

1. Spiritual facts (“messages of faith”) cannot be placed in an airtight compartment so as to separate them from secular facts (scientific and historical information). This is true in general, since all areas of knowledge interpenetrate each other; it is especially true in the case of special revelation, since the heart of biblical religion lies in God’s revealing himself in the secular realm (as the Creed says, our Lord “suffered under Pontius Pilate”). The question, “Are the death of Christ on the cross and his resurrection *secular* events or *faith* events?” parallels the question, “Have you stopped beating your wife?”—since it should be painfully obvious that the cross and the resurrection are *both historical and spiritual events at the same time*, and, if not historical, of little or no value spiritually. Doubt as to the historicity of biblical events will, logically and inevitably, produce equivalent doubt as to their spiritual value.

2. If the scientific and historical material in the Bible—which can in principle be checked for accuracy—is not reliable, why should anyone accept the spiritual/faith material set forth there—which cannot be checked? If the writers were not preserved from error in human geography, why would anyone trust what they recorded as to heavenly geography (“In my Father’s house are many mansions,” etc.)? A fundamental epistemological theme of Jesus’ teaching is, “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?” (John 3:12). Indeed, it is exactly this solid factuality of Christian revelation which gives Christianity its character of “meaningfulness”—in contrast with virtually all other religious positions, cults, and world-views which, lacking in any factual testability (verifiability/falsifiability), suffer from epistemological “nonsensicality” or “meaninglessness” (to use the expressions of contemporary analytical philosophy).

3. Accommodatist approaches to Scripture are never justified by an appeal to *kenosis* (“limitation”) by way of Phil. 2:8. Of course, in becoming man, God took on human characteristics; but this did not include sin or error; had that been the case, one could not trust anything Jesus said about God, since (as Strack and Billerbeck have well shown in their *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*) the vast majority of Jesus’ teachings can be paralleled in intertestamental Jewish writings—so he could well have simply accommodated himself to the fallible spiritual ideas of his time rather than offering fallen humankind eternal verities and the one divinely true way of salvation. Modern theologians such as Rudolf Bultmann and ecclesiastical liberals such as the late Bishop James Pike have gone this route, thereby evacuating not just the Old Testament of meaning by reducing its content to myth, but also destroying the New Testament gospel by demythologizing Jesus’ ministry and existentially dehistoricizing Jesus’ words and work.

Two wee bibliographical suggestions: ponder my essay, “Inspiration and Inerrancy: A New Departure,” included in my *Crisis in Lutheran Theology*, together with the appropriate sections (especially proposition 4.0) of my *Tractatus Logico-Theologicus* (www.ciltpp.com).

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Two Book Interpretation of Revelation

My thanks to Mary VandenBerg for her article (*PSCF* 62, no. 1 [2010]: 16–24) on the two-book interpretation of revelation, nature and the Bible. She traces the use of general revelation through nature back through Calvin to Augustine to Paul in Romans 1 and makes the solid point that Paul sees nature as pointing to God himself (good, loving, just) and not to the details of natural processes—as some scientific creationists might have it. Theirs is a descriptive/causal/hypothetical task and, insofar as researchers come up with convincing evidence, Christians need to be free to rejoice and to see the natural processes as part of God’s creative work.

As a theologian, VandenBerg wants to maintain a “high view” of the biblical text (supernatural revelation) and the distinctive feature of her methodology is, no doubt, teleological—what is the book trying to say to its original hearers and to us today? And what does it reveal about the purposive-redemptive nature of the Lord God? So, in her conclusion (p. 22 and endnote 47, p. 24), she warns against “rushing to reinterpret” the special book every time something seemingly conflicting arises from science.

In keeping with these Reformed commitments, it would be of interest to see her evaluation of a work like John H. Walton’s *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (InterVarsity Press, 2009) reviewed by Sean M. Cordry (*PSCF* 62, no. 3 [2010]: 227–8). Perhaps she would agree with the following comments.

In Reformed theological language, Walton’s thesis can be reduced to one sentence: To read Gen. 1:1–2:3 as Moses may have intended, don’t necessarily see it as referring to a material creation, but rather view it as an outline of God’s eternal plan for that creation.

Back in my seminary days, I began researching the ancient Near East culture into which Abraham was born in Ur. The seven tablets of the old (2000+ BC) Babylonian creation story (“*Enuma elish*”) had recently been uncovered. As I read them, I could not help but wonder how Abraham reacted to the account of the fighting of the many gods, to the chief male god’s (Marduk’s) killing of the head female deity (Tiamat), his standing on her body and then cutting her in two to make the heavens and earth, and then using the blood of another god he had killed to make humans to be slaves of the deities. What a shock it must have been for him to discover the one and only God who made humankind in his own image, who each “day” added something to creation that would be for the good of men and women, and finally on the seventh day to come and dwell with the people he loved in his holy Temple!

If Walton had played up this sharp contrast on the theological level, his own major points would have been considerably clarified for his readers (for example, his interesting reflections on the seventh day). The differences in cosmology between the old polytheistic and the Hebrew monotheistic one may turn out to be more enlightening than the similarities he concentrates on. In the Babylonian case, for example, Marduk commands the lesser gods to honor him, and they build a temple somewhere in the heavens away from us inferior beings. [Cordry’s contention that the polytheistic deities’ “relationship to people was of utmost importance” (p. 227) was

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in error. Humans tended to fear the gods and sought to appease them.] In the Bible story – as Walton’s elaboration shows so beautifully – God wants to be with his creation and has a plan for building his tabernacle which he gives to his people to construct, to dedicate, to inaugurate, and to care for, and in which to worship their living Lord.

Walton has done some solid work, bringing his readers back into that ancient time, by using the number of creation texts now available to throw light on a possible way of understanding Genesis 1 and its implications for Old Testament studies and for science-faith questions. I hope my few suggestions will stimulate further discussion.

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Eisegesis Denies Inerrancy

C. John Collins, “Adam and Eve as Historical People, and Why It Matters,” (*PSCF* 62, no. 3 [2010]: 147) practices eisegesis in his approach to Genesis 2 f. and ignores the first chapter. Both reports in Hebrew are clear that a pair of individuals are described. In Gen. 1:29, “male” and “female” are singular nouns, whereas “them,” involving both, is plural. Genesis 2:5 refers to “the man” plus a negation. Verse 7 has “the man” formed and vivified. The reference is singular throughout. The succeeding passage is clear that this is one individual. The reference to building the woman is also clearly singular. But Collins references a tribe as supported by Scripture and history (p. 151).

To argue that the children of Adam and Eve were less civilized than depicted because they were much more ancient (p. 158), living at least 40,000 years ago rather than about 6,000 (p. 159), has no basis in the text. That there were contemporaries (pp. 158, 160) is clearly not in the text.

Here we run into a theological problem. If Adam’s federal headship of the thousands of contemporary human beings involved their receiving the divine image and likeness and being subjected to his disobedience (p. 160; cf. p. 159), then the righteousness of Jesus Christ should apply to all human beings alive since the resurrection. Consequently, Collins should adopt at least some version of Universalism.

Of course, Collins could argue that Adam, Eve, and the talking, walking serpent either organized the tribe to march past the tree and to partake, or arranged distribution to all. On this view, a pregnant woman’s eating would affect the fetus, but even newborns would have to consume a little juice.

Note may also be taken that my commendation of McGrath (p. 165, n. 73) was limited to his matching interpretation of the biblical chronology. Collins, in contrast, expands his chronology without biblical warrant.

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Historical Adam?

The historicity of Adam was the theme of the September 2010 issue of *PSCF*. An article by John Collins stated in the abstract, “that Adam and Eve were real persons, and the forebears of all other human beings” (p. 147). Although entirely wrong anthropologically, it was a well-articulated article. Dennis Venema authored a thought-provoking article that showed “evidence of human-ape common ancestry” (pp. 166–78). Brachiators swinging on the family tree, eh, Dennis? Good article.

Daniel Harlow read Genesis “in an age of evolutionary science” (pp. 179–95). “Modern science has amply demonstrated that phenomena such as predation, death, and the extinction of species have been intrinsic and even necessary aspects of life on earth for billions of years, long before the arrival of *Homo sapiens*. For this reason, many Bible-believing Christians have long found it difficult to read Genesis 1–3 as a factual account of human origins” (p. 179). True, but what about reading Genesis as a “factual account” of Jewish origins? Did Harlow think of that? No, Adam is a “type of Christ” (p. 181), a “literary figure” (p. 181), according to him. And thus Adam is erased from the line of biblical patriarchs who once breathed air.

John Schneider volleyed, “... in the event that conflict between science and Scripture *seems* to exist, it follows that at least one of the two—the *science* or the *reading* of Scripture—is mistaken” (p. 197). Right on! Here succinctly stated is the heart of the problem.

Sometime in the first century AD a funny thing happened. The beginning history of the Israelite nation contained in Genesis 2–11, which Moses had handed down to the children of Israel, began being interpreted by early Christians as the start of the entire human race. When they received the canon of the Hebrew Old Testament, due to their ignorance, they read themselves into what they should have, or at least could have realized, was a Jewish history book. A simple mistake in thinking Jewish history was human history is a common misunderstanding that has endured for 2,000 years and even left its stamp on this issue of *PSCF*.

Here is what the authors Collins and Harlow apparently did not know and certainly did not recognize. The likely existence of Adam as a legitimate, historical personality has already been substantiated with archaeological and historical evidence. This evidence was first presented in a series of articles that appeared in the December 1993 and March 1994 issues of *PSCF* entitled, “In Search of the Historical Adam, Parts 1 and 2.”¹ A book was published in 2008 entitled, *Historical Genesis: From Adam to Abraham* (www.HistoricalGenesis.com).² A whole school of thought and a movement has sprung up in recent months focused on the historicity of Adam in full recognition of the antiquity of the human race—the Historical Adam Society.

“Historical Adam” is a Christian apologetic that embraces the Genesis narrative concerning Adam and his descendants, and operates completely within the bounds of scientific discovery and historical evidence. This position considers Adam to have been a real historical person,