

Historical Adam

A winter landscape with snow-covered ground and bare trees under a clear blue sky. Long shadows are cast across the snow.

Ordained Servant

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January 2023

From the Editor

The Committee on Christian Education has initiated a new program to help encourage, inform, and equip ruling elders for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Ruling Elder Podcast will publish its first podcast on January 15, 2023, in which Stephen Tracey interviews committee president Rev. Craig Troxel. The location of the link will be announced prior to the launch. Here is the new page <https://repod.opc.org>. It will be populated with the first episode on January 15.

This month we tackle a subject that is controversial in some Christian circles: the historicity of Adam. Professor of biology at Grove City College, Jan Dudd, explores this topic in his thoughtful article “Adam, Modern Anthropological Science, and Faith.” His review article “An Attempt at Reconciling Paleoanthropology and Scripture” reviews *In Quest of the Historic Adam* by William Lane Craig. Dudd teaches a required course called “Studies in Science, Faith, and Technology” and the course “Evolutionary Biology” as well as other biology courses.

We begin a new series “Letters to a Younger Ruling Elder” written by an experienced ruling elder who has some sage advice for those who are relatively new to the ruling office. His first offering is “The Danger of Pride.”

Alan Strange continues his “Commentary on the Book of Discipline of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church” with chapter 3.4–6. He makes the very important point in chapter 3 that Matthew 18 is only meant to describe discipline between equals, not normally when a Christian has a grievance against a church officer.

Alan Strange also reviews two books in his review article “What Is the Primary Mission of the Church?” reviewing *The Primary Mission of the Church: Engaging or Transforming the World?* by Bryan D. Estelle, and *Letter to the American Church* by Eric Metaxas. Strange compares the two books to the traditional doctrine of the spirituality of the church in a thoughtful assessment, demonstrating that Estelle takes that more biblical approach. He concludes, “Estelle is right about the primary mission of the church, and Metaxas is wrong in promoting the further politicization of the church.”

Christopher Chelpka reviews *The Unfolding Word: The Story of the Bible from Creation to New Creation* by Zach Keele. In the biblical theological tradition of Meredith G. Kline and Geerhardus Vos, Keele “keeps in mind the unity of the picture in Christ and shows how the parts fit into the whole of God’s unfolding Word.” Chelpka concludes, “It is an introduction to the Bible for those who are familiar with its contents but are ready to go beyond the general and learn to see more detail.”

The poem this month “Adam’s Silence” is by our own Mark Green, poet and president and CEO of Sola Media. Green reflects on the historical fall of Adam in Genesis 3:20.

The cover photo is a late light photo on a clear cold day on cross country skis on Derryfield Country Club's golf course in Manchester, New Hampshire.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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FROM THE ARCHIVES "SCIENCE AND FAITH"

http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-30.pdf

- "Preachers in Lab Coats and Scientists in Geneva Gowns." (Bryan D. Estelle) 19 (2010): 67–71.

Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

Servant Announcement

The Ruling Elder Podcast Is Here

In the first episode of the Ruling Elder Podcast, produced by the Committee on Christian Education, Stephen Tracey interviews committee president Rev. Craig Troxel. Ministers and Deacons are well served: ministers have ample conferences and resources, and Deacons have a great National Summit, so Troxel wanted to do something more to encourage Ruling Elders.

At the beginning of the interview Troxel asks, “What word occurs more often in Scripture, Pastor or Elder?” He goes on to share how helpful ruling elders have been to him, and how the committee hopes to continue to encourage ruling elders in their work for the Lord Jesus. We hope you enjoy this first episode, available on January 15. If you have ideas for an episode, please let us know by emailing Stephen Tracey at tracey.1@opc.org.

The Podcast Team,

Gregory Reynolds, Mike Shields, Danny Olinger, Stephen Tracey, and the technical expertise of Abby Harting)

Servant Truth

Adam, Modern Anthropological Science and Faith

By Jan Frederic Dudt

Scientific research continues to mount strong evidence against the idea that a single couple, such as Adam and Eve, could ever have been the ancestors of the entire human race. The evidence is profound and comes from a number of disciplines including paleoanthropology, anatomy, and modern genetics. For example, the bones of various species of extinct upright walking primates have been discovered and classified. The techniques used to reconstruct and categorize these specimens are similar to those associated with crime scene investigations. Data from these techniques, while not infallible, are considered valid. The data from the bones indicate that *Ardipithecus* (4 million years ago) and the australopithecines, like the Lucy skeleton, (two to three million years ago) walked upright but were rather ape like in facial and cranial shape. The remains of others such as *Homo ergaster* (two million years ago) and *Homo erectus* (two million to at least half a million years ago) were associated with simple, hand-worked, stone tools. The bones of these *Homo* species looked surprisingly human from the neck down. Their faces and skulls were primitive compared to modern humans. Their brain cases were intermediate between the earlier upright walkers (450cc) and those of modern humans (1300cc).

Complicating the story is the strong evidence that some humanlike species were contemporary with early modern humans, *Homo sapiens*. Many of us are aware of the curious findings associated with the Neanderthals, Denisovans, the red deer people, and the dwarfed Hobbit men. Enough DNA has been salvaged from the bones of the Neanderthal and Denisovans to make whole genome comparisons with modern humans. Genomic studies have led to the growing belief that both of these extinct forms produced a limited number of offspring with their modern human contemporaries about 50,000 years ago.

It is difficult to determine the relationship of these upright walkers to that of divine, image-bearing, modern humans. Reconciling the anthropological science (the interpretation of natural revelation) and theology (the interpretation of Scripture) is the challenge. Some, in order to accommodate the science, allegorize Adam, claiming that he is a figurative representative of humanity, not a historic individual. In other words, Genesis 1–3 is literary myth in the best sense of the term, conveying truth without having real characters doing things in real time. One Christian author draws the comparison of humans and baseball. Just as there was never a first baseball game, there was never a first human. Both have evolved.

However, this approach has significant pitfalls. The rejection of a historic Adam typically calls for departure from a number of traditional Christian doctrines. 1) The historic doctrine of original sin is recast into a story about every human's condition. Romans 7:24 "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" is altered so that "this body of death" refers to my base instincts (those vestiges of humanity's evolutionary past). 2) The doctrine of the atonement (Christ's death as payment for the sins of many) is recast as

Christ's defeat of sin through his conquest of his own base instincts. He is our example. And, 3) the development of a neo-Pelagian theology, replacing Augustinian sovereign grace, that sees each of us having our own fall from our state of innocence in the struggle to be faithful image bearers.

The concept of Christ as "a ransom for many" (Christ's words in Matt. 20:28) and the ideas of redemption and renewal suggest buying back and restoring to an original state. If sin is simply a struggle with the instincts and vestiges inherited from an earlier biological stage, then the idea of ransom, redemption, and renewal are not meaningful. Also, the rejection of a historic Adam leads to depersonalizing the direct confrontation between Satan and Adam, and by extension, depersonalizes the conflict between Satan and Christ. From Scripture we know that Christ, the human, was not being tempted by his evolutionary past. He was being confronted by the same tempter that confronted Adam. Satan, at it again, tried to derail God's plan for defeating Satan. The thing to remember is that Satan's attempt to derail the first Adam as redeemer or preemptor of Satanic expansion (Satan rebelled before the human fall) largely succeeded. However, Satan utterly failed in his confrontation with the last Adam.

The Genesis account could have delivered a story consistent with the notion of the fall as every unfallen individual's internal struggle. Instead, Genesis 3 describes a fall from a paradise of moral innocence by one person, Adam, with implications for the rest of humanity. If one allegorizes the Adam and Eve story (Gen. 1–3), reducing it to a mythic narrative full of "truth" without real historic content, Paul's New Testament references to the first Adam and the last Adam (Rom. 5; 1 Cor. 15) become a reflection of his Hebrew education and not a comment on real history. At that point, Paul's Christology can be called into question along with the entire redemptive picture as understood by historic orthodox Christianity.

The allegorists may have a point. The language of the Genesis account of the creation of humans and the subsequent fall does ring with allegory, or at least symbolism. Consider a crafty talking snake, a tree of life that shows up in Revelation 22, and a tree of the knowledge of good and evil, eating its fruit is an act of death-earning disobedience. The story has the flavor of fantastic myth constructed to teach valuable lessons, without the stories having actually occurred. However, allegorists seem to forget that allegory, symbolism, and history can go together. Consider Revelation 12. The woman clothed with the sun and moon, with twelve stars in her crown is about to deliver. The dragon (serpent), whose tail swept out a third of the stars of heaven, waits to devour the new born. The child is caught up to God's throne, and the woman fled to the wilderness to a divinely prepared place. The story, in part, is a symbolic version of the Matthew 2 account of actual space/time history that involved Herod's hunt for the Christ child and Joseph and Mary's flight with the baby to Egypt. The protagonist is not a real dragon. The woman does not actually have a crown with ten stars. What Christian familiar with Matthew 2 would not recognize parallels between the two stories? The dragon symbolizing Satan, the pregnant woman representing Mary and the unborn Jesus. The conflict between ultimate good and evil is apparent. However, the Revelation 12 story, like the Matthew 2 version of the story, describes real characters and real events. The Revelation 12 account is a literary story that more clearly describes the behind-the-scenes struggle between spiritual forces. Again, the characters in both of the stories are real.

The Genesis 3 account of the fall makes sense if it is seen in a similarly symbolic way involving real characters and real events. The symbolic nature of the story is undeniable, a

talking snake and trees of unknown taxonomy. However, to say that the characters and events are only allegorical or mythic flies in the face of the rest of Scripture. The rest of Scripture assumes real characters and real events. Genesis 3 can be seen as a similar narrative style to Revelation 12 without having a corresponding Matthew 2 type parallel account.

Where does this leave Adam? The situation in some measure is unresolved, especially for old earth creationists, people like Charles Hodge, B.B. Warfield, J. Gresham Machen, E.J. Young, and Francis Schaeffer. When did God first create Adam as an image bearer of God? What process did God use to create him from the dust? How long was Adam alone without a mate? Were Adam and Eve recognizably modern humans? Can the information that science gives us regarding early up-right walkers be reconciled with the Scripture? The answers to these questions may require us to live by faith, with the science in some tension. We cannot deny the data. However, science cannot be the arbiter of truth concerning certain Christian doctrines. For example, science is unable to confirm *ex nihilo* creation, the virgin birth, the resurrection, and miracles in general, things that we knew and accept by the testimony of Scripture. It seems that the Adam issue is similar. Perhaps the best science can do for the historical Adam is to inform us of normal natural processes and enable us to more clearly understand when divine intervention is a departure from natural events. For example, even if the human body of Adam was created through some God guided natural process (all natural processes are so guided), it is apparent from the narrative that the immaterial soul of Adam was not of the dust as his body was. A divine interventional miracle was the means of the creation of the immaterial soul. Again, if this special creation of Adam and Eve did not happen the Creator would have said, "Let the *earth* bring forth man in our image" instead of saying, "Let *us* make man in *our image*" (Gen. 1:26, emphasis added)? If we believe in the divine inspiration of Scripture, then we must admit that the narrative indicating special creation means just that.

We thank the Lord for special revelation to give us information we could not have discovered by studying nature. Seeing Adam as a special creation is secured by special revelation. For example, God has the earth bringing forth plants and animals on day 3 and 6 respectively. On Day 6 God could have said, "let the earth bring forth man in our image." Instead, he says, "let us make man in our image." Apparently, the mode of creating humans is different from the other organisms. It involves both material (dust) and intervention ("in our image"). This does not eliminate the possibility of some kind of process in creating humans, but it does indicate that something quite special is going on. Notice in parallel that Christ, the last Adam, in his humanity is both the result of material process (sharing humanity's identity through Mary) and intervention (How did he get his Y chromosome?). Natural revelation combined with special revelation are telling us that the parallels between the first Adam and the last Adam may be more profound than we have previously thought.

So is Adam the lone first image-bearing human as traditionally believed? Or as some now suggest, is he representative of all humans before and after him, just as Christ the redeemer is representative of those redeemed living before and after his earthly ministry? Difficulties are created by taking either tack. Certainly, serious theological issues are created if we say that the Adam in Genesis 3 is only allegorical or mythic. Consequently, reading Scripture in an unwise allegorical manner to make it comport with mainstream materialistic science seems like a new syncretism and an abuse of natural revelation.

There is a tendency among some Christians in the modern context to over-accommodate the claims of mainstream materialistic science. Natural revelation as interpreted by science

does present some challenges for us, but we have been down that road before. The departure from geocentrism is a case in point. However, the shift to heliocentrism did not present the theological crisis that was initially feared in the sixteenth century. Another example might be the issue of whether or not there was any death before the fall. Special revelation certainly indicates that there was not death for humans before the fall. Some have assumed by extension that nothing died before the fall. However, this would stretch credulity if modern ecology has revealed something right about nature. It would be hard to conceive, even in a garden of Paradise, that no insects were inadvertently stepped on by large creatures, that no plants died, or that no bacteria were killed on the ground by being left high and dry. Ecology has shown us that the cycles of death and renewal are part of a healthy functioning ecosystem. Moving theologically from no death in the garden to ecological balance does not really cost us much. The historic Adam issue is much more critical. The theological consequences of rejecting a historical Adam are devastating as evidenced by those who hold to that position. As we keep trying to get natural revelation right, our interpretation of science will likely be wrong about some of the details. However, it will be a lot easier to correct that than to rewrite the errors of bad theology.

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Servant Work

The Danger of Pride

Letters to a Younger Ruling Elder, No. 1

By an Older Elder

Dear James,

Thank you. Your words warmed the heart of an old man. I heard about your ordination and was just speaking with the Lord about you this morning. I wondered how you were doing in this new calling to serve him as a ruling elder. You can imagine my surprise when your letter came today requesting some advice. God's timing is always just right, isn't it? Of course, I am delighted to share anything the Lord has taught me over the years. I wish I had learned more by advice and less by mistake! It is a good thing to ask for some help (Prov. 24:6). Just bear in mind that giving good counsel can be hard. Even older men like me must be cautious here, lest we become like one who "darkens counsel by words without knowledge" (Job 38:2). Weigh my words by Holy Scripture. One thing we know for sure—that is, "the counsel of the Lord stands forever" (Ps. 33:11).

No doubt you grasp the weight of this calling to serve as a ruling elder in Christ's church. You are a soul-watcher now. And you will, one day, give an account of your watching (Heb. 13:17).

Soon enough, if not already, you will come to feel what Paul expressed when he wrote "we were burdened above measure, above strength" (2 Cor. 1:8). And this is uniquely so for those called to serve as ruling elders. You have already, as I understand from your letter, an earthly calling of significant responsibility. You also have a family. Now you are an elder. But I trust you will learn by experience just how strong our Lord is. He gives power to the weak (Isa. 40:29), which you will surely see.

Onto some advice. I think I will begin, if you do not mind, with an important caution. I do not know that you need it personally. But sooner or later it becomes a snare to many. I am talking about your heart. *The greatest danger of the eldership is an elevated heart.* Remember that. Nothing will ruin a man's work so much as a proud spirit. It is vital you know this. Whole churches have been destroyed by nothing more than the haughty heart of a ruling elder. Pride is a potent poison. The fiery dart of pride is Satan's favorite weapon. "Pride goes before destruction" (Prov. 16:18) is a rule that has sadly been proven time and again. A false teacher is bad. A proud elder is worse. Heresy has slain her thousands. Pride her ten thousands. There is no damage like the damage done by an arrogant elder.

In Romans, Paul's warning against pride is nearly the first thing he mentions when he goes from doctrine to practice. He explains the gospel. He shows our helplessness and need. He points to God's righteousness in Christ. He teaches us the meaning of sovereign grace. Oh, the wonders of His love! So how should we now live? What must this Christian now do? Here is where he starts, that man is "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think" (Rom. 12:3). If this is true of every Christian, it is more so for us elders. Beware of pride.

I would also have you carefully weigh the warning of Proverbs 26:12: "Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him." The fool is a bad man. He is a godless man. "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Ps. 14:1). But the proud man is a worse man. Pride makes us worse than atheists. An atheist thinks there is no God, but the proud man thinks he is God. That is worse. Mark this, a proud elder is worse than a godless one. A proud elder will share in Satan's fate, "he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:6). Remember, my dear brother, a proud elder is an ordained demon.

Having said all of that, our greatest need in this office of ruling elder is, by God's grace and means, to cultivate a humble heart. Let that, my dear, precious brother, be your great aim. Keep your heart with diligence (Prov. 4:23). Jonathan Edwards called pride "the worst viper in the human heart." Well, I have given you enough to think about for now. Feel free to write again should you want to discuss this topic, or maybe another, at greater length.

Your soul's well-wisher,

An older elder

Servant Standards

Commentary on the Book of Discipline of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chapter 3.4–6

by Alan D. Strange

4. Offenses are either public or private. Public offenses are those which are commonly known. Private offenses are those which are known to an individual only, or, at most, to a very few individuals. Private offenses may or may not be personal, a personal private offense being one which involves injury to the person bringing the charge.

Comment: An offense, as seen in 3 (above), must be properly established as something that, if proven true, would be a violation of God’s Word, the secondary standards of the church, and of a serious character (to warrant a trial). Now BD 3.4 notes that offenses established to be of that sort—the kind that this chapter regards as properly chargeable and triable (most offenses, being more minor, are to be covered and/or simply forgiven, cf. 1 Pet. 4:8; Mark 11:25)—are either public or private; furthermore, it seeks to define those two adjectives that modify offenses. While it may seem common sense to say that a public offense is widely known and a private offense is known only to or by one or two, the careful definitions given here are more helpful than that, as they give the judicatory the necessary discretion in determining whether the offense is public or private.

Public offenses are those which are commonly known. It is important to note here that something may be commonly known sinfully, i.e., it may have been a private offense that the offended party proclaimed to all about him, making it widely known. This does not make it properly a public offense and may, in fact, make the person or persons who have needlessly made it public liable for charges to be brought against them. Having said that, a public offense proper is ordinarily something committed in the sight of more than one, being known by more than a few. This last observation—more than a few—also highlights that a private offense is not only necessarily restricted to the knowledge of one party but also may be known only to “a few,” which has classically been described in the three to five range.

Furthermore, a private offense, known to one or only a few, also has an additional element: it may be personal or not personal. A personal sin is one committed by a private person (not by someone acting in an authoritative capacity, like an office-bearer) against another person, an equal acting in their private capacity (not a sin by someone in their office-bearing capacity). For instance, this means that a sin of a pastor acting as a pastor against a parishioner, or vice-versa, is not what is in view in Matthew 18, in the first instance. What is in view here is the private act of equals sinning against one another personally and not in some corporate capacity. It should also be noted that a doctrinal sin is not regarded as a personal sin. To speak or teach falsely is a transgression against a holy God but is not a personal sin in the meaning of this passage.

So to sum up all that has been established thus far in BD 3 about Matthew 18: Matthew 18:15–17 has in view, in the first and original instance, a situation in which someone alleges sin against them of another who is their equal; this sin is private, known to them alone, or

only a few, and is also personal, both parties acting in their personal capacities as Christians. Matthew 18, to clear up pervasive misunderstandings of it, is not requiring a parishioner who alleges abuse to go alone to the pastor or the elder and “confront” him about it. Nor does Matthew 18 require “private confrontation” of a wife or a child to an allegedly abusive husband or parent. In such cases, a parishioner alleging abuse may come directly to the session and speak to it about the alleged abuse, as the session has direct oversight of all its members acting in their official capacities of pastor, elder, father, husband, and the like, even as a child may go to a receptive father in the case of the alleged abuse of his mother and is not required, under Matthew 18, to go to his mother privately. The idea here finds an analog in the military chain-of-command: a soldier alleging mistreatment by his sergeant does not go to the general but does go to the most immediate superior to the sergeant to report such.

Matthew 18 describes personal private allegations and not matters that involve officers of family or church in their official capacities. For instance, a parishioner may come to a pastor and say, “May I speak to you as one Christian to another and not as a parishioner to a pastor?” If the pastor says, “No, I am your pastor and must speak to you in that role in this conversation,” that sort of response should make clear that we are not then dealing in a Matthew 18 framework. It is impossible to describe every case here. This treatment is meant to be suggestive and not exhaustive. We want to be sure in all cases never to misuse Matthew 18, and we do when we insist on its usage when inappropriate (plain and simple, a frightened and/or intimidated inferior need not go to an overbearing superior—that is not what this passage describes or requires, and it should not be allowed by responsible parties to be misused in this way).

Matthew 18, then, in the first instance describes the allegation of a personal, private offense, one which involves injury to the person bringing the charge of an offense. Obviously, the one against whom the alleged sin was committed may bring a charge of an offense, or, occasionally, another party (say, one of the two or three witnesses of the second step) may also bring the charge instead, as the situation seems to warrant. In many cases, the judicatory, to whom the charge of a personal, private party is brought in due course (after exhausting steps 1 and 2, going alone and then with two or three witnesses), takes it up and brings the charge itself against the allegedly offending party (BD 3.8).

5. No charge of a personal private offense shall be admitted unless the judicatory has assured itself that the person bringing the charge has faithfully followed the course set forth in Matthew 18:15–17; nor shall a charge of a private offense which is not personal be admitted unless it appears that the plaintiff has first done his utmost privately to restore the alleged offender. However, even in the case of public offenses, it is not wrong to seek reconciliation in terms of Matthew 18:15–17 or Matthew 5:21–26 or Galatians 6:1.

Comment: For extended commentary on the circumstances of Matthew 18:15–17, particularly as applying to equals (and not, in the first instance, to inferiors and superiors), please see my commentary on BD 3.1 and 3.4, above. It should be noted here that nothing in any of these comments should be taken to suggest that Matthew 18:15–17 may not ideally be in view in healthy relationships, even between parties that are not equals. For example, one would expect that in a healthy marriage relationship the wife, though in some sense an inferior to her husband, as defined in WLC 127–128, is also, in another sense, his equal (WLC 131–132), and she should be able to speak to her husband openly and freely about any alleged offenses against her. However, this chapter of the BD, having in view charges and that which is preliminary to a judicial trial, generally has application in cases that are not healthy, e.g., in which the marriage relationship has broken down. That which may

characterize healthy relationships, then, cannot be insisted upon when those very relationships are in breakdown, central to which are often questions involving abuse of authority (WLC 129–130).

This section, BD 3.5, makes clear that anyone who alleges that another has committed against them a personal, private offense should follow the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15–17. Several points concerning this have already been established in the commentary on BD 3 thus far. A personal offense is one alleged to have been committed against the person who brings the allegation and not against another person or persons. A personal offense, in other words, is not an impersonal offense—an impersonal offense may involve an attack on others (i.e., not on oneself) or perhaps a doctrinal offense made by a minister in writing or in some public address, including a sermon. A private offense is one that is known either only by the person against whom the offense was allegedly committed or by a few others. A private offense is not a public offense—a public offense might occur when someone slanders another in a congregational meeting of the church.

These non-private, thus public, cases of alleged offenses do not require the employment of Matthew 18, but, as the last sentence of section 5 notes, it may not be ill-advised to seek reconciliation even of public offenses in terms of Matthew 18 (and other related places in the Bible). An example might be that the one against whom alleged slander occurred in the meeting of a congregation, which is decidedly a public offense, may speak to the offender and seek reconciliation with him, even though the alleged offense was public. Matthew 5:21–26 and Galatians 6:1 are also brought in here as other places that address restoration of alienated or sinning parties. They are generally understood to refer to private, personal sins, but they too, like Matthew 18, may be properly in view even with public sins.

The Matthew 5 passage reminds us that proper self-examination, such as one engages in preparatory to coming to the Lord’s table, might prompt a convicted party to recognize his own sin against another, even a public sin, and move him to seek the other to express sorrow for sin and repentance of the same, leading to reconciliation. Galatians 6 speaks about those who are “spiritual,” i.e., spiritually mature in some measure, who have an eye to their own propensity to sin, gently restoring someone caught in transgression, even applicable in some cases to a public sin. The emphasis here is that a humble, self-aware, ministering spirit is needed in addressing sin and restoring the sinner, even in public sin. Public sin should be handled as kindly and carefully as the situation may warrant, even as with private sin.

Thus, while it is not inappropriate to employ Matthew 18 (and other passages) even in cases of public sin, as noted immediately above, it is necessary that such be employed in cases of personal, private sin for those who wish to deal with their alleged offenders. This means that one may not simply bring a charge against an equal without having first sought to regain that one at the most personal and local levels. One is not simply, as a first step, to “take it to the church” if one alleges that one’s brother has offended personally and privately. One first goes to one’s brother. This does not necessarily mean only one time. One may, in earnestly seeking to win the other, go more than once, if the alleged offender is open to such, and one seeks genuinely to “win him over” by private appeal. In all cases, one must never view the first step as something to be dispensed with as quickly as possible so that the other steps can be brought into view as quickly as possible. Having said that, though, if the offended going to the alleged offender does not yield satisfaction, even at long last, then step two, taking one or two others along in seeking resolution, may be enacted.

Step two, taking another one or two to go with you and speak to the alleged offending party, may also be done more than once, particularly if the alleged offending party is open to multiple visits as part of an effort to persuade. Here some care should be taken in who the

additional witness or two might be. They should not simply be a gang of friends of the offended who accompany him to, as it were, beat up the alleged offender. No, they should be, in keeping with Gal. 6:1, spiritual persons who have good discernment. All things being equal, it seems wise to secure office-bearers, especially ministers or elders, who have been already adjudged as spiritually mature, to help with this.

They need to be parties able to judge and assist in several respects: whether what is being alleged as an offense is truly an offense (i.e., a violation of the Ten Commandments) or just something that the offended party does not like; whether the alleged offending party seems sincerely repentant (perhaps the offended party wants a pound of flesh and refuses to accept evident broken-heartedness on the part of the offender); and other ways in which the “two or three witnesses” may seek to offer assistance in resolving the dispute between the two parties. The important thing here is that even as the first step of Matthew 18:15–17 should not be considered *pro forma* (“we all know that this is going to the session, but we have to go through the motions of the first step of Matthew 18”) so neither should the second step.

All this is to say, then, that personal, private parties at odds with each other must do all within their powers to effect reconciliation in the first and second steps of Matthew 18:15–17 before engaging the third step, which is to bring the matter to the church, i.e., to those who serve as the representatives and governors of the church, the session or the presbytery (as the case may be).¹ Congregationalists may believe that this means that the third step is to bring the matter to the whole church; Presbyterians do not agree with this, believing that the session of the local congregation acts on its behalf in governing the church. When that third step is engaged, however, the session—this is the burden of this section of BD 3—must assure itself that the person bringing the charge of a personal private offense to the session has done everything within his power sincerely and earnestly, not just nominally, to follow Matthew 18:15–17.

Matters in a case ought to be resolved as personally, privately, and locally as possible. Thus, even when a party brings a charge to the session of a private offense that is not personal (i.e., it is not an offense against the person bringing it to the church), the session must assure itself that the party bringing such a charge has done all within his power to restore the alleged offender privately. This is clearly the meaning of “nor shall a charge of a private offense which is not personal be admitted unless it appears that the plaintiff has first done his utmost privately to restore the alleged offender.” So much is it the case that it is worth trying to restore someone privately, not seeking needlessly to shame even someone who may have sinned publicly (as in a doctrinal case or public slander), that the principles of private restoration, present in passages like not only Matthew 18:15–17 but also Matthew 5:21–26 and Galatians 6:1, may be used when appropriate, even in cases of public restoration.

The genius of this whole line of argumentation is that, in those cases for which Matthew 18:15–17 is mandated (private, personal sins among equals), the judicatory must assure itself that every reasonable step has been taken by a person bringing a charge, short of bringing such a charge. In other words, the bringer of a charge to a judicatory must have done his utmost to reconcile with his alleged offender (if it is a proper Matthew 18 case) before he brings a charge to a judicatory and before said judicatory admits any such charge. And even in the cases that are not strictly Matthew 18 ones (the alleged offense is not personal), the

¹ The session has original jurisdiction over all the members of the local congregation (including deacons and ruling elders; BD 2.B); the presbytery has such over all the ministers in the regional church (BD 2.C.). Sometimes in this commentary session is used as the place to which charges are brought; this is true for all those whose membership is in the local church; in the case of ministers, they are brought to the presbytery.

judicatory must still insist on attempts to private restoration, recognizing that if such may even be appropriate in cases involving public sin, it certainly is required in cases of private sin, even when not personal.

6. When a member of the church is about to present a charge, he shall be solemnly warned by the judicatory that he may be censured if the judicatory, after conducting the preliminary investigation defined in this chapter, Section 7, determines that judicial process with respect to such charge may not be instituted. No censure stronger than a rebuke shall be pronounced without a trial.

Comment: This section reflects that in the case of a charge being brought to the judicatory by a “member of the church,” which is to say, by a private party (this does not apply, to be clear, in the case of a judicatory bringing a charge, as described in BD 3.8), such party is to be “solemnly warned” by the judicatory. The warning is to be issued to the bringer of the charge at the point in which he is presenting it to the church (i.e., when it is being received as part of correspondence and judged properly a charge), though it has not yet enjoyed a preliminary investigation. The warning should ordinarily be done with the person being warned personally present unless the party is providentially hindered from being present at the relevant meeting of the judicatory. A judicatory should ordinarily postpone action on receiving a charge if it is not able in some fashion (in person or by some telecommunication means) to bring the warning at this point. It may choose to notify the bringer of the charge of this warning by correspondence, but, in any case, the judicatory should not proceed unless and until it knows that the bringer of the charge has heard this warning and still wishes to proceed with the charge(s). It is crucial that a private party bringing a charge receive the warning at the point of presenting so that he is fully cognizant of what is at stake in bringing a charge to a judicatory and indicates his desire to go forward with the charge.

The justification for such a procedure arises from the general equity (WCF 19.4) of Deuteronomy 19:15–21, which sets forth certain rules concerning witnesses. Specifically, verses 16–19 set forth what is to be done in the case of a false, or “malicious” (ESV), witness who brings a spurious charge against the accused. Verse 19 makes clear that false charges come back on the heads of the bringers: “then you shall do to him [the false accuser] as he had meant to do to his brother [falsely accused].” We do not believe that general equity necessarily requires us in the New Testament era to mete out the same punishment upon the false accuser as occurred in the Old Testament; nonetheless, it is fitting that a warning be given to someone bringing a charge that proves ultimately not able to be duly processed (as set forth in BD 3.7). The warning to be given thus informs the one bringing a charge that if the preliminary investigation of BD 3.7 determines that there is no warrant to institute judicial process in this case, the bringer of the charge may himself become the subject of judicial proceedings.

These judicial proceedings may go in one of two directions if the judicatory finds that the charges brought to the judicatory merit dismissal: they may involve, in more serious cases, the bringing of a charge against the “malicious” bringer of a charge, something that may result in a trial for the false bringer (though not if they come as their own accuser, BD 5.1) and may involve, if he is found guilty, any censure up to and including suspension and excommunication. In less serious cases, the judicatory may determine that a charge and trial are not warranted and may issue what amounts to a summary judgment. If the judicatory takes this summary judgment path, involving no charge and trial, then it may issue a censure of admonition or rebuke—thus, the expression that “no censure stronger than a rebuke shall

be pronounced without a trial.” Some readers of this expression have misappropriated it and mistakenly assumed that a judicatory in any case may issue an admonition or rebuke without trial, but this is restricted only to the cases in view in BD 3.6.

Perhaps a comment or two on what might constitute cases as more or less serious. The General Assembly in 1994 ruled, on appeal, that a rebuke proposed by a presbytery in a BD 3.6 case was out of order because the reason for the rebuke was that the charge itself contained “intemperate and disrespectful language.” The General Assembly opined that if the charge was indeed as characterized, that it was a serious matter, warranting charges and trials.² Charges of such were brought in their respective sessions against the parties who had brought the charges against their pastor, they were adjudged guilty, and the General Assembly subsequently upheld their more serious censures.³ A less serious BD 3.6 infraction might be a frivolous charge that should never have been brought as a charge. In such a case, the lighter censures of admonition or rebuke, given in a summary fashion without trial, might be appropriate. Every case, of course, must be examined on its own merits, and no hard and fast rules can be laid down beforehand.

One of the questions that has confronted the OPC in recent years is this: which judicatory actually censures in BD 3.6 cases if the judicatory to whom the charge was brought is not the judicatory having original jurisdiction over the bringer of the charge?⁴ The General Assembly ruled in 2010, by a slim majority, in a case in which the bringer of a charge was from a different congregation (of the same presbytery) than the session to which the charge was brought, that it was out of order for the trial judicatory to have proposed censure for someone not under its original jurisdiction.⁵ The General Assembly, in a similar case, ruled in 2022, by a significantly wider margin, that the bringers of a charge, though under the original jurisdiction of a different judicatory, were liable to receive a rebuke from the judicatory to which they brought the charge.⁶ The reasoning was that the judicatory to whom the charge was brought, in a BD 3.6 case and only in such a case, does assume a jurisdiction over all that come before it and thus can issue a censure if the charge is found not to warrant process and the censure does not exceed rebuke.

This remains then, potentially, a disputed matter among us. I believe that the most recent ruling of the General Assembly makes sense: the trial judicatory assumes jurisdiction adequate for a summary censure (admonition or rebuke) only in the BD 3.6 case of a charge that does not survive the preliminary investigation and thus warrants no process. If, of course, a judicatory believes that the charge contains more serious matters, then such would have to be handled by filing a charge in the judicatory of original jurisdiction, the sole judicatory which could try a member under its jurisdiction.

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² *GA Minutes* at <https://opcgaminutes.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/1994-GA-61-red.pdf>, 27–28.

³ *GA Minutes* at <https://opcgaminutes.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/1997-GA-64-red.pdf>, 56–59.

⁴ This is a matter about which this author disagrees with Stuart Jones; for Jones’s discussion of this, see his *Commentary on the OPC BD*, 52–56.

⁵ *GA Minutes* at <https://opcgaminutes.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/2010-GA-77-red.pdf>, pp. 40–48.

⁶ *GA Minutes* at <https://opcgaminutes.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/GA-Minutes-Yearbook-2022-Digital-Edition-No-CFM-Report-or-Ministers.pdf>, pp. 43–44.

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An Attempt at Reconciling Paleoanthropology and Scripture

A Review Article

By Jan F. Dudd

In Quest of the Historic Adam, by William Lane Craig. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021, 439 pages, \$38.00.

Over the last decade and a half there has been a proliferation of articles and books from Christian authors of various stripes over the matter of reconciling the message of human origins as described by the current science of paleoanthropology with the biblical account of human origins. The discussion has typically centered around how to weigh the claims of modern science with those of Scripture.

The continual discoveries of fossils and artifacts has pushed back the date of the earliest *Homo sapiens* to about 350,000 BP (years before present) as suggested by recent finds from Morocco. The picture is complicated by the modern genetics of human diversity. The raw number of genes and allelic variants of characteristics like the human leucocyte antigens (HLA) make it hard to imagine that there was an original single couple any time in human history. HLA antigens are those protein flags on our cells that define us as self, requiring very close matches if an organ or tissue donation is needed. The total number of variants for HLA genes is staggering. A single first couple could only contain a minute fraction of the variants currently seen across the human population.

Complicating the picture are new discoveries that suggest that there were various forms of the genus *Homo* prior to the existence of *Homo sapiens* by hundreds of thousands of years. Names like *Homo erectus* and *Homo heidelbergensis* come to mind. In addition, there are discoveries of *Homo* species that were contemporary with modern *Homo sapiens* as recently as the last ice age, nearly 40,000 years ago, or less. Names like *Homo neanderthalensis*, *Homo denisova* (Denisovans), and the enigmatic hobbit man (*Homo floresiensis*) come to mind. In the last ten years or so the complete genomes of Neanderthals and Denisovans have been sequenced from DNA extracted from fossil bones or teeth. Rigorous comparisons of those genomes to modern human genomes across the continents has led to the conclusion that all non-African descended people and some African descended people show genetic markers consistent with cross breeding of *Homo sapiens* with Neanderthals and Denisovans. The genetic contribution from these ancient species is about 2%. The indication is that this occurred about forty or fifty thousand years ago, before Neanderthals and Denisovans disappeared from the fossil record.

Evidence from skeletal similarities of these *Homo* species and neurological and vascular markers in the bones of the *Homo* species compared to that of anatomically modern humans has led many to conclude that they were capable of speech and abstract human-like reasoning. Supporting this conclusion are discoveries of sophisticated throwing spears associated with *Homo heidelbergensis* dating to about 350,000 years BP and art associated with Neanderthal cave sites in Spain from 65,000 years ago, about 20,000 years before modern humans are thought to have arrived there.

The matter of reconciling these dates and the paleoanthropological complexities with the biblical account of human origins has generated much literature dedicated to the analysis. The literature spans the spectrum of perspectives of those who are committed to a historic understanding of biblical authority and inerrancy to those who have taken a more critical approach. Theologians and scientists alike have contributed. Such theologians as C. John Collins, John Walton, and Peter Enns populate the theological spectrum. Scientists such as Dennis Venema, Denis Lamoureux, and Francis Collins have contributed. Those who allow the science to arbitrate over biblical authority typically retreat from a historic Adam. In so doing classic doctrines associated with a historic fall and original sin are significantly reworked or abandoned altogether, often for something that looks strikingly Pelagian. Those who are committed to the historicity of the biblical narrative and characters are perplexed by the science and its implications for crucial doctrines such as the *imago Dei* and original sin.

Into this mix William Lane Craig has written *The Quest for the Historic Adam*. He makes his case for the great antiquity of humanity as informed by modern science while desiring to secure the biblically nonnegotiable historic Adam. His attempt to reconcile science with Scripture is part of a noble Christian project that echoes the sentiment of Christians down through the ages. Even Galileo believed that “nor is God any less excellently revealed in Nature’s actions than in the sacred statements of the Bible.”¹

Craig’s theological commitments are not Reformed nor are they classically evangelical. For him the doctrine of original sin has scant biblical support and is not crucial to the Christian faith, though he does recognize that a historic Adam is crucial to the doctrine (4–6). He also has an apparent misunderstanding of limited atonement, calling it a “strange teaching” that would not encompass the sins of archaic humans (365). In addition, as one reads his book, it is unclear how he sees the inspiration of Scripture. He never clearly says. However, his commitment to the concept of historic Adam is commendable. His appreciation for Peter Enns’s position that “Paul’s Adam in Romans is not a plain reading of the Adam story but an interpretation of the story for theological purposes that are not rooted in Genesis” (6) is revealing. Craig does not clearly distance himself from Enns’s position that the Old Testament is a post exilic second temple polemic on Hebrew identity. Hence, it is left to serious doubt whether Craig sees the Scriptures as a clearly inspired set of books with linked continuity. Perhaps it is for this reason that Craig spends the first half of the book contextualizing Genesis within its ancient Near Eastern cultural setting. For Craig this seems to be the greater influence on the narrative of Genesis 1–11 than the Holy Spirit himself, who is never mentioned in the book.

¹ Galileo, “Letter to Madame Christina of Lorraine, Grand Duchess of Tuscany” 1615.
<https://inters.org/Galilei-Madame-Christina-Lorraine>

Craig makes it clear in the first chapter that “we need to consider the option that Genesis 1–11 need not be considered literally” (14). Here he sides clearly with non-concordists, leaving one to wonder what useful information can be gleaned from the Genesis narrative. He is desirous of taking “a canonical approach to Adam” that prevents him from reducing Adam to complete figurative myth. However, he appeals to ancient Near Eastern mythology to do this.

Chapters 2 and 3 are dedicated to convincing the reader that myth need not reflect real events or linear time while it maintains a sacredness in the mind of the adherent. It looks to him like the Genesis narrative has ample parallels to classic Near Eastern myths. Those parallels are used as a commentary against “crass polytheism” punctuated by genealogies that were “regarded as authoritative” by the “undisputed post-exilic Chronicler.” It is curious that he never mentions Moses and how the Holy Spirit would guide the narrative to accomplish its purpose. Craig’s take on Genesis is not that it is a description of real events worked out in historic time, rather it is a commentary against the contemporary polytheistic myths. It makes one wonder why even bother with a historic Adam and not just default to the classic position of many higher critics that reject the historicity and the heart of the gospel. The reader is required to assume that Craig is unwilling to go that far due to a conviction that the rest of Scripture accepts Adam as historic. Why the authors of Scripture would be seen as authoritative without Craig’s clear articulation of his view of biblical authority is an unanswered question.

In chapters 4 and 5 Craig makes the case that although Genesis 1–11 is mythic it is not the same type of myth as was found among the Hebrews’ contemporary neighbors. While trying to retain some historic flavor in the narrative, he points out that in Genesis, cultural practices like livestock herding and vine dressing are attributed to humans not the gods. But this point could be made using myth to attribute these skills to human invention rather than to the deities. This is also the case with anthropomorphisms such as God breathing life into nostrils, walking in the garden, or smelling Noah’s sacrifice. His take is that the author of these descriptive events would have assumed his readers would see these anthropomorphisms to be part of the storyteller’s art and not serious theology (102). Strangely, Craig fails to make the case that Jewish and Christian people have not seen these descriptions as serious theology. He goes on to make the case that fantastic things like six creation days, a crafty snake, cherubim with flaming sword, unions of angels and humans, and trees with special qualities would likely have been considered less than factually true by the biblical author. Yet, despite the fantastic elements and inconsistencies, these stories would have been objects of belief for the ancient Israelites.

Chapter 5 is Craig’s attempt to anchor Adam in history despite the mythic qualities of the Genesis 1–11 narrative. Genealogies from the Old and New Testaments make historicity an insurmountable matter. His belief is that the purpose of the genealogies in ancient Near Eastern tradition, including Genesis, is domestic, political, and religious. The history is an incidental preservation (141). However, the characters in the genealogies would have been considered by ancient readers as real, even if the life spans were believed to be fantastic (146). He does not make a good case at this point why ancient supernaturalists would reject the long-life spans while holding to the historicity of the individual, whether considering a Sumerian king or a biblical patriarch. Craig jumps to favor the term mytho-history, real people from the primeval past whose actions are significant for mankind in a highly symbolic story. I suppose he would see this historical

account to be on par with the account of Davey Crockett riding on a lightning bolt. You might believe in Davey but not the ride on the bolt.

Building on this perspective, Craig goes on in chapter 7 to see Paul's treatment of Adam in Romans 5 and I Corinthians 15 as truly historic. He does not go as far as some to suggest that Paul assumes the history of Adam because he misses the point of mythic Genesis. However, he also does not go so far as to say Paul got it right because he was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, for many of us Craig's choosing of the historic Adam is not a much better opinion than those who reject the historic Adam for the figurative myth of Genesis. However, Craig needs his Adam to be historic in order for him to make his case from the science outlined in the last part of his book.

Craig claims Adam to be historic. However, when was he and what was he like? In the last third of the book Craig explains why he thinks Adam is very old, perhaps 750,000 years BP. He relies heavily on mainstream paleoanthropology and modern human genetics to make his point. He does a masterful job of surveying the current science to make his case. This might be a tough read for those who have not followed the field over the last few decades. The terms, dates, and anthropological theory could be a slog for the unfamiliar. However, I believe he represents the science accurately. It is good to remember that the modern science of Paleoanthropology has no Christian voice and spends a lot of time in rancorous debate of the evidence, with no sympathy for Christian concerns. Classically, the idea of humans being defined biblically as image bearers is rejected if not scoffed at. For Christians the matter of being in the image of God is of far greater importance than knowing when Adam walked the earth.

Based on the modern state of the scientific data, Craig chooses *Homo heidelbergensis* as the species that most likely represents the first couple. Recent finds that show this archaic species to be capable of sophisticated tool making in a temperate climate suggests that *H. heidelbergensis* was as capable as modern humans. Cranial capacity in the lower range of modern humans would not preclude their human identity. Skeletal evidence of neural and vascular pathways like those in modern humans supports the claim. Craig is correct to claim that the modern science chooses *Homo heidelbergensis* to be the forebearers of *Homo Neanderthalensis*, *Homo denisova*, and *Homo sapiens*. All of these appear to be fully possessing of human capabilities when the latest evidence is considered. There is evidence for tool making, speech, and art among all of them. Neanderthals and modern humans were burying their dead as early as over 100,000 years ago. Based on the evidence, Craig finds it hard to exclude any of them from Imago Dei, even though they are classified as different species. The implication is that heaven could likely look more like Tolkien's Middle Earth than we typically think.

However, Craig puts a lot of weight on a functional definition of what it means to be in the image of God. He is less sympathetic to an ontological approach to being Imago Dei. This could be unsettling to some traditional Christians who realize that human possession of the Imago Dei is not a function of capabilities that can be gained or lost. Function can certainly define the group, but it is insufficient to define the individual's status. Function can be lost or gained, identity cannot. Fortunately, Craig does not reject an ontological approach entirely (366–67). Significantly, he rejects monism and retains the dualistic Christian doctrine of humans as physical body and immaterial soul. He sees human consciousness as seated in the immaterial soul. There is mystery here for sure. To

his credit, he is clearly stating that God imputed the soul in a direct act to create Adam, the first human, as *Imago Dei*.

Craig's final effort in the book is to make the case for an original first couple as the progenitors of all humans. This position has regained some traction among Christians who have reconsidered the long history of humanity and the genetic complexity that drove many over the last couple decades to reject the idea of a historic first couple. He makes the point that the great antiquity of *Homo heidelbergensis* (+700,000 PB) as outlined in the work of Joshua Swamidass has demonstrated that a genealogical ancestor is not necessarily a genetic ancestor, as one's genealogical ancestor may not have a genetic contribution to the offspring after many generations. Here a lot of speculation is done to show that the original Image Bearing couple, Adam and Eve, could conceivably be the ancestor to all living.

A lot more could be said about William Lane Craig's *In Quest of the Historic Adam*. He has obviously done a masterful job on the research and thought needed to write this book. The book is useful for understanding how an old earth creationist can make sense of a thorny scientific problem associated with the origin of humans. However, it is also clear that Craig does not adequately treat what it means to have authors writing Scripture who are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Could biblical authors who knew less about ancient Mid-Eastern manuscripts than some scholars today write books under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that are consistently coherent with linked continuity? I am not convinced that Craig believes that they could. Hence, there is a major weakness in his argument.

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What Is the Primary Mission of the Church?

A Review Article

By Alan D. Strange

The Primary Mission of the Church: Engaging or Transforming the World? by Bryan D. Estelle. Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, 2022, 448 pages, \$19.99, paper.

Letter to the American Church, by Eric Metaxas. Washington, DC: Salem, 2022, xiv +176 pages, \$22.99.

The cry of the hour in some quarters of the institutional church—by liberals, typically—is “relevance!” The challenge levelled at the church by such liberals is that the message and service of the church must properly serve a culture that insists on wage equity, gender sensitivity, “wokeness,” and the like. In other quarters—as witnessed in Eric Metaxas’s book—the call for the church is to “speak up” about matters that are of concern to many on the other end of the political spectrum. So whether the church is being told that it must be relevant to progressive culture or that it must not be silent politically in the face of liberalism, the calling, task, and mission of the church appears by such imperatives to have as much to do with cultural currents as it has to do with anything that Jesus Christ has commanded his church to do. Not, however, for Bryan Estelle, Professor of Old Testament at Westminster Seminary California. Dr. Estelle is clear that the primary mission of the church is not to testify directly to political, social, economic, or cultural verities as some perceive them but for it to be faithful to the call and commission of the Lord to evangelize and disciple the nations (Matthew 28:18–20).

Estelle’s subtitle also suggests his view of the church’s primary mission, though put in a question form: is the church to engage or transform the world? It becomes quickly evident that Estelle thinks the answer to the question is different than the one H. Richard Niebuhr furnished, who thought that the Reformed understanding of “Christ and Culture” was to see “Christ as the Transformer of Culture.” Dr. Estelle does not see the church as the transformer of culture; rather, he sees the church as an institution given a specific task from Christ, in which she is to “engage” the world and to call her to faith alone in Christ alone. Estelle in this book treats that conviction in four sections: beginning with a biblical survey, exploring various competing approaches to the question of the primary calling of the church (theologically, confessionally, and historically), and ending with a treatment of church power and a treatment of the relationship of church and state. This tract for our times provides an apt remedy for the pervasive politicization that afflicts us even in the church.

Estelle begins his treatment in Genesis, finding the foundations laid there “for the biblical teaching on the primary mission of the church” (72). He sees it as rooted in covenant, both in the covenant of redemption and historical covenants, namely, the redemptive covenant of grace and the non-redemptive Noahic covenant. This forms the basis for a two-fold citizenship for God’s people, a sacred and secular citizenship, along the

lines of Calvin's two kingdom view, according to Estelle. The question then becomes one of how the Christian and the church should comport themselves in the world in this present age. Estelle makes it clear here that he is not suggesting that it is possible for a Christian to "keep his faith out of certain spheres of life" (72); rather, the question is how the Christian and the church ought to engage what Estelle calls the "secular sphere."

Estelle suggests Old Testament answers to "secular" engagement in chapters 2 and 3 of the book, in which he treats in turn both Joseph and Daniel. These two are case studies for strangers in a strange land, as Joseph was forcibly taken to Egypt and Daniel to Babylon, with each in turn coming to have exemplary lives, albeit with both in captivity. Estelle sees Israel's life in its own land as emblematic of saints in the new heavens and earth, while the saints in exile, as were Joseph and Daniel, typified life in the New Covenant era, in which the church labors under a pilgrim identity, as did Israel in its wilderness wanderings; the church reaches its eschatological fullness in the coming age, as anticipated by Israel entering and living in the promised land.

In chapter 5, Estelle examines the New Testament witness to the primary mission of the church, looking at classic passages in the gospels and the epistles that testify to the spiritual character of the church's divine task, particularly as that task is conceived over against the task of other institutions of God, like the state or the family. Estelle concludes that the New Testament clearly teaches that "Christ is ruler of the Universe; however, how He rules in creation and civil society as moral governor of the world is different from how He rules His church as mediator of the covenant of grace" (145). Here Estelle self-consciously relies on his colleague David VanDrunen in affirming that "the church is 'the only institution and community in this world that can be identified with the redemptive kingdom and the covenant of grace'" (145).

In Part 2 of his book, Estelle looks at various approaches to the question of Christ and culture and definitions of the primary mission of the church that he takes to differ from the approach that he is setting forth, which is that the institutional church has a more precise, and narrow, call than many may conceive it to have. He begins in Chapter 6 by looking at Kuyper, Dooyeweerd, and North American Calvinism and is critical of their propensity to modify secular matters, even one's job, with the qualifier "Christian" (as in "Christian architecture" or "Christian cooking"). While he is critical of such approaches, he is even more critical in what follows, as he engages a Marxist approach in his examination of Liberation Theology (Chapter 7) and, on the other end of the spectrum, Reconstructionist and Theonomic viewpoints (Chapter 8).

Finally, he finishes Part 2 with looking at what he calls "missional creep," as seen in the ways that Leslie Newbigin, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Social Justice Movement more broadly have sought to redefine the church so that it ends up not primarily shaped by and responsive to the command to preach the gospel narrowly focused (the person and work of Christ and the call for faith and repentance) but broadly conceived as securing social justice in this world especially for the poor and oppressed. The church should indeed preach that our goal as Christians should be not only to work to provide for us and ours but also to help those who have need (Eph. 4:28). The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) and the

judgment of the sheep and goats (Matt. 25) make clear that the needy, especially needy Christians, merit our aid as we are able to render it.

Certainly, our business ethics must have the glory of God and the welfare of our neighbor at heart and never simply focus on the “bottom line” of the world, the mere accumulation of wealth. We address for the Christian life much of what concerned Newbigin, King, and others, but not in explicit political ways: we do not preach that justice means that the church (or even individual Christians) must support a certain minimum wage, tax bill, or the like. The pulpit can properly call neither for conservative nor liberal political measures to be adopted by the civil magistrate, though we always preach the obligation of all men to love God and neighbor in practical ways.

In Part 3 of his book, Estelle examines the primary mission of the church as it relates to the Kingdom of God (KOG), as it is developed confessionally, and the outplaying of the church’s mission historically. With respect to the relationship of the church to the KOG, Estelle acknowledges that while most have seen the kingdom as more extensive than the church, “nevertheless, the church is the sole institution on earth for carrying out the goals of the KOG” (283). He examines Calvin, Vos, and current writers on this question, critiquing social gospellers and others who fail to see that because the KOG realizes its fulfillment eschatologically, the true mission of the church is to prepare its members for that future realization.

In the confessional and historical chapters, Estelle deals with the teachings of Westminster, both in its original and disestablishment (American) forms, highlighting the church’s mission and spiritual character. In both forms the Westminster Confession of Faith notes that the church is not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth” (WCF 31.4, amended; 31.5, unamended). The doctrine of that spiritual character is often termed “the spirituality of the church,” which Estelle shows in all its sides, good and bad (the latter being used in the defense of chattel slavery in America). He thus looks at the relevant nineteenth century Presbyterian Church (in the USA) Old School theologians (Thornwell, Robinson, Hodge, Peck, et al.) as they dealt with the question of the spirituality of the church.

Finally, in Part 4, Estelle looks at what is fundamental to all of this—the nature of church power. Over against the Roman Catholic claim that church power is magisterial and legislative, Presbyterians believe it to be ministerial and declarative. The power of the church is exercised in lowliness, in servant form (ministerial: seen in the servanthood of our Lord, the foot-washer). Presbyterians also view church power as moral and suasive, contrasted with civil power, which is legal and coercive. Church power is never coercive, with officers lording it over the flock; rather, it is declarative of the Word of God.

All this is to say that the nature, and limits, of the power of the church define it as the institution that it is, a spiritual one, seen in its exercise of the keys, over against a civil institution (the state), whose power is that of the sword, or a biological institution (the family), whose power is symbolized by the rod. Estelle explores all of this by looking at the nature of Christ’s kingship as that which is exercised particularly in and over the church and how that has played out from matters diverse as the nineteenth century debate about church boards in the PCUSA and the twentieth century dispute about women in combat in

the OPC. All in all, Estelle addresses the need for the church to mind its own (spiritual) business, chronicling when he thinks it was and was not successful in pursuing its true mission.

As noted, this is an apt book for the times. Rather than simply decrying these dark days with the “*O tempora! O mores!*” of a Cicero contra Catiline, Estelle calls upon the church to recapture her mission, to mind its spiritual business, and to give herself unstintingly to that for which her Lord has called her. The differences that I would have with this fine book would be those that I have already expressed elsewhere relating to contemporary two-kingdom approaches. I think that such approaches tend to draw the distinctions well between the institutional church and other institutions (like the state) but come up short in showing us how faith is integrated with life (accounting for diversity but not unity; both must be accounted for).

Also, while I think that Joseph and Daniel do furnish us with many good patterns to follow in an often hostile culture, surely the church that now operates, considering the finished work of Christ and the globalization of the gospel message, must impact the world in a way that ethnic Israel before entering and then in her land never could. Another way of putting it—while wilderness wanderings may be evocative, and certainly descriptive of our Christian experience now in a measure, they do not exhaust our present reality of taking all captive to the obedience of Christ. It seems that a fair reading of Western history shows that the gospel has transformed many lives that have impacted the world about it. Again, though, these are minor criticisms of a very good book.

I think, while the contemporary two-kingdom model offers much that is helpful, it is not the best strategy in encouraging others to recapture a right view of the church’s mission. I am elsewhere currently arguing for something like what Dr. Estelle calls for—a revival of a balanced spirituality of the church doctrine—that I call “mere spirituality” (with apologies to C.S. Lewis). This “mere spirituality” approach calls for all the Reformed, whether two-kingdom advocates, transformational partisans of the right or left, establishmentarians, etc. to recognize what the calling of the institutional church truly is, however they may differ as to questions of Christ and culture, public or political theology, and the like. I want all parties at the Reformed table, even if they disagree with each other politically and on the relationship of faith and the world, to agree that the church is the church, along the lines that Estelle and I seek to define it, in terms of its primary mission and true spirituality.

The book by Metaxas stands in sharp contrast to Estelle’s. While there is much in Metaxas with which many confessional Christians would agree—he calls for pulpit opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage, for instance—there is much else that he calls for respecting the “need” of the institutional church to be explicitly political that is, at best, uncertain, on a charitable reading. For instance, take Metaxas’s curious call that we must not only fight “for justice,” which could mean many things, but that the church must also attempt to see “that our government enacts the will of the people” (77). The best reading of that is problematic for the institutional church—how does the church know “the will of the people” and, in any case, if such could be ascertained, why would it be the church’s business to seek to have the government enact it? What is really going on here? Throughout

the book one has the sense that something that is not being made explicit lies beneath the surface and is Metaxas's "real reason" for writing this volume.

How would seeing to it "that our government enacts the will of the people" work in a monarchy or an oligarchy, which are biblically legitimate forms of civil governments, and, in any case, under which God's people have lived or currently live? I guess Metaxas would reply that his letter is to the American church, and since we have a republic here, it is the church's responsibility to see that the government of the republic enacts the will of the people, even though it is arguable that simply "enacting the will of the people" is how a republic is properly to work. Many would say that historically, electing the best persons and letting them vote accordingly is how a republic is to be governed; admittedly, a republic does not classically mesh with the democratic populism that has come, not only in the days of William Jennings Bryan but also more lately, to characterize the United States.

One suspects, given Metaxas's known public commitments and actions regarding former President Trump, that enacting the will of the people may have something to do with the church speaking up in the case of a defective election result so that the "real decision" of the people may be followed. How the church is supposed to ascertain such and why it is the church's calling even to attempt to do so and to proclaim the "real winner" of an election is never disclosed. It is hard to think that Trumpism does not lurk in the back of his insistence that the church needs to step up and stop dodging its political obligations. Not only did an overwhelming number of evangelicals vote for Trump in two elections, but also many evangelicals have spoken of Trump in near-messianic terms, with Pentecostal and charismatic leaders especially referring to him as "anointed" or using like religious metaphors. In some quarters, it is hard to imagine how the American evangelical church could be any more open and supportive of Trump than it has been.

Metaxas's point of departure throughout his call for the American church not to be politically silent is his analogy of the present church in this country with the German state church of the 1930's. Metaxas believes that the failure of the German church to confront National Socialism and Hitler parallels the modern church in its failure to confront abortion, same-sex marriage, and fluid genderism, as well as more directly political matters like COVID-governmental overreach, the thwarted will of the people (in elections and the like, presumably), etc. In fact, it seems to me that many evangelical churches have spoken out about matters garnering wide Christian agreement like same-sex marriage and also in the areas in which many of us who take an Old School Presbyterian view of the spirituality of the church would find transgressive on the part of the institutional church: one need only think here of the widespread open support/advocacy of Trump in the pulpits and narthexes of many confessional churches. To be sure, this sort of thing has characterized certain charismatic or Pentecostal churches even more than any Reformed ones, thankfully, but Metaxas writes as if what he laments the lack of afflicts the whole American church.

Much could be said here about the church in Germany in the 1930s and particularly about the hetero-orthodox theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who Metaxas takes as paradigmatic, interestingly so given Bonhoeffer's involvement with the attempt to assassinate Hitler. Metaxas has elsewhere, in his biography on Bonhoeffer, wrongly constructed him as some sort of evangelical, which he decidedly was not, and wants to read

our current history as replaying the history of Germany in the time leading up to and during the “thousand-year reign” of Hitler, which was mercifully cut short after twelve years. No historian worthy of the name ever thinks that history simply “repeats itself,” though patterns might recur. Even if one wishes to paint the present presidential administration (and perhaps the Democratic Congress along with it) as Hitlerian in some fashion, it is hardly the case that the evangelical church is silent today as was the Lutheran church in Germany. Many evangelical Christians and churches make their views known: 81% voted for Trump in 2016 (and more in 2020), many regularly, in fact, speak out against matters to which they object in the public square.

Strangely, though Metaxas addresses abortion often, he fails to note that Dobbs recently overturned Roe, returning the question of abortion legislation to the states. Was this an expression of the “will of the people” or not? That is hard to gauge, as many people, certainly those on the left, are stirred up to defend abortion more vigorously than ever. Frankly, the church should not care what public opinion is on matters like murder or same-sex marriage but proclaim “thus saith the Lord” with possible political consequences secondary to the moral truths of the Scriptures. The church should never be silent about preaching “the whole counsel of God.” At the same time, it should be silent about directly political matters like “who really won the 2020 election,” best COVID protocols, term limits, etc. Christians of the same confession may differ about a variety of political matters, while all would agree that same-sex marriage violates God’s pattern for marriage.

Metaxas is not wrong that the church should speak prophetically to the nation. We ought to proclaim to all about us not only the gospel but also the law in all three of its uses. The second use of the law furnishes civil society with a legal pattern. Thus, the church can call upon the magistrate to rule righteously, even in accordance with natural law, if he refuses to hear biblical law, since the latter is fundamental to the former. The church has a proper place in calling all men everywhere to repent and believe. The church as church, however, is to distinguish itself from the world; at the same time, it is to give itself to the world. Only in this way can the “mere spirituality” that ought to characterize the church, regardless of where it is in the world, shine forth and draw all men to Christ, the only light and hope of the world. Estelle is right about the primary mission of the church, and Metaxas is wrong in promoting the further politicization of the church. The last thing that we need more of in a society and culture in which pervasive politicization threatens to swamp us and sink us beneath its secularistic waves is more of the same. Instead, we need the church to carry out its primary mission of proclaiming the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the good news that the world truly needs.

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The Unfolding Word, *by Zach Keele*

By Christopher J. Chelpka

The Unfolding Word: The Story of the Bible from Creation to New Creation, by Zach Keele. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020, 350 pages, \$28.99, paper.

Every Christian should strive to have a good overall understanding of the Bible and its theology. But those who are responsible for frequent exposition of the Scriptures must aim for something more than a general understanding.

Look at Psalm 118, for example, and imagine you are going to teach it in a Sunday school class. You see clear themes of deliverance, the hope of God's grace, and the joy of salvation. You also see the character and works of God. Let us say you have also got enough biblical theology under your belt that you know how to interpret and apply the vanquishing of the nations, the discipline of the Lord, and the rock that the builders rejected.

But just as you start writing an outline, you notice details like the "gates of righteousness." What does the metaphor of the gates represent? Does it point to the gates used in sheep pens or the ones for castles? Do they refer to something like judgment or entering or protection or something else?

Or maybe you are wondering about "bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!" Why is binding it necessary? Why is the psalm specific about the horns of the altar, and what are they? Is a festal sacrifice a special kind of sacrifice? Which festival? We could stop there. But should we? How can we know which details are minor and which are a significant key to the meaning of the psalm?

Theology is key for good interpretation and application of God's Word, but it is no shortcut for understanding the details of a passage. And when you can only see the big picture, you run the risk of "inaccuracies and bland generalizations."

That is the warning Zach Keele gives in his introduction to *The Unfolding Word*, a book that guides readers through the important details of the Bible without losing sight of the whole. Keele compares reading the Bible to looking at a "large mosaic, where each tile is its own image. Put together, they form another image. We need to zoom in and out regularly; slowing down and speeding up have to work together" (3).

This is not an easy skill, especially when you are a beginner. So, like someone visiting an unfamiliar city, it can be helpful to find a good guide—someone who knows what is important to point out first, what can be left for another time, and what newcomers tend to miss when they are on their own.

Zach Keele is a worthy guide. First, he knows the Bible well. As my pastor during my seminary training, I saw firsthand that Pastor Keele is an exceptionally devoted student of God's Word. Others will attest to this as well. He pays no lip service to things like

working in the original languages and the study of background material. He is a careful thinker and exacting in exegesis. Second, he knows his audience well. As a lecturer for English Bible Survey at Westminster Seminary and a longtime member of the candidates and credentials committee of the OPC Presbytery of Southern California, he has the advantage of knowing what many students of the Bible tend to miss but need to pay attention to. Happily, for those beyond his classroom, Keele has brought that knowledge and experience to bear in *The Unfolding Word*. It is an introduction to the Bible for those who are familiar with its contents but are ready to go beyond the general and learn to see more detail.

Keele starts in Genesis. He explains the covenantal foundations of the Bible in their ancient Near Eastern context, then traces the history of God's people from "Eden to Egypt" (chapter 2). Next comes "Exodus and Settlement" (chapter 3) along with "The Mosaic Economy" (chapter 4). The united and divided kingdom are dealt with in chapters 5–6, followed by "The Prophets" (chapter 7) and the "Exile and Return" (chapter 8), before concluding the Old Testament portion of the book with "Psalms and Wisdom." The New Testament books are covered in the four concluding chapters.

In each of these chapters Keele moves back and forth from the big picture to the tiny details. Sometimes he provides keys that help unlock vast amounts of understanding, sometimes he zooms in and provides compelling answers to specific questions. Examples of the former include observations about the physical landscape of Israel and the spiritual functions of that land; how God used the tabernacle, sacrifices, purity laws, and priesthood in the Mosaic economy; and the definition of wisdom and how the Wisdom Literature makes us wise. Examples of the latter include why lists of the twelve tribes often do not match with the twelve sons of Jacob, what the Jerusalem Council was requiring in their prohibition that went out to the churches, and the identification of Lady Babylon in John's apocalypse.

But in all the zooming in and zooming out, Keele always keeps in mind the unity of the picture in Christ and shows how the parts fit into the whole of God's unfolding Word.

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ServantPoetry

Mark A. Green (1957–)

Adam's Silence

Genesis 3:20

Before you speak, my love, let me recall
That majesty we shared before we found
Something slithering upon this sacred ground.

As regents ruling in this typal hall,
The law spelled out our contract in this place
So future heirs might know a Sabbath space.

But we stumbled—and just before that fall
Your silent *Yes* revealed so all could see
Me unprotected as you rejected me.

And now we shroud our shame behind these skins,
Unrighteous robes designed to hide our sins.