



# Adam & Eve & EVOLUTION

## The Reader's Digest Version

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For many years now I have been intrigued by the challenge facing orthodox Christians of reconciling the biblical accounts of early Genesis with the mounting scientific evidence that humanity evolved from primates. I recently indulged my intrigue by researching the topic and developing a five-week course entitled “Adam & Eve and Evolution”, which our parish opened up to the community-at-large during Lent. And I would like to share a little of what I learned here.

For more than a century, Creationism has enjoyed inimitable support in America. Creationism is the belief that that humanity was specially created by God in its present form approximately 6,000 years ago. Ever since the Scopes “Monkey” Trial of brought the question of human origins to the forefront in 1925, roughly half of Americans have professed to being Creationists and opposed the theory of human evolution. In fact, according to Gallup, as recently as five years ago 46% of the American public held this belief. However, a July 13 article in USA Today reported there has recently been a sharp drop in the number of Americans who hold to Creationism, as a Gallup poll conducted in May of this year determined now only 38% of America remain Creationists. Certainly the rise in atheism contributes to this figure, but the details of the poll reveal the biggest factor in this change is the increased number of Christians who no longer consider belief in evolution to be at odds with a Biblical faith.

This is sure to cause many believers to wonder: how could this be? How can our faith possibly be reconciled with evolutionary theory while still maintaining the authority of scripture? But, as I have studied this issue, I have learned that while Creationists may be the loudest voices in American Christianity, there is actually a wide spectrum of perspectives on how to best interpret Genesis 1-3, including some that accommodate the preponderance of scientific evidence supporting human evolution, without compromising the authority of scripture. Below, I will share a few of the most compelling of such perspectives. But, in order to do that, I first need to provide a more thorough explanation of Creationism.

There are actually two main Creationist camps today. The majority of Creationists in America are Young Earth Creationists. Proponents of Young Earth Creationism believe that because the Bible is the Word of God, it must be authoritative not only on matters of religion, but on matters of science as well. Therefore, since they hold to the traditional understanding of Genesis 1 – namely, that it is a description of the material creation of the Earth – they believe this indicates that the scientific theories of the big bang and human evolution are unreliable and must be based on faulty science. In contrast to the scientific consensus that the universe and the earth are billions of years old, Young Earth Creationists date the creation of both as having occurred only 6,000 years ago, based upon the various genealogies in the Bible. Furthermore, Young Earth

Creationists affirm that Adam & Eve were the first historical people, specially created by God – Adam from the dust and Eve from Adam’s rib according to Genesis 2. Also contradicting scientific evidence, they infer from these passages that prior to Adam & Eve’s “Fall” into sin in Genesis 3 the world was perfect and without any death, animal or otherwise.

There is another version of Creationism, however, known as Old Earth Creationism. They depart from Young Earth Creationists by affirming the scientific consensus that the universe and earth are both very old, the universe originating with the Big Bang approximately 13.8 billion years ago and the earth about 4.5 billion years ago. Most Old Earth Creationists reconcile this with scripture by interpreting the “days” of creation in Genesis 1 as representing vast ages of time. However, Old Earth Creationists do not accept the scientific theory of human evolution. Instead, they agree with Young Earth Creationists that Adam & Eve were the first historical people specially created by God about 6,000 years ago.

For the last century, these two forms of Creationism have tended to be the dominant view among Christians in America. And in the last 50 years, Young Earth Creationism in particular has become dominant. And it may surprise some that for political, racial, & cultural reasons this has been an almost uniquely American phenomenon. But ever since the 19th century, when evidence for an old earth and human evolution began to emerge, there have been Christians who have suggested that both can be reconciled with scripture. And despite having their voices drowned out or mostly ignored for more than a century, since the 1990s there has been a resurgence of more moderate Christian perspectives that take scientific findings seriously. Gerald Rau, author of *Mapping the Origins Debate: Six Models of the Beginning of Everything* (IVP Academic, 2012), has divided these perspectives into two categories: Directed Evolution and Planned Evolution.

In regard to the creation of the world, both Directed and Planned Evolution would affirm the scientific consensus about the age of the universe as well as the theory of human evolution. However, these two perspective differ in two key ways. Proponents of Planned Evolution insist that when God originally created the universe He planned it in such a way that all that has transpired without God having to intervene further. So, while they would affirm that God certainly intervenes in the created order in other ways, such as through the incarnation, answering prayer, and even performing miracles, proponents of Planned Evolution would insist that since the Big Bang 13.8 billion years ago God’s further intervention in the creation process has not been required for creation to unfold exactly as it has – from the emergence of the earth from the sun 4.5 Billion years ago to the beginning of life on earth some 3.6 billion years ago, and finally the origin of the human species about 100,000 years ago. The Biologos Foundation (biologos.org) is a leading proponent of the Planned Evolution perspective.

In contrast to this perspective, proponents of Directed Evolution believe God has intervened in the process of creation all along, directing it to unfold in a certain way. And to support this they point to a litany of highly improbable scientific events that were required for the origin of life and humans to ever occur.

The other significant distinction between these two Christian perspectives on evolution is how they understand the scientific process by which humans evolved from primates. The Planned Evolutionists agree with the majority of naturalistic (atheist) scientists in affirming Darwinian evolution, which emphasizes natural selection as the primary mechanism of evolution. In contrast, Directed Evolutionists tend to be non-Darwinian: affirming that natural selection played a part, but insisting the evidence indicates there must have been additional mechanisms at play as well.

But the question remains: how can proponents of Directed and Planned Evolution adhere to these scientific views without compromising the authority of Scripture? First, both would take issue with the Creationist tenet that, as the Word of God, the Bible is authoritative on matters of science. Although this tenet may have become the majority view in the past century among American Protestants, historically this has not been the majority view of the Church at least since Augustine. But, perhaps even more significantly, the Planned and Directed Evolutionists would argue that the Creationist interpretations of Genesis 1-3 have come as a result of projecting modern ideas back onto an ancient text, presuming the author of Genesis 1-3 provides answers to modern questions that its author wouldn't have been seeking to answer.

So how do the Planned & Directed Evolutionists suggest early Genesis can be rightly interpreted? Regarding Genesis 1, the most compelling interpretation to emerge in the last decade has come from John Walton. Though Walton affirms that God certainly created the universe materially from nothing, in his book *The Lost World of Genesis One* (IVP Academic, 2009) Walton argues that Genesis 1 is not a description of the earth's material origins. Instead, he argues that the word "create" in ancient Hebrew referred to God giving something function and purpose. Thus, Walton understands Genesis 1 to be about God assigning functions to a world already billions of years old in order to create a "cosmic temple" where He could bring humans into relationship with himself. In other words, according to Walton, the way Creationists read Genesis 1 is analogous to reading a description of God building a house, when the intent of the Genesis author is actually more analogous to a description of God making of a home.

Walton also provides the most compelling interpretation of Genesis 2-3 in the Directed Evolution category, presented in his book *The Lost World of Adam & Eve* (IVP Academic, 2015). There, Walton interprets the Genesis account to be presenting Adam & Eve not as the first humans, but as humans chosen by God as representatives of the larger human race that was in existence; priests, if you will, with the purpose of bringing humanity into relationship with God. However, when Adam & Eve failed at their mission in Genesis 3, this brought disorder into the world that required Jesus, a "second Adam", to come to redeem humanity and accomplish what Adam & Eve were unable to: providing a way for humanity to come into relationship with God.

From the Planned Evolution perspective, the most compelling interpretation of Genesis 2-3 has been put forth by the recent book *Evolution and The Fall* (Eerdmans, 2017) edited by William Cavanaugh and James K.A. Smith. In the book, Smith re-examines the doctrine of The Fall in light of human evolution with the aim of determining what elements of the doctrine are indispensable for the story of scripture to remain coherent and to remain faithful to Christian

Tradition. Smith's conclusions lead him to insist, first of all, that Christian tradition requires affirming that humanity was created originally good. However, Smith clarifies that humanity can be "good" while at the same time having the need to mature ethically. In other words, original goodness does not necessitate that there was original perfection. This is significant because it means one could maintain that animal and human death could have occurred prior to The Fall without violating the tradition.

Additionally, Smith also insists that we must maintain that the event of The Fall had an effect on human character such that we are now incapable of not-sinching apart from the power of God. However, according to Smith it is not theologically necessary to affirm that this "Fall" happened at a distinct, punctiliar moment in time. Instead, the book suggests that The Fall narrative of Genesis 3 could represent the inner deliberation of temptation that many humans collectively succumbed to over a period of time.

I understand that this short article may cause more questions for readers than answers. If you are interested in learning more on the topic, I invite you to visit [saintmatthiasoakdale.com/ae](http://saintmatthiasoakdale.com/ae) where a video of Part 1 of my five week course is available and access to other videos is available upon request.

However, some reading this article may wonder why all of this even really matters? What is at stake if Christians continue holding to Creationism or remain closed to other perspectives? Well, to that I would answer: only the Great Commission.

The same USA Today article I cited before notes that polls reveal nearly 40% of those who have left organized religion do so because of religion's anti-science reputation, and this is especially true among younger adults. A 2011 Barna research poll of young adults with a Christian background reports 35% said "Christians are too confident they know all the answers." Meanwhile, 29% of young adults feel that "churches are out of step with the scientific world we live in," 25% perceive that "Christianity is anti-science," and 23% said they have "been turned off by the creation-versus-evolution debate." The fact is that the next generation is asking for better answers on questions of science than the Creationist movement has been able to provide.

Some denominations, like the Missouri-Synod Lutherans and Southern Baptist Convention have rejected the Theory of Evolution outright and have (I believe mistakenly) made Creationism part of their core doctrine. Meanwhile, one of the greatest advantages Anglicanism has over much of evangelicalism is a tradition of intellectual seriousness coupled with doctrinal latitude concerning secondary issues of the faith that can provide a safe environment for people to wrestle with subjects like this one.

Taking a fresh look at the question of human origins and admitting we don't have all the answers is one way the Church can begin to restore its credibility with the lost and bring them to that which is primary: a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.