humanity'.

As a continuation of what Enns put forward in chapter 5, he argues that Paul, in keeping with the interpretive conventions of Second Temple Judaism, utilised imaginative and innovative approaches to his reading of the Old Testament, including the Adam character of Genesis 2 and 3. The supposition is that 'what Paul says about Adam' (p. 117) is not 'necessarily what Genesis was written to convey'. Enns surmises that just as the apostle's Jewish peers 'rethought' (p. 96) their 'own history in light of the crisis of the exile', so too, Paul reassessed his understanding of scripture in light of the death, burial, and resurrection of Israel's Messiah. Enns contends that an objective evaluation of how the apostle made use of the Tanakh indicates he was not 'bound by the original meaning of the ... passage' (p. 103) he quoted. In this view, the apostle was following contemporary hermeneutical practice when he retold and reapplied the Adam story in ways that departed from a strictly narrow, literal reading of the biblical text. Enns regards Paul's unique and novel approach as being entirely appropriate, given that the Adam character was an ahistorical archetype of Israel, not the literal first *homo sapien*.

### 3.2.8. *Paul's Adam (ch. 7)*

In the previous chapter, Enns asserted that Paul, like his contemporary Jewish peers, deliberately moulded biblical texts to fit the apostle's theological argument. In chapter 7, the author contends that in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle, as a 'child of Israel's traditions' (p. 123), utilised the 'theological vocabulary available to him'. Enns concedes that Paul understood Adam to be the 'historical first man' (p. 119) who was 'responsible for universal sin and death'. The author notes that Paul's main intent was not to inform his readers that Adam

was a literal individual. Instead, the apostle's central objective was to use a transformational reading of Genesis to explain the significance of the Christ event. Enns maintains that, in light of the 'scientific evidence ... for human origins' (p. 122), along with the 'literary evidence ... for the nature of ancient stories of origins', 'belief in a first human' is no longer a 'viable option'. For him, this conclusion remains so, despite whatever culturally-conditioned, erroneous views Paul embraced about the Adam character of Genesis 2 and 3.

Enns thinks the core message of the gospel is preserved, even when one sets aside 'Paul's understanding of Adam as a historical person'. According to this line of reasoning, the Adam character was a 'primordial, prehistoric man' (p. 125) who was fabricated through 'hundreds of years of cultural transmission'. In contrast, Jesus was a genuine individual, whose 'resurrection' was a 'present reality for Paul'. The author opines that Adam and Jesus occupy completely different 'historical' (p. 126) categories. For this reason, Enns considers it is possible for one episode recounted in mythic history (e.g. in an ancient garden) to be parallel to another event narrated in real history (e.g. commencing in the garden of Gethsemane) without the point of comparison being weakened or lost. Similarly, the author holds that it is possible for the efficacy of Paul's literary parallel to remain valid even when one of the characters (e.g. Adam) turns out to be symbolic (or metaphorical) and the other (e.g. Jesus) is affirmed to be a real person who actually lived.

### *3.2.9. Conclusion: Adam today: nine theses*

Enns brings his book to a close by articulating the following nine theses, or assertions, that he thinks are central both to valuing 'Scripture as God's Word' (p. 137) and accepting 'evolution as the correct model

for human origins'. (1) 'Literalism is not an option'. By this the author means it is improper to 'read Genesis' as a 'literally accurate description of physical, historical reality'. In his view, to do otherwise disregards 'evidence' arising from 'scientific' research and 'ancient Near Eastern stories of origins'. (2) There is a basic incompatibility between the 'scientific and biblical models of human origins' (138), for these two approaches 'speak a different "language"'. They are not only irreconcilable, but also, 'there is no "Adam" to be found in the evolutionary scheme'. (3) 'The Adam story in Genesis reflects its ancient Near Eastern setting and should be read that way' (p. 140). (4) The 'Adam story' in Genesis is 'probably the older and was subsumed under Genesis 1 after the exile in order to tell Israel's story'. Additionally, the first chapter of Genesis was 'put at the head of Israel's national story' (p. 141) for purposes of 'self-definition' and clarifying the nature of Israel's 'relationship with God'. So, even if the 'Adam story' had the 'world stage as its backdrop' and once possibly 'functioned' as a narrative about 'universal human origins', it eventually took on a 'clearer Israelite-centered focus'. (5) Reading the 'Adam story' (p. 142) in concert with 'Proverbs' demonstrates the 'Israel-centered focus' of the former. Hence, the 'Adam story' is 'not about a fall from perfection', but 'about failing to follow the path of wisdom and reach maturity'. (6) Paul used the 'biblical idiom available to him' to convey the 'deep, foundational plight of the human condition' and disclose 'God's solution through the resurrection of Christ'. The implication is that the apostle was mistaken in his 'assumptions about human origins' (p. 143). Be that as it may, the 'need for a savior does not require a historical Adam'. (7) 'Even the expression of deep and ultimate truth does not escape the limitations of the cultures in which the truth is expressed'. (8) At the heart of the 'conflict for many Christians' (p. 145) is the perceived 'threat' associated with contending that the 'Adam story in Genesis is not a

historical account’, and the way Paul ‘understood’ the narrative, in terms of human origins, is incorrect. Despite the teaching of longstanding theological traditions, maintaining the last two assertions does not subvert the ‘trustworthiness of the Bible’. (9) Making ‘evolution’ (p. 147) an ‘add-on to Christianity’ is deficient. Instead, to foster ‘serious intellectual engagement’, a ‘synthesis’ is required in which ‘one’s own convictions’ are changed ‘in light of new data’.

#### **4. Conclusion: a Comparison of the Respective Presuppositions Made and Deductions Put Forward by Collins and Enns**

As was noted in the introduction to this essay, both Collins and Enns address the same basic issues, examine a similar range of scientific and biblical data, and tend to arrive at opposite conclusions. The main issue their respective works explore is the historical authenticity of the Adam character (and to a lesser extent Eve) in the Genesis creation narratives. The secondary issues that they discuss include the following: the findings of modern evolutionary science concerning the origin of the cosmos and life on earth, including *homo sapiens*; the sagas from various ancient Near Eastern accounts and how they compare with the opening chapters of Genesis; and the theological view Paul held concerning the notion of a first human pair through whom he believed sin and death entered the human experience and from whom the apostle declared all other *homo sapiens* to be biologically descended.

Both authors, in their respective ways, are attempting to bridge the gap between evolution and Christianity, and thereby, make it possible for on-going fruitful dialogue to continue on a topic that is pertinent to the wider discussion on science and religion. While Collins and Enns

affirm a high view of the Bible, the amount of importance each places on it is considerably different. In turn, this influences their respective assumptions, arguments, and conclusions. More specifically, Collins gives the Judeo-Christian scriptures pride of place in the debate, while Enns puts greater emphasis on the data external to the Bible. Expressed differently, Collins aligns his hermeneutical decisions to favour the authority of scripture, whereas Enns shifts his views to accommodate the narrative of human origins put forward by modern science.

Accordingly, Collins maintains that any scientific premise concerning the Adam and Eve characters has to account adequately for a broad range of evidence he deems to be important, including information from scripture, the prevailing cultures of the ancient Near East, Second Temple Judaism, and common human experience. His argumentation is influenced by his presupposition that some version of the traditional theological view concerning Adam does the best job of accounting for all the relevant data. Enns also thinks it is important to objectively consider the same assortment of information. His presupposition, though, is that it is no longer possible to affirm the historical authenticity of Adam. Enns reasons that the last view does an inadequate job of accounting for the pertinent findings arising from modern science, archaeological evidence, and how ancient cultures formulated their national tales.

The preceding observations indicate how two specialists in biblical studies can arrive at such dissimilar views about whether Adam ever really existed. In turn, whether greater stress should be placed on science or scripture influences the specific positions Collins and Enns take on a series of interrelated topics. In general, Collins favours options that agree as much as possible with a more traditional view of a literal first *homo sapien*. For Enns, the preference is for alternatives that best correspond to the present-day scholarly consensus about human

origins. That being the case, whereas Collins maintains the opening chapters of Genesis convey truth that is essentially historical and factual, Enns argues that these texts are ancient myths that do not communicate any information that corresponds to historical reality. Whereas Enns contends that Adam is a metaphorical character who never really existed, Collins asserts Adam literally existed in space-time history.

Enns thinks a comparison of the Genesis creation stories with other ancient Near Eastern tales leads to the conclusion that the former is merely symbolic in character. While Collins recognises the presence of symbolism in the opening chapters of Genesis and discusses the literary parallels these texts have with myths appearing in the surrounding culture, he holds that there is an essential historical core in Genesis 1–3. Put differently, for Collins, the literary genre, while being characterised by imaginative written conventions, remains essentially historical in what it recounts. Oppositely, for Enns, the presence of metaphorical elements in the biblical texts, like those found in other ancient tales, is conclusive evidence that readers are dealing with ahistorical information.

Both authors acknowledge the literary differences between the two creation accounts found in Genesis. Yet, while Collins sees them as being characterised by coherence, Enns considers any attempts at harmonisation to be misguided. Furthermore, when Enns compares the opening chapters of Genesis with other Mesopotamian texts, he concludes there are unmistakable resemblances between them that point to the ahistorical nature of Genesis 1–3. In contrast, Collins deduces that there are substantial dissimilarities between the biblical and extra-biblical renditions, which bolster his view that the Genesis version conveys factual information about real events.

Moreover, both authors agree that terms for sin and disobedience do not appear in the Adam story. Yet, whereas Enns reasons this omission undermines the traditional view of original sin, Collins thinks it is reasonable to retain the longstanding doctrine. Both take up the issue of what particular texts in the Old Testament and the writings of Second Temple Judaism have to say about the Adam character. Enns thinks references to Adam in the Old Testament are infrequent, while Collins asserts they are considerably more widespread. Each author is cognizant of the Adam character functioning as a dominant theological motif in the Old Testament. Even so, while Collins regards this as support for his view of the prevalence of Adam in the Hebrew sacred writings, Enns remains unconvinced. Collins regards the treatment of Adam in Second Temple Jewish literature as affirming the historicity of the character. Oppositely, Enns contends that the writers from this period used imaginative approaches to reapply the fictional individual known as Adam to their particular circumstances.

Connected with the preceding observations is the significance each author assigns to the presence of story-like elements in the biblical text. Though Collins acknowledges that pictorial and symbolic elements are present, he does not surmise from this that the underlying information is fabricated. In contrast, Enns infers that what readers are encountering is fictitious. For him, this conclusion is in keeping with what one finds in comparable literature from the ancient Near East. So, according to this line of reasoning, the opening chapters of Genesis are a retelling of similar creation tales found throughout the ancient Near East. Likewise, Enns asserts that the Adam character, as an ahistorical, literary archetype, was taken up in varied ways and reapplied in differing contexts by writers in the Second Temple period. Moreover, he sees the same phenomenon occurring in Paul's use of Adam. Enns surmises that in keeping with the hermeneutical practice of his day, the apostle

departed from the original meaning of the biblical text to reapply the Adam story in ways that were new and novel.

Both authors agree that Paul regarded Adam as an historical person who was the biological progenitor of the human race. Also, both affirm that the apostle thought a real Adam sinned in an actual ancient locale called the Garden of Eden. Moreover, both authors concur that Paul was convinced Adam's single act of disobedience brought original sin, death, and corruption to the human race and the rest of creation. While Collins agrees with what Paul taught in these areas, Enns argues that the apostle was mistaken in his understanding about human origins. Furthermore, whereas Collins advocates retaining the traditional views of Adam, Enns contends it is no longer feasible to do so. Collins thinks the historic teachings of the Church best account for all the pertinent biblical and extra-biblical data. In contrast, Enns asserts that the consensus view of modern science regarding human origins should prevail and lead to a profoundly different understanding of what scripture teaches about Adam, sin, and death.

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