

Embracing Jesus Christ & The Cross Without Historical Adam

Denis O. Lamoureux

Professor of Science & Religion and Research Associate in Paleontology
St. Joseph's College, University of Alberta

Thank you for this opportunity to share a few thoughts on the topic of “Christianity and Human Origins.” Now there is no doubt about it, my title is quite provocative, and if anyone finds it offensive, I apologize. But I will ask you for your patience please, as I try to explain how embracing Jesus Christ and the Cross without historical Adam might be possible.

Before I start, there is something that I need to make extremely clear about history in the Bible. I believe that historical accounts begin with Abraham roughly around Genesis 12. It is the opening eleven chapters of Scripture where much debate arises.

I must also emphasize the science of biblical archeology aligns well with much of the history in the Old Testament.¹ And most importantly for me as an evangelical Christian, I believe that the New Testament is a reliable historical record of actual people and events in the first century AD.²

It is well-known that political leaders such as King Herod (Matt. 2:1), Pontius Pilate (Lk. 23:6), and King Agrippa (Acts 25:13) really existed. In particular, the four gospels were based on eyewitness accounts of actual individuals and things they experienced (Lk. 1:1–4; 2 Pet. 1:16–18; 1 Jn. 1:1–3). And there really was a man named “Jesus” who lived in Judea in the first century AD. The gospels are a trustworthy historical record of the Lord’s teaching and miracles, and especially his bodily resurrection from the grave three days after his physical death on the Cross for our sins. The historicity of Jesus Christ in the New Testament is non-negotiable for me.

Definitions

Let’s begin with some basic definitions. My view of origins is called “Evolutionary Creation.” This is the belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created the inanimate universe and every living creature, including humans, through an ordained, sustained, and intelligent design-reflecting evolutionary process.

Of course, the term “intelligent design” has created some confusion over the last thirty years. So, I will use a biblical and traditional definition. Intelligent design is the belief that beauty, complexity, and functionality in nature point to an Intelligent Designer.

As Psalm 19 states, “The heavens declare the glory of God,” and I would argue, so too does the evolution of living creatures. And Romans 1 asserts that anyone who rejects this divine revelation in nature is “without excuse.” From my perspective, and to use a legal term, Intelligent Design in the world is “beyond a reasonable doubt.”

“Scientific concordism,” or simply “concordism,” is an interpretive approach to Scripture that commonly appears in evangelical circles, though many evangelicals are not familiar with this term. Concisely defined, scientific concordism is the assumption that the Bible aligns with the facts of science.

In my opinion, this is a very reasonable assumption. God created the world, I believe that. God inspired the Bible, I also believe that. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the Bible should align with science. But here is the critical question: Is scientific concordism a feature of the Word of God?

To explore this question, let’s begin with a couple interpretive insights from leading evangelical biblical scholars. G.E. Ladd asserts, “The Bible is the Word of God written in the words of men [and women] in history.”³ In this way, we should not be surprised to find in the Bible the ideas of ancient humans.

Similarly, John Walton states, “The Bible is written for us . . . it is not written to us.”⁴ In other words, Scripture is for everyone in every generation. However, the Bible was written to ancient humans and not to our modern scientific generation. With this being the case, we should expect the Word of God to include some ancient ideas that ancient people would have used and understood.

The Bible & Ancient Science

One of the best places to examine some of the ancient ideas in the Bible is to consider passages that deal with the natural world. As this diagram reveals, Scripture features a 3-tier universe (Figure 1). This was the science-of-the-day in the ancient Near East. Or stated more precisely, it is an ancient science.

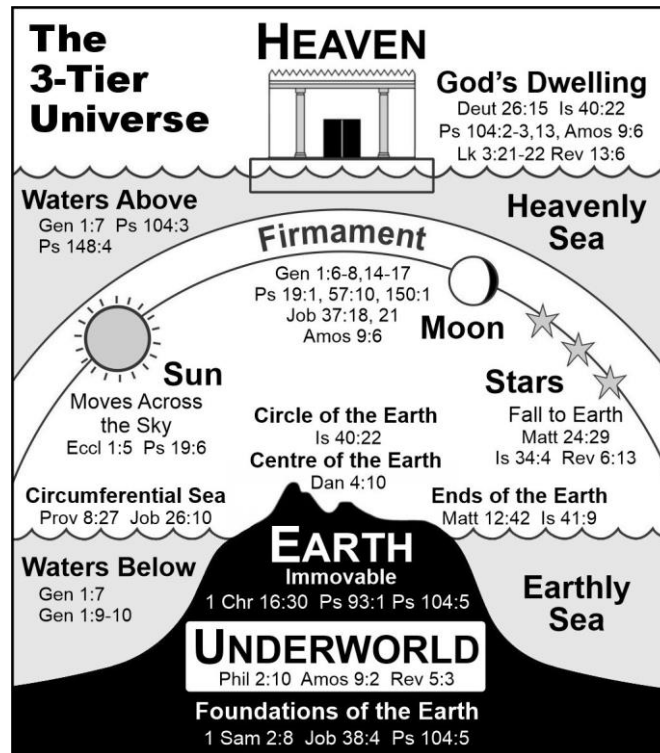


Figure 1. The 3-Tier Universe

This ancient understanding of the structure of the world appears in the first chapter of the Bible on the second day of creation. Genesis 1:6–8 states that God created the firmament to separate the “waters above” (the heavenly sea) from the “waters below” (the earthly sea). The Hebrew word that is translated as “firmament” is the noun *raqia*‘. It refers to a hard and solid structure. Viewing the sky through the naked eyes of ancient humans, it was reasonable for them to think there was a blue sea overhead that was held up by a firm dome. This was the astronomy-of-the-day, an ancient astronomy.

On the fourth day of creation, God places the sun, moon, and stars in the dome of the firmament. Indeed, it looks as though these heavenly bodies are right in front of the firmament and the blue heavenly sea. To use a technical term, this understanding of the heavens is based on an ancient phenomenological perspective. The Greek verb *phainomai* means “to appear.”

To complete the diagram, the earth is like an island surrounded by water. Why did people in the ancient Near East believe this? Think about the regional geography. As this diagram reveals, they were surrounded by a lot of water (Figure 2).

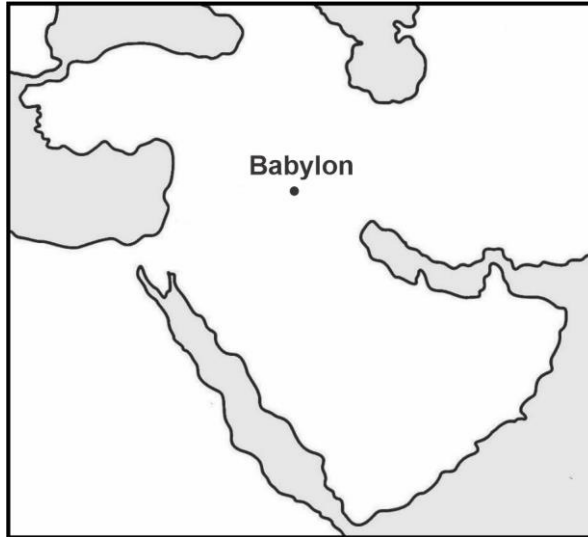


Figure 2. Ancient Near Eastern Geography

To assume there was a circumferential sea that bordered the earth was the geography-of-the-day. In fact, this ancient understanding appears in the Babylonian World Map from the 6th century BC (Figure 3).⁵

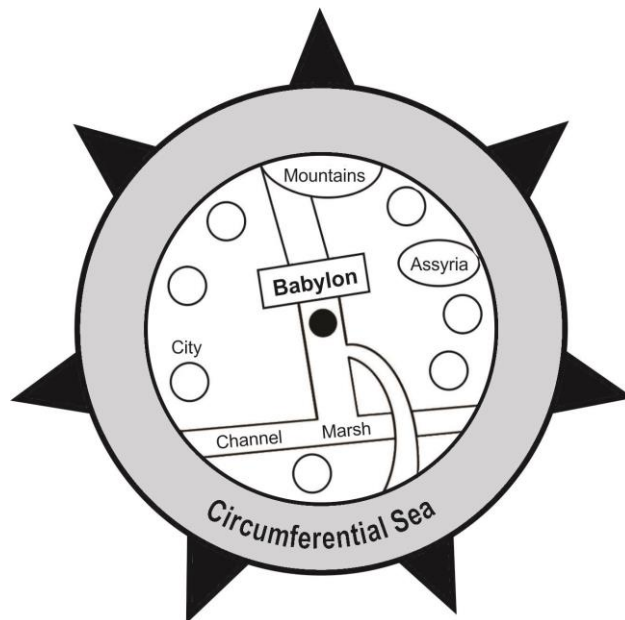


Figure 3. Babylonian World Map

It is clear the Bible has an ancient astronomy and an ancient geography. Of course, many Christians are quite troubled by the idea of ancient science in Holy Scripture. They are quick to complain, "Did God lie in the Bible?" But Titus 1:2 states

that God “does not lie,” and Hebrews 6:18 asserts that “it is impossible for God to lie.” Lying requires deception and the God of the Bible is certainly *not* deceptive. Yet is there a faithful and reasonable way to deal with the ancient science in the Word of God?

In my opinion, the well-known idea of biblical accommodation offers a helpful insight. This is the belief that the Holy Spirit descended to the level of ancient humans and used their ideas, like ancient science, in order to reveal as effectively as possible inerrant messages of faith in Scripture.

The notion of divine accommodation is part of the Christian tradition. The best example is the Incarnation. God descended and became a man in the person of Jesus. Similarly, the parables are earthly human stories that the Lord made-up with heavenly divine meanings. And of course, every Christian knows that God accommodates and comes down to our human level to speak to us in prayer.

Let me offer an interpretive principle for biblical statements about nature. The Message-Incident Principle asserts that first and foremost God reveals inerrant spiritual truths (Figure 4). To do so, the Holy Spirit accommodated and used an incidental ancient science as a vessel to deliver these life-changing messages of faith.



Figure 4. The Message-Incident Principle

Though the ancient vessel is important for transporting these eternal truths, it is not the essence of the message. The ancient understanding of nature is incidental, meaning that it occurs alongside the more important spiritual truths. And I would suggest that we need to separate these inerrant faith messages from the ancient science, and not conflate these two components in Scripture together.

Let's apply the Message-Incident Principle to Genesis 1. The main spiritual truths include: God is the Creator of the world, humans are created in the Image of God, and the creation is very good. To deliver these inerrant messages, the Holy Spirit allowed the inspired author to use ancient astronomy and ancient geography as a vehicle or platform. And again, separate the spiritual truths from the ancient science and don't conflate them together.

OK, here is the point in this paper where it gets quite challenging. Since the Bible has an ancient astronomy and an ancient geography, it is only consistent that Scripture also has an ancient biology.

From their ancient phenomenological perspective, ancient people believed that living creatures were immutable. That is, plants and animals never change (or evolve) into different creatures. For example, they only saw that a goat births a goat, which births a goat, etc. Through this experience, they reasonably assumed that goats are immutable. The notion of immutability is an ancient biology, or more specifically, an ancient taxonomy.

This ancient idea of the immutability of living creatures clearly appears in Genesis 1 with the reproduction of plants and animals "according to their kinds," as stated ten times.

Now, there is a very significant implication or inference regarding this ancient biological concept. To use a technical term, a corollary of immutability is that plants and animals were first created fully developed. Stated another way, built into the very definition or concept of immutability is the idea that living creatures were first made as they appear today. As just noted, ancient people never saw them change (or evolve) into different creatures. To use the example of goats, when the first goats were created, they were made *de novo*.

De novo creation refers to the quick and complete creation of living creatures. In this way, plants and animals were first made fully formed. This was the origins science-of-the-day that is found in most ancient creation accounts, and it appears clearly with the creation of living creatures in Genesis 1 and 2.

I need to introduce another term to further explain the concept of *de novo* creation. Retrojection refers to taking present experience and casting or reversing it back

in time to explain and reconstruct the past. An excellent example of retrojection is Crime Scene Investigation (CSI). Police gather physical evidence and cast it back in time to reconstruct the events of the crime.

Ancient people did a similar mental operation to understand the origin of living creatures. To use again goats. The ancients would have known that a goat today came from an earlier goat, which came from an even earlier goat, etc. They then took this series of 'a goat births a goat' and retrojected it back to the beginning of creation to reconstruct the events in the origin of goats. Ancient people came to the logical conclusion that the 1st goats were created *de novo*.

I am certain that you know exactly where I am going with this line of argumentation. People in ancient times saw with their own eyes that humans were immutable. In attempting to understand the origin of humans, ancient people retrojected the series of 'a human births a human' and came to the perfectly reasonable conclusion that men and women were first created fully developed. Stated another way, the corollary of human immutability is that the first humans were created *de novo*.

So, who was Adam? Adam is an ancient explanation of human origins that is based on an ancient biology; more specifically, the ancient taxonomical idea that humans are immutable. Adam's existence is based on the retrojection of seeing and experiencing that a human only births a human. Adam is an ancient attempt to reconstruct the scene when God created the first humans.

And the implication of this ancient conceptualization of human origins is quite significant for Christian theology. To be explicit and incisive, **Adam Never Existed**.

Of course, Christians are quick to respond to this shocking idea. They usually appeal to the apostle Paul. By using a Conferment Argument, they claim that Paul believed Adam existed, and therefore, Adam really existed. In other words, Paul confers or bestows historicity to Adam. And I will be the first to say, that yes indeed, Paul did accept a historical Adam.

However, what else did Paul believe? The marvellous Kenotic Hymn in Philippians 2 reveals the miraculous gift of God descending and accommodating to become a human in the person of Jesus Christ. Verses 10 and 11 assert that every knee shall bow and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord "[1] in heaven [2] on earth, and [3]

in the underworld.” Notably, modern evangelical Bibles often translate the last phrase as “under the earth.” But the Greek noun *katachthonios* means “the underworld.”

Therefore, I believe a Consistency Argument is a better approach to Paul’s view of Adam. Since Paul accepted an ancient astronomy and an ancient geography, it is only consistent that he also accepted an ancient biology and the *de novo* creation of Adam.

The well-known passages by the apostle Paul that deal with Adam are Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, and these can be viewed through the Message-Incident Principle (Figure 5). Most importantly, these biblical chapters reveal the inerrant spiritual truths that all humans are sinful, and that God judges us for our sins. The Gospel also appears in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15—Jesus died for sinful humans, rose physically from the dead, and offers us the hope of eternal life.

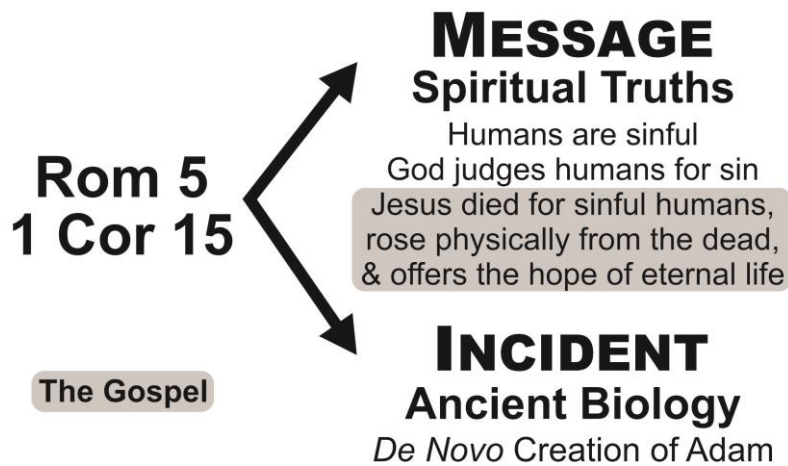


Figure 5. The Apostle Paul & the Message-Incident Principle

In order to reveal these messages of faith to ancient people in the first century, the Holy Spirit accommodated and allowed the apostle Paul to use the ancient biological notion of the *de novo* creation of Adam as a vessel to transport these life-changing eternal truths. And to use my mantra, we need to separate these messages of faith from the incidental ancient biology, and not conflate them together.

And let me add a second Consistency Argument. The Bible has an ancient understanding of the origin of life, and consistency argues it also has an ancient understanding of the origin of death. Stated another way, a corollary of the *de novo* creation of humans is that death can only happen after they have been made quickly and

fully formed. Therefore, Christians should not use the Bible to discover the origins of physical life or physical death.

Literary Genre of Genesis 2–4

There is another way to understand Adam in Scripture. Instead of focussing on the ancient science in the Bible, we can examine the literary genre of Genesis 2–4 where Adam appears prominently. There is clear symbolism, archetypes, and wordplay in these chapters that offer clues to the type of literature employed by the Holy Spirit-inspired author:

- a garden paradise in a symbolic land named “Delight” (Hebrew: *eden*)
- an archetypal 1st man (*adam*) made of earth (*adamah*)
- an archetypal 1st woman named “Life” (*hawwah*) the mother of all the living. This name is related to *hayah*, the verb “to be”
- a symbolic tree with fruit imparting knowledge of good and evil
- a symbolic tree with fruit imparting eternal life
- an archetypal tempter—a talking snake who instills doubt in the Words of God
- cherubim (mystical creatures with a human head, lion body and eagle wings. Figure 6)⁶
- a symbolic flaming sword moving back and forth
- an archetypal murderer named “Spear” (*qayin*) condemned to tremble (*nua*) and wander (*nud*) in a symbolic land named “Wandering” (*nod*)



Figure 6. A Cherub

Together, these symbols, archetypes, and wordplay point away from Genesis 2–4 being a historical account. They are characteristic of a made-up story, or a parable-like story. And we need to remember that about one third of Jesus’s teachings were parables. These are fictitious stories that the Lord made-up to deliver inerrant spiritual truths. The events in parables never happened.

For example, the marvellous Parable of the Good Samaritan has inspired the legal community to formulate Good Samaritan Laws. However, there never was a good Samaritan who had assisted a badly beaten-up man. This parable never happened because it is a fictional story. Similarly, the wonderful Parable of the Prodigal Son is my personal story. But this rebellious son who eventually came to his senses and acknowledged his sin never existed. This parable never happened. It is a fictitious story that Jesus made-up. The parables of the Lord are *proof* that God uses fictional stories in the Bible.

In the light of the made-up stories in the parables of Jesus, and the symbolism, archetypes, and wordplay in Genesis 2-4 listed above, there is a very significant conclusion that can be drawn: **the story about Adam in Genesis 2–4 never happened.**

To be sure, this conclusion shocks most Christians. Part of the reason is that there is a problem with modern readers. Our scientific and historical literature deals only with hard facts. Made-up stories like parables are never included in these accounts. For example, in my dozen scientific publications with my paleontology colleagues on dental evolution and development, we have never put in parable-like stories, or our religious or philosophical beliefs.

So, when we read Genesis 2–4, we automatically (or better, unwittingly) historicize the made-up story. This is simply how we normally read accounts of origins. And for evangelical Christians, this reading tendency is also fuelled by scientific concordism that is deeply embedded in our tradition. As a result, we transform the Fictional Adam of the parable-like story in Genesis 2–4 into a Historical Adam.

To move beyond this common interpretive approach, let me suggest that we don’t conflate, but separate the inerrant spiritual truths from the incidental parable-like story in Genesis 2–4 and the Fictional Adam. In this way, the main message of faith is that we are like Adam and Eve—we don’t listen to God, and we even try to rationalize our sin by blaming other people. In Genesis 3, Eve blamed the snake for her sin. Adam blamed Eve

for his sin, and even subtly blamed the Lord for putting Eve in the garden with him! This parable-like story reveals who we are—we are all sinners who don't listen to God.

Christian Views on Human Evolution

If the Bible includes an ancient understanding of human origins, and Genesis 2–4 is a non-historical parable-like story, then concordist interpretations of the biblical creation accounts will inevitably fail. This opens the way for Christians to consider the possibility that the Lord created men and women through an evolutionary process.

To explain this approach, I begin with my two non-negotiable beliefs: First, human evolution is teleological. That is, the Creator planned evolution, and evolution is purposeful. As an evolutionary creationist, I believe that God ordained human evolution, that he sustained this natural process through millions of years, and that this creative method was intelligently designed by him (Figure 7).

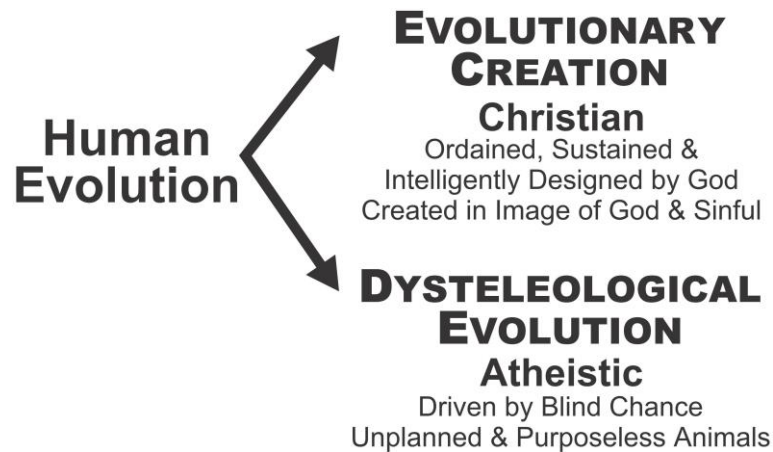


Figure 7. Human Evolution. Contrasting Evolutionary Creation and Dysteleological Evolution

This is in sharp contrast to atheism's dysteleological evolution, which believes that evolution is driven by blind chance and that humans are nothing but unplanned and purposeless animals. I absolutely reject and despise this interpretation of evolution.

My second non-negotiable belief is that *only* humans are created in the Image of God and that *only* humans are sinful. To explain my position, I first need to deal with a common misconception: WE DO NOT EVOLVE FROM MONKEYS OR CHIMPANZEES! Instead, we share with chimpanzees a last common ancestral

population that lived about 6 million years ago (Figure 8). With only about a 1% genetic difference, chimps are our closest evolutionary cousins. Along the line of evolution to humans, there are over 8000 pre-human fossil individuals. About 200,000 years ago, Anatomically Modern Humans arose. They were physically similar to us, but they did not act like us.

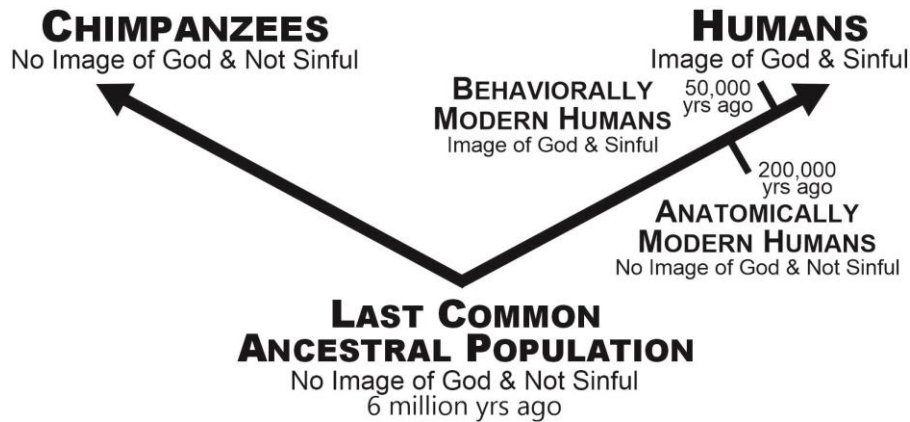


Figure 8. Evolutionary Relationships between Humans, Chimpanzees, and the Last Common Ancestral Population

Roughly 50,000 years ago, Behaviorally Modern Humans (BMH) evolved on earth. They behaved like us and left archeological evidence such as specialized tools for hunting and fishing and various forms of art. Notably, they buried their dead with items that were assumed to be needed in the next life. In other words, these humans had religious beliefs. It is for this reason that I suspect the Image of God and human sinfulness were manifested at this time. Behaviorally Modern Humans were fully human.

There are two analogies between developmental biology and evolutionary biology that help to appreciate the possibility of God creating humans through evolution.

First, every Christian knows that God created each of us through His developmental processes in our mother’s womb (Ps. 139:13–14). No one believes He intervenes miraculously to attach a leg or arm to our developing body. This is *proof* that God uses natural processes to create life. Similarly, it is possible that God created all living creatures, including humans, through His evolutionary processes.

Second, Christians believe that the Image of God and human sin were manifested

during our development. Similarly, it is possible that the Image of God and human sin arose during the evolution of the 1st Behaviourally Modern Humans. Of course, the question arises how and when did these human spiritual realities first appear?

In attempting to answer this question, let's return to human development to draw some insights (Figure 9). Did the Image of God and human sin appear with a punctiliar event at a sharp point in time, such as fertilization? 2-cell stage? The first heartbeat? Or the beginning of brain activity? Or were these human spiritual realities manifested over time gradually and mysteriously?

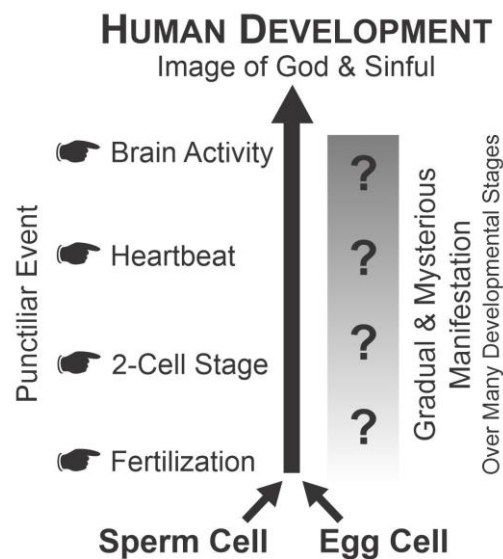


Figure 9. Manifestation of Spiritual Realities during Human Development

Please note that I am using the term “mysteriously” in a theological way to suggest that the Lord has put limits on our creaturely ability to know. For example, we will never fully understand the Holy Trinity or the Incarnation. I believe this is also the case with the manifestation of the Image of God and human sinfulness during our biological development.

This example of the appearance of human spiritual realities during development can be applied to the origin of Behaviorally Modern Humans about 50,000 years ago. There are three basic options, and it is possible to combine and modify these options (Figure 10).

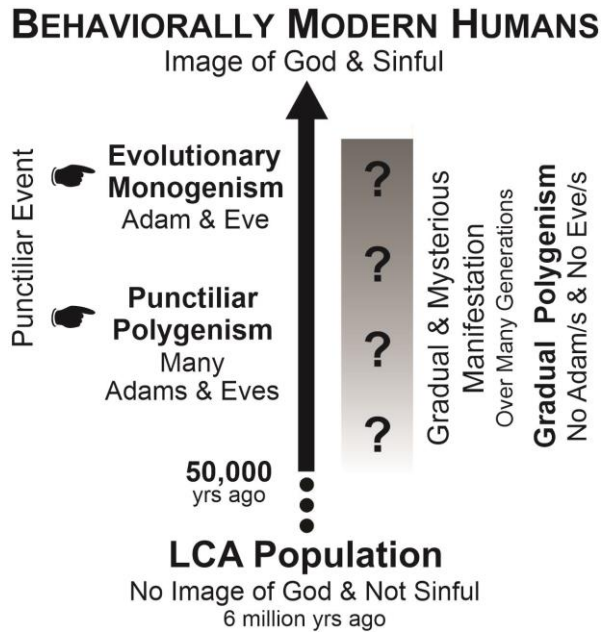


Figure 10. Manifestation of Spiritual Realities during Human Evolution

First, Evolutionary Monogenism (Greek *monos*: one, single; *genesis*: beginning) believes that one male and one female were taken from the population of pre-humans and given the Image of God and moral accountability through a punctiliar event at one sharp point in time. But these first two humans soon fell into sin. This option asserts Adam and Eve appeared at the end of evolution.

Second, Punctiliar Polygenism (Greek *polus*: many) states that many males and females were separated from the pre-human population and quickly given spiritual realities to make them fully human. This first group of people also sinned soon afterwards. This view of human origins contends that the human evolutionary process terminated with many Adams and Eves.

Finally, Gradual Polygenism claims there is no Adam and Eve, or no Adams and Eves. This position rejects scientific concordism. The Bible is not a book of science that reveals the origin of humans. Gradual Polygenism believes that the Image of God and human sin were gradually and mysteriously manifested over many generations. This is my view of human origins.

Conclusions

Let me now close with some conclusions. First, scientific concordism inevitably

fails. The Word of God features an ancient understanding of nature, and therefore, it is impossible to align ancient science with modern science. Therefore, the Bible cannot be used like a book of science.

Second, the Christian Tradition conflates Adam and Spiritual Truths, giving an ancient science, the *de novo* creation of humans, the status of inerrancy. Obviously, the ancient science of the 3-tier universe in Scripture is not inerrant. And neither is the *de novo* creation of living creatures, including humans.

Third, the Christian Tradition historicizes the parable-like story in Genesis 2–4, transforming the Fictional Adam into the Historical Adam. But made-up stories cannot be turned into accounts with real historical people and events.

Fourth, sin entered the world, but not through Adam, because Adam never existed. Instead, sin entered the world through the first Behaviourally Modern Humans.

Fifth, sin is real, and we are ALL sinners in need of a Savior.

Finally, and most importantly, our Savior is the Lord Jesus Christ who willingly died on The Cross for our sins. Amen!

Thank you for your attention.⁷

¹ For an excellent introduction to the historicity of the Old Testament, see William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

² For an excellent introduction to the historicity of the New Testament, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

³ George Eldon Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 12.

⁴ John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 19.

⁵ Wayne Horowitz, *Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 21-42.

⁶ Artwork by Rebecca Burlet. Copied with permission.

⁷ I thank Dustin Burlet for his insights in the preparation of this paper.