

A theological challenge to biblical creation

A review of
Darwin, Creation and the Fall: Theological Challenges
by R.J. Berry and T.A. Noble (Eds.)
Nottingham, Apollos, 2009

Lita Cosner

“The Christian doctrine of creation has too often been highjacked [sic] by controversies of creationism, deistic tendencies and a concentration on Genesis 1 to the detriment of the richness of other biblical passages on creation.” With such a beginning, the reader should be wary of what might be coming in *Darwin, Creation and the Fall: Theological Challenges*. As the title indicates, this collection of essays is concerned with finding *theological* justification (the authors never rise to the level of finding actual *support*) for theistic evolution.

Taking the Bible seriously

David Wilkinson asks,

“What does it mean to take the Bible seriously in this area and in particular to take the whole of the Bible seriously? It is very tempting to construct a doctrine of creation from just the Old Testament texts, but in doing so one misses the major Christian themes of creation seen in the light of the new creation, and a God who sustains every moment of the universe’s existence in Jesus” (pp. 15–16).

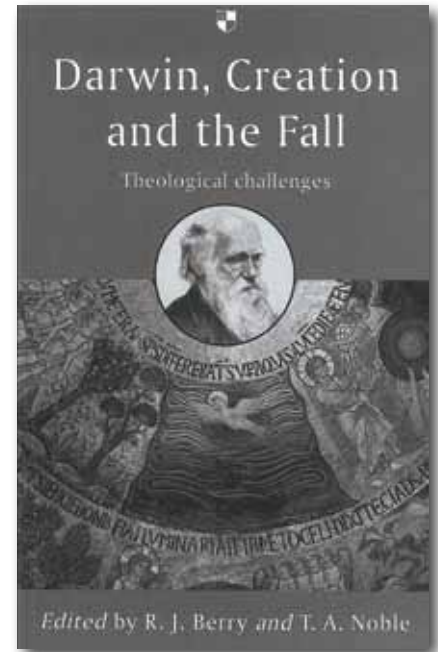
Furthermore, he promises, “Recapturing a Christian doctrine of creation from Scripture allows us to move beyond the controversies of creationism and encounter a fruitful dialogue with science” (p. 16).

The impossibility of a dialogue with an abstract concept aside, this assumes that the New Testament gives a fundamentally *different* doctrine of creation from that of Genesis. The New Testament gives a fuller, Christological doctrine of creation, but it builds on the historical foundation laid by Genesis. In fact, a non-historical interpretation of Genesis is at odds with the teaching of Jesus, Paul, Peter, and John. Redemption had to take place in history precisely because the Fall took place in history—and this is something Wilkinson doesn’t address in his essay.

Did Darwin dethrone humanity?

Oddly, genetics Professor R.J. Berry was chosen to write on the distinctly theological topic: Did Darwin dethrone humankind? After discussing the pros and cons of taking Adam as a ‘representative individual’ rather than a historical first man, he concludes: “Resolution of this point must be left to theological debate” (p. 65)—which makes one wonder why a theologian wasn’t chosen in the first place. In any case, one suspects that if there was a way for him to make a convincing argument for a ‘symbolic’ Adam, he would have done so.

Berry states that the question of whether a historical Adam existed “is entirely separate from the scientific debates about Darwinism—a fact which goes a long way toward explaining the bewilderment and expressions of irrelevance of most scientists when challenged about evolution” (p. 64). True, the question of whether or not Adam existed is a *historical*, not a scientific, question, but if evolution were true, that would have serious implications for our understanding of the historical claims of Scripture. And though he attempts to find a viable exegesis of Romans 5:12–21 that does



not depend on a historical Adam, Paul clearly had an individual in mind.¹

In the sectioned titled “Was Adam an individual?”, Berry states, “Certainly the word translated ‘Adam’ may be taken to mean collective humanity” (p. 63). In some contexts, of course it can—but the context is key. ‘Mankind’ could not be married to Eve; make an individual decision to eat the forbidden fruit; or the like. Berry argues that

“If [the image of God] was initially conferred on an individual, there is no reason why it should not spread by divine *fiat* to all other members of *Homo sapiens* alive at that time. Likewise, the effects of the disobedience of the first pair could also have spread ‘laterally’” (pp. 65–66).

But that destroys the kinsman-redeemer concept taught throughout Scripture—in fact, such an Adam would cease to be in any meaningful sense the Adam presented in Scripture.

Argument from omissions

Any piece of writing is by definition limited, so it is sometimes unfair to fault an author for not citing a certain work or for omitting a certain view—no-one can cover every conceivable, or even relevant, position in an essay. But when

an entire book systematically ignores the best arguments and representatives from the opposition, it creates a false sense of the debate.

Throughout the whole book, there is the assumption that the truth of evolution has been established beyond debate, and that some sort of reinterpretation of Genesis is both necessary and inevitable. But biblical creationists on one side and atheistic evolutionists on the other interpret Genesis as written—biblical creationists believe it and atheistic evolutionists do not. Both groups deal with a traditional understanding of what Genesis means by either accepting or rejecting it as an authority. And if the contributors to this volume did not think that these responses are optimal or viable, it would have been nice to at least hear how their alternative is proposed to be any better.

Death and suffering

Darrell Falk authored the chapter “Theological challenges faced by Darwin”. It primarily focuses on the problem of death and suffering in nature. It shouldn’t be surprising that a theistic evolutionary view fails to offer a satisfying solution to the problem of evil, but the closest Falk comes to offering an answer is:

“Suffering is a side effect of the freedom that God wills for creation. When we romanticize creation as being the work of an engineer who pre-ordains every detail rather than the work of a God who builds freedom into creation, we point to a reality that doesn’t exist” (p. 77).

The problem with Falk’s explanation is that the god of evolution wouldn’t just have *allowed* death and suffering as part of the creation, he (or she, or it?) would have programmed it into creation itself. In this scenario, there could be no ‘very good’ creation with no death or suffering, as is depicted in Genesis (e.g. 1:29–31), because before Adam could ever have inhabited the garden, his ancestors for untold millions of years would have had to die. Yet Paul explicitly calls

death “the last enemy” (1 Corinthians 15:26), and “the wages of sin” (Romans 6:23). Once again, in the name of harmonizing the Bible with modern scientific interpretations, the alternative that’s presented bears no resemblance to what is presented in Scripture.

Misplaced admonitions

In the epilogue, the editors state that as theistic evolutionists, they are able to

“... join in Paul’s admonition to ‘instruct certain people to give up ... devoting themselves to interminable myths and genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation and do not further God’s plan for us, which works through faith’ (1 Tim. 1:3–4 [sic]). After all, what are ‘interminable myths and genealogies’ but disputes about anthropology and evolution? They divert us from a proper focus on Christ and his work” (p. 199).

But the myths and genealogies that Paul opposes have nothing to do with the text in Genesis. After all, his close friend, Dr Luke, traced Jesus to Adam which included the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 (Luke 3:23–38). As George Knight summarizes:

“... μῦθος is uniformly used in the NT to refer to a tale, legend, myth, or fable regarded as untrue. Here the myths (and genealogies) are said to give rise to mere speculation and to be contrary to the οἰκονομίαν θεοῦ; in 4:7 they are qualified by the designations ‘worldly’ (βεβήλους) and ‘for old women’ (γραῶδεις); Tit. 1:14 designates them as ‘Jewish’, 2 Tim. 4:4 as that which people turn to when they turn away from the truth (see also 2 Pet. 1:16). Hence ‘myth’ for Paul (and Peter) is an unreal tale that only the gullible believe and follow, which produces nothing of value” (see Spicq, 93–98).²

There is something ironic about the editors implying that creationists are on the level of the false teachers Paul is refuting in 1 Timothy when



Figure 1. The Adam proposed by the contributors to the book may be historical, but he bears no resemblance to the Adam presented in the Bible.

they’ve spent an entire book disputing about the meaning of Genesis 1–3! In fact, while evolution was not, in and of itself, in view when Paul wrote this passage, the ‘myth’ of evolution would be a far more appropriate fit.

The editors call the view that the book espouses almost ‘unbelievably conservative’, in that they say that a literal Adam is a biblical necessity, and the same is true for a historical Fall. But their ‘historical Adam’ is not the biblical Adam; he is not the first human being, specially created by God; he is rather one of many proto-humans who have evolved. And the Fall is, if anything, part of Adam’s evolution, not the catastrophic event depicted in Scripture.

There is nothing really new in this book; the authors don’t propose a radical new exegesis that hasn’t been seen before. The editors and contributors of this book all claim to be Christians, and to question that is outside the scope of a responsible review. But in reading the book, one longs for even the *suggestion* that a responsible interpretation of Scripture should trump this week’s scientific fads.

Dodging an avalanche of evidence

B.B. Warfield used an analogy about the inspiration of the Bible:

“The effort to explain away the Bible’s witness to its plenary inspiration reminds one of a man

standing safely in his laboratory and elaborately expounding—possibly by the aid of diagrams and mathematical formulae—how every stone in an avalanche has a defined pathway and may easily be dodged by one of some presence of mind. We may fancy such an elaborate trifler’s triumph as he would analyze the avalanche into its constituent stones, and demonstrate of stone after stone that its pathway is definite, limited, and may easily be avoided. But avalanches, unfortunately, do not come upon us, stone by stone, one at a time, courteously leaving us opportunity to withdraw from the pathway of each in turn: but all at once, in a roaring mass of destruction.”³

The attempts of the contributors to *Darwin, Creation and the Fall* to escape the evidence for the biblical Adam, even as they attempt to find some underlying historical Adam (which, much like the ‘historical Jesus’ of some scholars, bears little resemblance to the individual as presented in Scripture), remind one of the attempts to dodge an avalanche, stone by stone. And to put it mildly, the attempt does not come across as a resounding defense of biblical authority.

In reading this collection of essays, one is struck not by how much the authors are keeping of the biblical account, but by how much they are willing to sacrifice in the attempt to find a scientifically acceptable compromise.

References

1. See Cosner, L., Romans 5:12–21, Paul’s view of a literal Adam, *J. Creation* 22(2):105–107, 2008; creation.com/romans5.
2. Knight, G.W., *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 73, 1992.
3. Warfield, B.B., *The Word of Benjamin B. Warfield, vol. 1: Revelation and Inspiration*, Logos Research Systems, Bellingham, WA, p. 65–66, 2008.

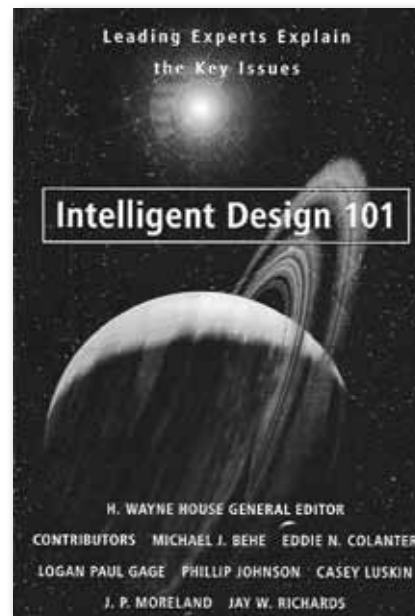
Intelligent Design in review

A review of
Intelligent Design 101
by H. Wayne House (Ed.)
Kregel Publications, Grand
Rapids, MI, 2008

Daniel Davidson

Intelligent Design 101 is edited by H. Wayne House, professor of biblical and theological studies at Faith Evangelical Seminary, and a prolific author of books and articles on a range of topics, including apologetics, biblical archaeology, theology, and even American law. This book on intelligent design reflects House’s theological background in only a few of its essays. For the most part, the book deals with now-familiar design arguments and issues: philosophical criticisms of naturalism as the ruling paradigm of science; discussion of ‘irreducible complexity’; and mildly technical reviews of DNA and fossil evidence supporting the design hypothesis. It is more than a little disappointing that a book on ID edited by a theologian does not seriously engage the ongoing theological debate over ID.

Nonetheless, on the subjects that it does cover, *Intelligent Design 101* offers something for everyone. This is both its strength and its weakness. Phillip Johnson, founding father of the ID movement, offers reminiscences on the design movement and his role in sparking its development. Michael Behe contributes a chapter that summarizes his argument in his bestselling *Darwin’s Black Box* in a succinct and highly readable way. On the other end of the spectrum, Casey Luskin offers a lengthy, semi-technical, and almost encyclopedic survey, “Finding Intelligent Design in



Nature”. And Wayne House contributes a chapter on Darwinism and American law that digs somewhat more deeply into the legal precedents than readers new to the debate might be expecting.

Trajectory of design

This book reflects in some ways the trajectory of the ID movement. It starts, in fact, with an essay by Phillip Johnson, whose 1991 book, *Darwin on Trial*, brought the issue to the center of public attention. In *Intelligent Design 101*, Johnson explains that his vision was to assemble a big tent of Darwin critics—researchers of any and all persuasions who believed that Darwinian evolution could not account for life—or for the origin of species, for that matter. He recognizes that, before him, the pioneer critics of Darwinism in the 20th century were Henry Morris and John Whitcomb, authors of *The Genesis Flood* (1961). “Most of those affiliated with this ‘creation science’ movement believed in a young earth,