

A Reply to the Responders

John A. McIntyre

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I appreciate the thoughtful responses to my article, “The Real Adam and Original Sin.” As James Hurd notes, addressing the difficulties of the reconciliation of science and Genesis is like eating M&Ms; as soon as the solution is found for one difficulty then another difficulty appears. Yet as scientists, when we face a complicated situation, we propose a theory and then search for facts to test the difficulties of the theory. The philosopher Karl Popper illustrated this procedure in a lecture when he said to his audience: “Observe.” No one knew what to observe. The proposed Real Adam is a theory against which observations can be tested.

In this reply, I will discuss the most important issues raised by the Real Adam and the comments of the responders concerning these issues. Finally, I will compare the advantages of the Real Adam to the alternate proposals.

Adam’s Place and Time

Scripture presents Adam and his sons as farmers and herdsman living near the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. According to science, this places Adam in southern Mesopotamia living among other *Homo sapiens* after the receding of the last ice age, about 10,000 BC. (For purposes of discussion, in the following I will refer to *Homo sapiens* as members of the human race before they acquired the image of God.) Scripture and science complement each other then on the place and time for the Real Adam while Adam is not the first *Homo sapiens*.

Adam Did Not “Fall”

For Adam to “fall,” he first had to be righteous. But there is no evidence in the historical account of Genesis 2–3 or in Scripture that Adam is righteous. On the contrary, Adam disobeyed God almost immediately after God had formed him from the dust of the ground. And, certainly, there is no scientific evidence for righteousness among Adam’s precursors, the *Homo sapiens*.

The only reason that Adam is said to be righteous in the church confessions is that “God created man in his own image” in Gen. 1:27 and the confessions associate righteousness with this image. But righteousness is not necessarily associated with the image of God; unrighteous people today are images of God. Furthermore, Gen. 1:27 cannot chronologically precede the creation of the world in Gen. 2:4, which is connected by genealogies to the rest of the history of Scripture. So, when Adam was formed from the dust of the ground in Gen. 2:7, he need not have been either righteous or in the image of God. Yet even though Adam was not righteous, sin still “came into the world through one man” as Scripture asserts. The innocent *Homo sapiens* Adam certainly sinned when he disobeyed a direct command of God.

I am delighted to learn from Perry Yoder that Mennonites agree with the Real Adam on the absence of a “fall” (p. 99). But the Real Adam did change (not a genetic change) when he ate the fruit; his “eyes were opened.” My conclusion is that the absence of a “fall” is not a difficulty, but an improvement, for the theory of the Real Adam.

The Image of God

If Adam did not “fall” from a righteous state, then what is the point of the historical account of the temptation and disobedience of Genesis 2–3? The answer to this question can be found in the rhetorical climax of the account, “and their eyes were opened.” Something significant happened to Adam and Eve when they disobeyed God and ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The identity of this significant “something” can be discovered by understanding the scriptural meaning of the word “knowledge.” Immediately after being banished from the Garden of Eden, we find that Adam “knew” Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain. Clearly, Adam knew Eve in a cognitive sense long before this, but

Scripture uses “know” to indicate an intimate participation. Thus for Adam and Eve, the events at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil are intimate participations in acts of good and evil.

When Adam disobeyed God and ate of the fruit of the tree, he was stepping outside the creation. And by his escape from the natural world of the creation, Adam was no longer an “it” within the creation but had become an “I” outside the creation. He had taken on the character of the Creator. He had become an image of God.

But, in what sense were their eyes opened when they disobeyed God? Yoder recognizes this connection as a “key to the understanding of the Real Adam.” The use of an analogy is helpful for answering this question. Let us replace God and Adam, the Creator and his creation, with Shakespeare and Hamlet, another creator and his creation. Hamlet, like Adam, is restricted to the world created by his creator. Other actors in the play can command Hamlet to do something and, whether he obeys or disobeys, his action is still within the play. But if Hamlet disobeys Shakespeare and, say, refuses to follow his script, Hamlet is stepping outside the play. Similarly, when Adam disobeyed God and ate of the fruit of the tree, he was stepping outside the creation. And by his escape from the natural world of the creation, Adam was no longer an “it” within the creation but had become an “I” outside the creation. He had taken on the character of the Creator. He had become an image of God.

Remarkably, then, the only way for a creature to escape from the creation and become an image of God is to disobey God. David Wilcox has a cogent objection to such an understanding of the acquisition of God’s image: “The implication would be that human disobedience is God’s method of creation, how we ‘fell up’ to become what he intended us to be” (p. 104). My only response is to note that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish.”

Sinful human beings had to disobey God before God could demonstrate the depths of his love for them.

Another objection to the image of God described in the Real Adam is raised by Hurd. He points out that there is evidence that *Homo sapiens* believed in the transcendent long before a Mesopotamian Adam is associated with the image of God. But some anthropologists have proposed that the idea of the transcendent is merely an extrapolation of cause and effect. If something happens without an apparent cause, then God did it. Belief in the transcendent need not be associated with the believer standing outside of nature himself.

Yoder raises an interesting objection to the contention that Adam transcended the world only after “his eyes were opened.” For, before he ate, Adam had named the animals, an act requiring the use of language symbols that were not part of the natural world. Adam must therefore have transcended the world before “his eyes were opened.” I would reply to this that, in naming the animals, Adam was demonstrating his ability to step outside the world. Like the children who did not count themselves in the article, “The Real Adam,”¹ Adam had the ability to stand outside nature but had not yet comprehended that he was doing so. His eyes were not yet opened.

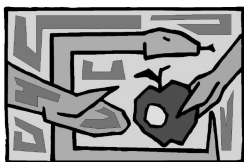
This close association of symbolic language with the image of God also clarifies the propagation of the image of God to the human race. Steven Pinker speaks of “the language instinct” that enables humans to learn a language. Similarly, by the time of Adam, the development of the *Homo sapiens* had reached the point that they, like the children in “The Real Adam,” had unknowingly acquired the ability to stand outside nature.

Despite the difficulties mentioned by the responders, I must say that I am charmed with the idea that humans first recognized themselves as images of God when the eyes of Adam and Eve “were opened.” Here, we have the connection between the rhetorical climax of the scriptural account of the origin of the race and the greatest event in the scientific history of the race, the transition from an animal-like “it” to a human “I.”

Sin Entered the World

I have just asserted that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not the source of the cognitive knowledge of good and evil. The Ten Commandments were not written on the fruit of the tree. The tree was simply the location where Adam and Eve met the serpent and first participated in good and evil.

This understanding of the tree, however, invalidates one of the assumptions used to explain the entrance of sin into the world in the article on the Real Adam. For in the article, it was assumed that Adam had acquired the cognitive knowledge of good and evil when he ate of the tree.



Dialogue: Reply

A Reply to the Responders

The Homo sapiens living before Adam are confined to the world and are subject to their desires. ... Have the prehistoric Homo sapiens escaped from the bondage of their natures ...? If not, then they are not sinners, and sin entered into the world through one man, when Adam sinned by disobeying a direct command of God.

This knowledge then, combined with the natural instincts inherited from their *Homo sapiens* ancestors, led to all human beings becoming sinners.

Hurd and Yoder object that this account for the entry of sin assumes that prehistoric humans living before Adam were not sinners. As Hurd writes: "It would seem very hard to sustain the argument that *Homo sapiens* never had sin until Neolithic Adam" (p. 102). There is no doubt that the *Homo sapiens* Adam sinned when he disobeyed a direct command of God. The question raised is whether the *Homo sapiens* living before Adam sinned without disobeying a command of God. In other words, are humans sinners if they do not know God's law?

We can answer this question from Scripture since Paul wrestled with this problem when he entered the Greek world with the gospel. In chapters 2 and 3 in his Letter to the Romans, Paul answers the question: "for I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin." People are sinners whether they are aware of God's law or not since they disobey the laws set by humans of which they are aware. It would appear then, that if we apply Paul's conclusion to the *Homo sapiens* living before Adam, that they were sinners and that sin did not "enter the world through the one man Adam."

However, it is not obvious that Paul's conclusion can be transferred back to prehistoric times. For the Greeks, who have sinned without the law, are images of God and so are freed from the confines of the creation. They can transcend their natural desires and, consequently, can be held accountable for disobeying the laws set by humans. In contrast, the *Homo sapiens* living before Adam are confined to the world and are subject to their desires. My cat does terrible things to mice but I hardly call him a sinner. Have the prehistoric *Homo sapiens* escaped from the bondage of their natures any more than my cat? If not, then they are not sinners, and sin entered into the world through one man, when Adam sinned by disobeying a direct command of God.

Evaluation

Difficulties certainly are associated with the Real Adam. Perhaps the greatest difficulty

is that the Real Adam lived at such a late date (after the termination of the ice age in 10,000 BC). Wilcox expresses his preference for an earlier Adam when he writes: "Personally, I think Adam lived long before the culture of Genesis ..." (p. 105).

But difficulties are also present for an earlier Adam. This Adam would be living in a cave with a stone axe. Wilcox suggests that "one must consider the biblical cultural description as a metaphor for culture in general" (p. 104). But this view assumes that the first eleven chapters of the Old Testament are not historical like the remainder of the Old Testament.

Of course, there is also the third alternative that John Polkinghorne accepts as the present theological consensus: "The myth of the Fall can be understood as an ever-contemporary symbol of the human condition."² Here, the attempt to bring Adam and Eve into history is abandoned completely with the consequence that the comparison of a historical Adam with a historical Christ in Romans 5 is abandoned as well.

As my present evaluation of the Real Adam, I will quote Winston Churchill's evaluation of democracy as a political system: "It may not be very good but it is better than any of the alternatives." ⚙

Notes

¹John A. McIntyre, "The Real Adam," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 56 (2004): 162-70.

²John Polkinghorne, *Science & Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 64.

Correction:

In a previous issue (*PSCF* 58, no. 1 [March 2006]: 48), our author description implied that one person was the sole author of the book, *Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis of Environmental Stewardship*, published by InterVarsity Press. The following four persons shared the authorship of this book: Fred Van Dyke, David C. Mahan, Joseph K. Sheldon, and Raymond H. Brand.

Roman J. Miller, Editor