Debating the historical Adam and Eve

Four Views on the Historical Adam

Matthew Barrett and Ardel Caneday (Eds.)

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There is a huge debate raging at present in ostensibly evangelical circles on Adam and Eve. Did they exist? Was Adam the first ever human? Are we sinners because of his original sin? Many books have been published over the last five years promoting different views on Adam and Eve, from Peter Enns' *The Evolution of Adam*[1] to C. John Collins' *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?*,[2] alongside numerous blog posts and articles from all sectors of the evangelical world. So it was almost inevitable that a 'X views on the historical Adam' book was to be published, and *Four Views on the Historical Adam* is it.

The four contributors to this book are Dr Denis Lamoureux[3] (Adam never existed), Dr John Walton[4] (archetypal view), Dr C. John Collins[5] (old-age view), and Dr William Barrick[6] (young-age view). Moreover, the book offers two divergent pastoral perspectives in conclusion. Dr Gregory Boyd[7] argues that Christianity is secure regardless of a historical Adam. This is hardly encouraging from a leading advocate of the heterodox views of open theism, which denies divine omnipotence, and annihilationism, which denies eternal conscious punishment for the unsaved. Dr Philip Ryken[8] argues that we cannot understand the world correctly or 'Christianly' without the historical Adam.

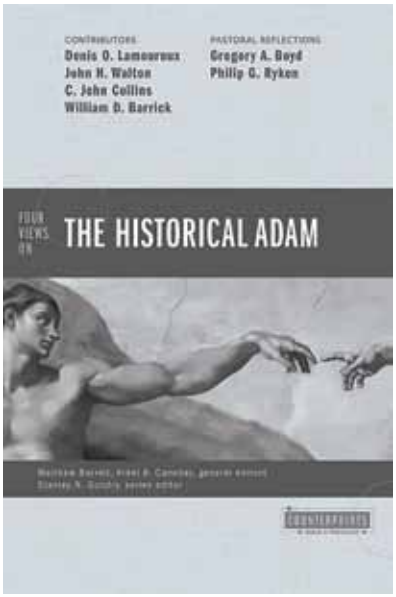
Barrett and Caneday—introducing Adam … or not

Editors Matthew Barrett and Ardel Caneday offer the obligatory diplomatic opening to the book (pp. 13–36) and cover the history of the origins debate from Darwin to today. They present the major views one will find on this debate from atheistic evolution to young-age creationism and everything in between in a reasonably fair and accurate manner. They also introduce the contributors to the volume, the format of the discussion (in which each contributor submits an essay, with the other contributors giving a response to that essay, and then the author of the essay presents a short rejoinder), and the questions they will be addressing. There is little to object to in this section; it is for the most part a reasonably fair introduction to the topic. However, at times they are a little too reliant on Ronald Numbers in their characterization of young-age creationism—he is infamous for his mendacious claim that it began with Ellen White, ignoring the fact that it was the majority view of the Church Fathers, medieval theologians, and Reformers.[9]

Denis Lamoureux—no Adam

Lamoureux is appreciably blunt: "Adam never existed, and this fact has no impact whatsoever on the foundational beliefs of Christianity" (p. 38). He then offers his testimony from biblical creation to theistic evolution while claiming to remain a 'lively evangelical'. A clever tactic—a testimony garners sympathy and does not lend itself to refutation.

But Lamoureux offers more than just testimony. He offers three hermeneutical keys to justify his position. First is Lamoureux's prime



hermeneutical 'bogeyman', 'scientific concordism':

> "Scientific concordism is the *assumption* that the facts of science align with the Bible. Stated another way, it is the assumption that God revealed scientific facts to the biblical writers thousands of years before their discovery by modern scientists" (p. 45).

However, the Bible does not have to reveal modern scientific facts in the Bible for it to 'align' with science. It only has to not contradict empirical fact. Moreover, Lamoureux believes Jesus' bodily Resurrection is a historical fact. But if evolution is an empirical fact, the notion that dead bodies don't reanimate themselves is a far clearer empirical fact. So why reject concordism with the textual data relevant to evolution but embrace it with Jesus' Resurrection?

Second is his 'message-incident principle': that the Scriptures present inerrant spiritual truths in the guise of incidental and errant 'ancient science'. He uses Philippians 2:10–11 as an ex-ample of this: "Paul is referring to an ancient understanding of the structure of the cosmos known as the '3-tier uni-verse'" (pp. 48–49). However, the '3-tier universe' language is impressionistic—it's designed to give

a feel for the cosmic scope of Christ's rules established by the Christological reflection on Isaiah 45:23 between which it is sandwiched. It requires imposition of a later concept on the biblical text.[10] Lamoureux also posits that *raqia'* in Genesis 1 supposedly means the sky is a solid dome (pp. 50–55).[11] However, he also applies this to ancient biology and Adam:

> "Adam's existence is based ultimately on an ancient conceptualization of human origins: *de novo* creation. … And since ancient science does not align with physical reality, it follows that *Adam never existed*" (p. 58).

The implication? "*Holy Scripture makes statements about how God created living organisms that in fact never happened*" (p. 56). That is, a flat denial of inerrancy. But doesn't this mean God lied in Scripture? "'No! The Lord accommodated in the Bible.' The Holy Spirit used the biology-of-the-day as an incidental vessel to reveal inerrant spiritual truths in Genesis 1" (p. 57). 'Accommodation' is Lamoureux's third major hermeneutical plank. However, as Collins explains, Lamoureux doesn't seem to understand the difference between accommodating to human *finitude* and pandering to human *error*:

> "… there is no reason to suppose that the sort of 'accommodation' we find in the Bible is the sort that uses (now rejected) ancient science to teach timeless truths. … We might compare two efforts at accommodating the needs of a child's mind when we answer her question about where babies come from. One way is to say something about storks bringing the baby. A better way (which my wife used) is simply to say, 'God mixes a little bit from the mom and a little bit from the dad and grows it into a baby in the mom's tummy.' The second is a truthful accommodation, and is in line with the traditional notions; young children rarely ask for elaboration" (p. 77).

Lamoureux applies these ideas to Paul's and Jesus' discussions of Adam and Eve differently. Apparently Jesus was "accommodating to the Jewish belief of the day that Adam was a real person" (p. 60) in Matthew 19:4–6. Jesus seems to have *known* Adam and Eve didn't exist, which, instead of making Jesus mistaken, turns him into a liar. However, Lamoureux thinks Paul believed Adam existed (p. 61–63). This is where Lamoureux's 'message–incident principle' comes to the rescue. Romans 5:12–21 is apparently just a compare and contrast of Adam and Christ whose 'inerrant spiritual message' is: 'we're all sinners, but Christ's death and resurrection makes us righteous'. However, there is far more to Romans 5:12–21 than this, and it establishes that a historical Adam is required for Paul's reasoning to work.[12]

Lamoureux's essay is well structured, but it rests on the presumption that deep time 'science' trumps Scripture. He sets aside the *claims* of Scripture that he thinks "[do] not align with physical reality". This is not 'inerrancy'; it is the old heterodox neo-orthodox doctrine of limited infallibility.

Responses and rejoinder

This exchange revealed just how different Lamoureux's hermeneutical program is from the other contributors. All three contributors noted that Lamoureux was working with a fundamentally different doctrine of inerrancy than the rest—a limited 'inerrancy in salfivic purpose' rather than the sort of inerrancy found in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI). Walton caught Lamoureux out on issues of historicity and genealogy, and Collins pinned Lamoureux for a fundamental misuse of language in his 'message–incident principle'—the Bible is written in ordinary and poetic language, so "we cannot tell … from the words used … what the writers 'believed' about the world" (p. 75). Barrick's response, however, was rather weak. He caught out Lamoureux on inerrancy, but many of his other arguments seemed to miss crucial details in Lamoureux's arguments. For instance:

> "Are the six days of the Genesis creation account an accommodation made by God to indicate an extended amount of time more commensurate with evolutionary theory?"

This does not reflect Lamoureux's notion of 'accommodation'. For Lamoureux, Genesis 1 reflects 'ancient (i.e. falsified) historiography', but presents an 'inerrant spiritual message' that God is Creator. Barrick is arguing against a figurative view of Genesis 1 (much more like Collins' view) when Lamoureux thinks the ancient author believed he was writing about events that really happened.

John Walton—the archetypal Adam

Walton believes Adam and Eve existed. He cites the genealogies that feature Adam (Genesis 5, 1 Chronicles 1, and Luke 3) and Paul's claim that there was a historical original sin in Romans 5 as the reasons to believe Adam existed.

Nevertheless, for Walton the main interest in Adam (and Eve) in the Bible is not historical, it is *archetypal*: "… an archetype serves as a representative of all other members of the group, thus establishing an inherent relationship" (p. 90). However, Walton's 'archetype' need not be historical: "An archetype can be a real person in a real past, though not all archetypes are" (p. 90). Walton then proceeds to substantiate the notion of archetype in the biblical and Ancient Near Eastern literature (pp. 90–100).

However, Genesis 2–5 connects Adam to historical figures through genealogies, though in most ANE literature created humans are nondescript and have no such genealogies. What then does archetypal depiction have to do with the historicity of particular facets of Adam's life? If

Romans 5:12 counts as a claim for the historicity of the Fall, then the same applies to 1 Corinthians 15:45 with respect to Adam as the first ever human.[13] Is it really coincidence that those portions of the narrative hardest for evolution and deep time to accommodate are all that Walton deems to be non-historical?

Walton also views the New Testament as depicting Adam and Eve in archetypal terms (pp. 105–108), though he acknowledges a historical Fall in Romans 5. However, Walton's understanding of the Fall is unusual: "… but nothing here necessitates that Adam was the first human being or that we all must be related biologically or genetically to Adam" (p. 106). As evidence, he suggests that Genesis 2 is not an expansion on the events of the sixth day of Genesis 1, but is a sequel to Genesis 1 (pp. 108–113).

However, Collins and (to a lesser extent) Barrick point out in their responses that Genesis 5:1–3 explicitly repeats the language of Genesis 1:26–28 with specific reference to the Adam of Genesis 2–4. Moreover, the 'not good' condition of Adam's solitude in Genesis 2 is a clear parallel to the 'good/very good' language of Genesis 1, implying that creation was only 'very good' when Eve was formed. This only makes sense if Genesis 2 is an ex-pansion of Day 6 of Creation Week. Finally, both Jesus (Matthew 19:3–9; Mark 10:2–9) and Paul (1 Corinthians 15:45–49) interpret Genesis 2 as an expansion of the events of Day 6 by reading Genesis 1 and 2 synoptically.

Furthermore, the word distinction Paul makes in his 'sin' terminology in Romans 5:13–14 establishes that Adam and Eve were the first ever sinners:

> "For *sin* [*ἁμαρτία hamartia*] is not reckoned where there is no law. But death reigned from Adam to Moses even on those who did not *sin* [*ἁμαρτήσαντας hamartēsantes*][14] after the likeness of Adam's *transgression* [παραβάσεως *parabaseōs*][15]."

For Paul παράβασις is a transgression of a known law one is under, and ἁμαρτία is general moral evil.[16] Moreover, Romans 5:12 claims that ἁμαρτία, not just παράβασις, came in through Adam: "through one man ἁμαρτία came into the world". This implies there was no ἁμαρτία before Genesis 3; i.e. Adam and Eve were the first humans to sin.

Finally, Walton presents a hypothetical scenario for the origin of man and the historical Fall consistent with theistic evolution (pp. 113–115). However, it has humans sinning before the Adamic Fall, so it founders on the exegetical points above.

Walton's essay is at times difficult to follow because he jumps around so much. Nevertheless, he is careful in his thinking and cautious in his conclusions. However, it is often too cautious, and he makes some exegetical blunders (which can be difficult to discern) that undermine his case.

Responses and rejoinder

In many ways this discussion was little more than the contributors talking past one another and assuming their own views. Lamoureux seemed to miss the major difference between him and Walton over inerrancy and got distracted by the red herring of *raqia'*. Barrick largely assumed his own view, but did score some points on the historical groundedness in the particulars of Genesis 1–4 supported by Genesis 5. Collins was an exception, and gave a forceful rebuttal to Walton's rejection of Adam as the *first* man and the *first* sinner that Walton did not really answer. Walton spread himself too thin in his rejoinder, and was able to do little more than reassert his views.

C. John Collins—historical Adam in an old Earth

Collins' argues for a 'mere historical-Adam-and-Eve-ism'. His first section defines 'history' as "not really a *kind of literature* (or *genre*); it is a *way of referring*, of talking about events in the real world" (p. 147). As such, 'history' does *not* imply the account has no figurative elements, is comprehensive or unbiased, or is an exact chronological sequence unless actually claimed (p. 148).

In his second section, Collins argues for the unity of Genesis 1–11 (pp. 148–155). Following Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen, he first notes that Genesis 1–11 has a basic structural continuity with contemporary cosmological text from Mesopotamia which reflects a common cross-cultural memory. He also cogently argues for the literary unity of Genesis 1–11 (pp. 155–157). He cites the numerous cross-links between the characters and the language of the narrative to tie together the numerous 'toledoths' of Genesis 1–11.

More problematic is Collins' argument that Genesis and the ANE literature have a common 'lack of literalism'.[17] For instance, the ridiculously long reigns of the kings in the Sumerian Kings List (SKL) (c. 20,000 years) mirrors in exaggerated form the longevity of the Genesis 5 patriarchs (c. 900 years) (pp. 152–153). However, the SKL also records two instances of significant drops in the reigns of the kings, one occurring immediately after the Flood and another later in the list, which somewhat mirrors the pattern in Genesis 11.[18–20] Like the accounts of Creation and the Flood, the Genesis 5 and 11 genealogies have a relative *lack* of exaggeration compared to the ANE literature.

In his third section, Collins argues that the Bible operates with a basic 'Creation–Fall–Redemption' narratival framework, and shows how Adam and Eve are a crucial assumption of that framework (pp. 157–164). Interestingly, he discusses Matthew 19:3–9 (pp. 161–162). However, Mark 10:2–8 parallels this account, which explicitly places Adam and Eve "from the beginning *of creation*"—obviously antithetical to old-earth creationism.[21,22]

Collins next asks whether this 'big picture story' is credible (pp. 164–167). To show that we are all of one stock, he stresses human uniqueness within the biological world in, for example, linguistic ability:

> "The differences between humans and other animals, as the linguists analyze them, are not simply of degree … but of kind" (p. 165).

We also share a unique sense that something is not right with the world:

> "All human beings have experiences that make us feel that things are not the way they ought to be" (p. 166).

How do we explain this?

> "… the story of Adam and Eve—who were created good, but who disobeyed and brought sin and misery into their lives and into ours—answers this exactly" (p. 167).

Collins' last section explores what specific historical reconstructions the 'big picture story' he has been building can tolerate (pp. 168–175). He proposes four principles (pp. 171–172), the first three are uncontroversial, but the last is an 'acceptable' polygenetic scenario in which Adam and Eve are the head of a "closely related" tribe which 'fell' under their leadership. However, he is unclear on what "closely related" means. It seems to be in part an attempt to accommodate Francis Collins' genetic 'problem' for a historical Adam and Eve.[23,24] But if so, Collins' scenario is open to the objection he made to Walton's hypothetical scenario:

> "Walton's scheme raises serious questions about the justice of God in accounting the sin of this couple to their contemporaries, without having some kind of natural relationship between them" (p. 130).

Collins lastly addresses the issues of 'evolution' and 'inerrancy'. He notes a few different common definitions of 'evolution', and accepts the possibility of all except the sort of universal common ancestry that requires 'no extra help from God'. Yet this doesn't impress the village-atheopaths like Victor Stenger[25]:

> "Surveys indicate that what most believe in is God-guided evolution. That is not evolution as understood by science. That is intelligent design. There is no room for God in evolution."[26]

However, he misrepresents young-agers as objecting to "all kinds of evolution, and even to an old earth in general, because of how they involve animals dying" (p. 172). The young-age objection to pre-Fall fossils includes, for example, fossil evidence of thorns, cancer, cannibalism, predation—and importantly, even *human* death, and by sinful means at that.[27] It's not just about animal and human death; it's also about *suffering*. Moreover, young-age creationism demands *rapid* biological change.[28]

On 'inerrancy', Collins endorses the CSBI for the purposes of this debate.[29] He approvingly quotes John Wenham:

> "Christ's view of Scripture can and should still be the Christian's view of Scripture" (p. 174).[30]

Despite the weaknesses and ambiguities in Collins' essay, he presents a cogent case for the historicial and soteriological significance of Adam and Eve as the first humans.

Responses and rejoinder

This is in many ways the most irenic and helpful discussion of the book. The critiques are often sharp, but the tone of the discussion was by far the most edifying of the book. As such, the views were allowed to interact with each other more than the personalities, and it enables the reader to more clearly evaluate the positions in dialogue. Lamoureux was the sharpest critique, which centred on 'concordism', the common straw-man of 'god-of-the-gaps',[31] and the definition of 'inerrancy', while Collins spent most time (successfully) rebutting Lamoureux's response in his rejoinder. There was hardly a major disagreement between Walton and Collins, with the exception of Adam as the *first* man, which I think Collins clearly won. And Barrick was able to score some solid points against Collins' view of Genesis 1 by citing Exodus 20 and Exodus 31 (though he strangely called Collins' view of Genesis 1–11 "nonhistorical"). Collins' rejoinder was a powerful refutation of Lamoureux, a basic agreement with Walton, and a glossing over the problems Barrick raised.

William Barrick—Adam from the beginning

I agree with Barrick's view, and I have a lot of sympathy for his evident passion for it. However, I found his argument for it to be uneven. Moreover, there were serious misrepresentations of his opponents, especially Walton. For instance, after giving a reasonable summary of Walton's views, he calls them "allegorical" (p. 199). I disagree with Walton's archetypal view, but he clearly believes it is what the *human* author intended to convey, and thus it cannot be an allegorical interpretation.

Moreover, Barrick's "assumptions" (pp. 199–202) are hard to explicitly or exclusively connect with the young-age view. He lists four: Genesis is supernatural revelation given to Moses, Genesis is historically accurate, Genesis is universal in scope, and the rest of the Bible assumes a relatively straightforward reading of Genesis 1–11. The first is not needed (it may have been originally given to Adam, Noah, and Shem, and passed down to Moses, who edited their documents into Genesis), and the second and third assumptions don't rule out Collins' or Walton's views. Only the fourth comes closest to excluding the other views.

Nevertheless, when Barrick has the chance to explicate the fourth assumption in his assessment of the New Testament evidence (pp. 218–223), he doesn't really demonstrate an exclusively young-earth view. He clearly demonstrates the need for a historical Adam and a historical Fall, and makes somewhat of a case for the necessity of Adam being the first man. However, he

doesn't substantiate that Adam's first sin is the reason humans *physically* die, which would seriously undermine Collins' view.[32] Neither does he really tie Adam chronologically to the beginning of *creation*, which would explicitly exclude Collins' view.

The strongest point of Barrick's essay was his discussion of Genesis 1–5 (pp. 202–217), which made up most of the essay. He was far more detailed in his analysis of Genesis 1–5 than any of the other contributors, and I think he did enough to show that the young-age view is the best position. He clearly explicated the verbal links between Genesis 1 and 2–4, how the historicity is grounded in Genesis 5, and how this creates a fair presumption of mundane historical presentation, even in some of the more 'fantastic' details such as the forming accounts of Adam and Eve.

Responses and rejoinder

The discussion of Barrick's essay was clearly the worst of the discussions. Unlike the discussion of Collins' essay, this was all personality and little substance. Barrick's essay was rather belligerent at times, and it engendered a similar response, especially in Lamoureux, and even in Walton. Lamoureux committed the most egregious error of the whole book—a farcical representation of 'the' young-age prediction on the fossil record (figure 1) (pp. 231–232)—when Barrick never mentioned fossils even once in his essay! Collins was calmest, but even he was forced to deal with issues that need not separate him from Barrick. Walton's response was uneven—scoring points where Barrick misrepresented him, and then begged the question of his own interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 when asking for evidence for Barrick's view.

Barrick's rejoinder was more belligerent than his essay, and seemed to misconstrue the debate. For Barrick, it *all* came down to inerrancy, which he seemed to use as a bludgeon to circumvent the hermeneutical discussion. However, he seems to have a definition of 'inerrancy' more conservative than that found in the CSBI, which many young-age creationists endorse.[33] He accuses Walton (who has endorsed the CSBI before[34]) of rejecting inerrancy because he says the spelling of Nebuchadnezzar/Nebuchadrezzar is irrelevant for inerrancy (p. 252). However, even if Barrick's solution is correct, Walton's explanation is consistent with Article XIII of the CSBI, which denies that spelling irregularities compromise inerrancy.

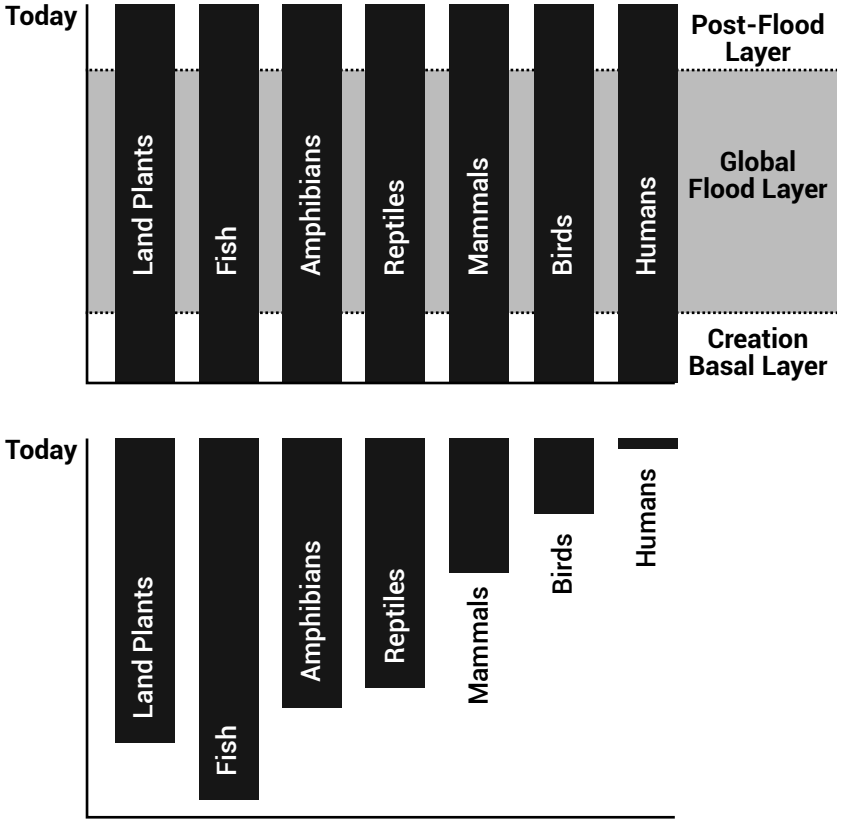


Figure 1. Lamoureux's farcical representation of the fossil pattern young-earth creation supposedly predicts (top) vs the fossil record (bottom) (p. 231). A short perusal of relevant creationist literature will show that there are in fact divergent perspectives on the fossil distribution and the geologic column among young-age creationists, none of which match Lamoureux's nonsense.

Boyd and Ryken—does Adam matter for the church?

In the last two sections, Gregory Boyd and Philip Ryken argue for different pastoral perspectives on the significance of the historical Adam debate for the life of the church.

In some ways, Boyd's essay is more informative. He is clear on the ecclesiastical consequences of his view—we should accept people as Christians even if they don't believe in a historical Adam. He also makes some thought-provoking points about the widespread evangelical acceptance of C.S. Lewis, who did not believe in a historical Adam (at least in his early years as a Christian). Moreover, the ecumenical creeds did not mention Adam. However, this is an argument from silence: the creeds majored on refuting the heresies of the day, e.g. the Nicene Creed refuted Arianism.

However, Ryken establishes how connected the historical Adam is to the biblical understanding of humanity, sin, salvation, and suffering, such that we lose these connections without the historical Adam. He also makes the

point that the church has dealt with issues relevant to Adam before—the Pelagian controversy in the 4th and 5th centuries. Pelagius rejected the representative nature of Adam and his Fall, and so made us all our own Adams. Ryken points out that rejecting a historical Adam has the same basic effect. One episode Ryken didn't mention was the way the Roman Catholic church dealt with Isaac La Peyrere and his notion of 'pre-Adamites' in the 17th century; they rejected it as heretical.[35] There is no reason to conclude that the Protestant churches of the day would not have done the same thing.

However, Ryken leaves us hanging about how to address the historical Adam debate arising within church walls. Do we keep it as an in-house debate? To we kick the dissenters out? Do we leave them in, but take away their soap box within church walls? Boyd votes for embracing them with open arms. I don't think Ryken's points allow us to be so lenient. Further, this all begs the question; in reality, the non-believers in a historical Adam have been the ones kicking out dissenters from their compromise.

Conclusion

This book is an improvement on some previous 'multiple views' books on the origins debate.[36] Each of the contributors gets to respond to each essay and the responses given to their essay. No one view has a privileged place in the discussion. Most of the discussions were reasonable (though not always great), and the discussion around Collins' essay was particularly helpful.

Nevertheless, it still has significant shortcomings. The discussion of the young-age view was poor. I found Barrick's essay uneven (with sections of brilliance and sections of frustration), the critiques ranged from weak to fallacious to farcical, and the rejoinder was an abject disappointment.

If you want to know what views are out there other than the young-age view, this book is a reasonable primer. If you are looking for a calm and conscientious discussion of the young-age view on the historical Adam, this book is a failure.

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7. Senior pastor at Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul, Minnesota.
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