



Adam in the New Testament

"This vigorous defense of historical Adam is as relevant now as it was when first published in Dutch."

—Vern S. Poythress

SECOND EDITION

MERE
TEACHING MODEL
OR FIRST
HISTORICAL MAN?

J. P. Versteeg

*Translated and with a Foreword by
Richard B. Gaffin Jr.*

“This book is the best that I know of in demonstrating exegetically that the parallels drawn by Paul between Adam and Christ (as the Last Adam) necessitate viewing not only Christ as a historical figure but also the first Adam as an actual historical figure. The argument is made persuasively and convincingly that, if one concludes that the first Adam was not historical, then one should be driven to the conclusion that Jesus as the Last Adam was not historical—the latter conclusion even very few unbelieving scholars would be willing to hold. Other references to Adam outside of Paul in the New Testament are also discussed, and the same conclusion is convincingly reached about the historicity of the first Adam. One might not agree with everything said about other issues outside of the Adam-Christ topic, but the conclusions reached about Adam and Christ are sane, sober, and reliable.”

—**Gregory K. Beale**, Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary

“Many thanks for reissuing this helpful work. Among its many virtues let me mention two. First, Versteeg stresses clearly that Paul’s arguments in Romans and 1 Corinthians depend on historical sequence: Adam did something, and as a result something happened, and then Jesus came to deal with the consequences of it all. In this process both Adam and Jesus acted as representatives. Second, our view of Adam is bound up with our view of sin: is it an intruder into God’s good world (the traditional position), or is it a necessary part of the creation (which denial of historical Adam entails)? Anyone reading this will appreciate that contemporary discussions of Adam are still treading the same ground.”

—**C. John Collins**, Professor of Old Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary

“Denying the historicity of Adam or his significance for our own original sin is not just an issue of science versus the Old Testament. For the New Testament, as in Romans 5, deals with Adam as well, in an important

theological context. For the apostle Paul, our sin begins in Adam, as our redemption begins in Christ. Theologians cannot escape this teaching merely by saying that Adam is a myth or legend; they must also account for his role in Paul's doctrine of salvation. So a number of theologians, such as H. M. Kuitert, have postulated that Adam is a 'teaching model' in the New Testament. Versteeg's remarkably cogent and concise book tells us why this view is impossible. It was a great help to us when it was first published in 1979. But it is even more helpful now. Recently, some have claimed that analysis of the human genome forbids us to believe that the human race began with a single couple. In the face of such arguments, it is important to remind ourselves why the church has maintained that Adam is the first man and the source of human sin. I do hope this book gets a wide readership."

—**John M. Frame**, Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

"Given the recent debates about the existence of Adam, this vigorous defense of historical Adam is as relevant now as it was when first published in Dutch. The exegetical and theological issues remain the same today. Versteeg shows with vigor and cogency that the New Testament's teaching requires a historical Adam, and his defense deserves the attention of all who are interested in the question."

—**Vern S. Poythress**, Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Editor of the *Westminster Theological Journal*, Westminster Theological Seminary

"What an important book this is for today! Sane, clear and thorough, it offers a stout answer for those questioning the historicity of Adam, and lucidly shows why it remains non-negotiable. All thinking Christians need to read this."

—**Michael Reeves**, Head of Theology, University and Colleges Christian Fellowship

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PREFACE TO THE 1978 EDITION

ONE QUESTION at the center of interest throughout the world is that of the origin and essence of man. From where does man come and who is he? When we take up this question in the light of Scripture, we immediately encounter what Scripture says about Adam. However, what is the intention of Scripture when it speaks about Adam? Does Scripture characterize Adam as a historical person in whom the history of humanity began, or merely as a model, used in a framework of teaching—as a “teaching model”—without historical significance? The answer to this question has far-reaching consequences. One’s view of sin, redemption, and the Redeemer is closely connected with one’s view of Adam.

This study, which will examine what Scripture says about Adam, was originally a contribution to a volume published for the 75th anniversary of the Theological Seminary of the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and written by the professors of the seminary. It was intended as a New Testament contribution to that volume. For this reason attention has been limited to the data of the New Testament.

My thanks to the translator for his readiness to make this study available in English.

J. P. Versteeg (1938–87)

TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

FOR THIS REPRINTING, the translation has been slightly modified in a few places but remains substantially unchanged. Works cited in the footnotes have been updated with their English translations appearing since 1978, with the exception of G. C. Berkouwer's two-volume work on Scripture, whose single-volume English translation has been so substantially edited as to preclude accurate reference to the latter in Versteeg's citations.

When this work appeared over forty years ago, I was drawn to making it available in English for its effective refutation of the view that Scripture does not require the historic Christian confession that all human beings descend from Adam as the first human being. Also, its careful and incisive examination of key New Testament passages makes an important positive contribution in its own right.

Versteeg, since deceased, dealt primarily with the views of H. M. Kuitert as well as of several others gaining currency at that time within Protestant and Roman Catholic circles in the Netherlands. Little did I imagine then the way in which virtually the same views have subsequently become increasingly present within English-speaking evangelical circles on both sides of the Atlantic. This is true particularly for a number of scientists, biblical

scholars, and others who believe, moreover, that their denial or, as the case may be, doubts about the historic Christian understanding of Adam and his significance should be accepted as compatible with their Christian commitment.

Versteeg challenges that conviction. He shows that it conflicts with the central message of Scripture and leads to the eventual loss of the gospel. This is the basic thread of his argumentation: if it is not true that all human beings descend from Adam as the first human being, then the entire history of redemption documented in Scripture unravels. The result is no redemptive *history* in any credible or coherent sense and so the loss of *redemptive* history in any meaningful sense.

Versteeg's work is as timely today as when it was first written. The publisher is to be commended for making its translation available again.¹



In his concluding chapter (6), Versteeg notes some primary “Consequences” of embracing an evolutionary view of human origins and denying the historicity of Adam as affirmed and reflected on in Scripture. He identifies three such far-reaching implica-

1. Among more recent brief treatments of the biblical and theological issues at stake, see Michael Reeves, “Adam and Eve,” in *Should Christians Embrace Evolution? Biblical and Scientific Responses*, ed. Norman C. Evans (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 43–56; Robert B. Strimple, “Was Adam Historical?” in *Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. John R. Muether and Danny E. Olinger (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2011), 215–22; Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “‘All Mankind Descending from Him . . .’,” *New Horizons* 33, 3 (March 2012): 3–5.

tions for the Christian faith. The most immediate is a radically altered understanding of *sin*, particularly of the origin and nature of human depravity and the corresponding abandonment of any meaningful notion of the *guilt* of sin. This changed view of sin, in turn, results in a substantially changed notion of *salvation*. Eclipsed or even denied is Christ's death as a substitutionary atonement that propitiates God's just and holy wrath on sin and removes its guilt. And these shifted perceptions of sin and salvation are inevitably followed by a significantly different assessment of the *Savior*. Stressed is Christ's humanity, especially the exemplary aspects of his person and work (he is the "ideal man" realized within the constraints of the evolutionary process), an emphasis that minimizes or even denies his deity.

Versteeg details these consequences as he encountered them. It is worth taking some note here how they—particularly those concerning sin and salvation—are finding expression today among the group mentioned above: would-be evangelicals who hold that denying the historicity of Adam as taught in the Bible is nonetheless compatible with Christianity true to the Bible. One such instance is the recent book of Peter Enns.²

Enns writes primarily for those like him who want to remain Christians faithful to Scripture yet also share his conviction that scientific evidence renders no longer credible the historic Christian confession "all mankind, descending from him [Adam] by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression."³ The evidence, he believes, is beyond dispute

2. *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2012).

3. Westminster Shorter Catechism 16; Westminster Larger Catechism 22.

that human beings have evolved from earlier forms of life and by a process that excludes the possibility that all human beings descended from an original first pair. This conviction has led to his book and controls from beginning to end his effort to show that a divinely facilitated (“theistic”) macro-evolutionary view of the origin of the universe in general and of humanity in particular is compatible with how Scripture is to be read and is normative today.

The scientific issues involved, certainly important and in need of careful attention, are not my concern here. Nor for the most part is Enns’ handling of Scripture (his treatment of Paul’s teaching on Adam, which he clearly recognizes provides the greatest obstacle for the compatibility view that he wishes to establish, is akin to the views that Versteeg addresses and refutes). My interest, rather, is the theological conclusions and implications for the Christian faith that he is brought to by his controlling conviction that the findings of evolutionary science must be determinative for understanding the Bible and its authority today. Enns and others who share this conviction may not explicitly draw particular conclusions or implications and may even wish not to do so. But it is difficult at best to see how they can evade them or have other alternatives, at least credible or satisfactory ones.

*“A true rapprochement between evolution and Christianity requires a synthesis, not simply adding evolution to existing theological formulations.”*⁴ This, the last of nine concluding theses, is the note on which the book ends. We are not left in any doubt about its implications for the existing theological formulations

4. Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, 147 (italics original).

of historic Christianity, especially as they are found in Reformation and post-Reformation Protestant orthodoxy. The “synthesis” or rethinking that Enns envisions means their complete abandonment.

Evolution, Enns says, has “turned on its head” the Bible’s, especially Paul’s, teaching about the origin and nature of humanity, sin, and death.⁵ Evolution leaves no place for an original state of affairs as described in Genesis 1–2—one, all told, that was “very good” (1:31) and unmarred by the presence and effects of sin. There never was a time when man, created male and female in God’s image, lived in undisturbed fellowship with God and each other without sinning and without yet being invariably disposed to sinning. Nor is human death “the unnatural state introduced by a disobedient couple in a primordial garden.”⁶

Concerning sin, then, Enns and others of like mind today make clear what is also true of those whom Versteeg dealt with in his day. Evolution excludes believing the Bible’s claim that sin entered human history at a point after its beginning. Evolution, in other words, precludes the fall as taught in Scripture. It replaces the historical before-and-after of creation and fall with their side-by-side inseparability. Sin is not a matter of human *fallenness* but of human *givenness*. Whatever else being human may mean, it entails being sinful, or at least being naturally and inalterably disposed to sin.

Enns adopts a “crucial theological distinction” from an article by George L. Murphy, the distinction between “original sin” and

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

“sin of origin.”⁷ The former is the Augustinian notion, alleged to be no longer viable either historically or theologically. “The latter affirms the absolute inevitability of sin that affects every human being from *their* beginnings, from birth.” The “self-evident reality of repeated, relentless sin remains an unalterable and existential fact of human existence.”⁸

On the same page, Enns is eloquent about this self-evident reality or “what the Judeo-Christian tradition calls sin.” But eloquent as well is his complete silence about the *guilt* of sin. The exclusive focus of his description is on sin as the harmful and manipulative things that people do to each other and themselves; all told, they “find it tremendously difficult to live in true peace with each other,” and “few are at peace even with themselves.”⁹

Not only is there this silence about the guilt that sin incurs (true as well in those whom Versteeg deals with), but also there is no mention or even intimation that sin is rebellion *against God*. Missing is even the slightest indication that the deepest dimension of sin is not the wrongs we do to other people or ourselves, no matter how horrendous, but our personal affront to God in his holiness and sinless purity. “We have all fallen short of the mark,” Enns says. But nothing is said about what constitutes and determines this mark, other than that we “see how distant we are from the human ideal that Jesus models.”¹⁰

7. Ibid., 124; the distinction is elaborated on page 111 (see 117n16) in Murphy’s “Roads to Paradise and Perdition: Christ, Evolution and Original Sin,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 58, 2 (June 2006): 109–18.

8. Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, 124 (italics original).

9. One wonders how in Enns’ view *any* have a capacity for true peace, whether with themselves or others.

10. Ibid.

Enns' evolution-determined view of sin may have room for some notion of guilt. But it is difficult to see how that will be anything more than guilt in terms of intrahuman relationships and the violation of standards ultimately set by human beings in seeking to maintain and secure some measure of viable communal order and "domestic tranquility" in the face of an inherently destabilizing evolutionary process. It is hardly guilt *coram Deo* in any credible sense.

Enns says that "we must remain open on the ultimate origins of *why* all humans are born in sin (original sin)" and be content with observing "*that* all humans are born in sin (sin of origin)."¹¹ But this is said in the face of his own unquestioning commitment to a theory that unavoidably entails its own ultimate explanation why all human beings are born in sin. That explanation is, in a word, God. If God, insofar as he is affirmed as in some sense Creator, has set in motion and sustained the evolutionary process so that an eventual outcome is human beings with an inborn disposition to sin, then accountability for that disposition is his, not theirs. This conclusion is inescapable—unless we diminish either the nature of sin or the sovereignty of God as Creator taught in Scripture.¹²

Enns tells us that "characteristics that Christians have thought of as sinful," such as "the aggression and dominance associated with 'survival of the fittest' and sexual promiscuity

11. Ibid., 125 (italics original).

12. This divine accountability is far removed from Reformed theology's view that sin and the fall are comprehended within God's all-controlling eternal decree. That Adam and Eve were created, as they in fact were, able to sin (*posse peccare*) as well as able not to sin (*posse non peccare*) is antithetical to the view that they were created inherently disposed to sin and incapable of not sinning (*non posse non peccare*).

to perpetuate one's gene pool," are evolutionary "means of ensuring survival."¹³ If that is so, then no amount of emphasizing the responsibility or the presumed freedom to curb these and other similar inborn proclivities for our own and others' welfare will be able to veil the fact that these proclivities as such are hardly guilt-incurring. They are aspects, givens, of who we are as human beings, essential to what God has used evolution to make us to be. Nor can we be held guilty for their destructive expressions in more than the most relative and attenuated sense. Certainly, guilt before God, even if it were to be affirmed, has been rendered virtually meaningless.

Concerning salvation, Enns repeatedly assures his primary evangelical target audience that the evangel, the gospel, "does not hang in the balance" in his evolution-determined treatment of the Bible's teaching on Adam. He is emphatic: rejecting Paul's teaching about the historicity of Adam "has no bearing whatsoever on the truth of the gospel." Again, he is sure that "the need for a savior does not require a historical Adam."¹⁴

If we ask, however, what for Enns the gospel confidently deemed not to be at stake is, the answer is anything but adequate. He says repeatedly that the gospel, especially for Paul, is about the death and resurrection of Christ.¹⁵ But he does not say what it is about these events that makes them the core of the gospel nor give any indication how they accomplish salvation from sin and its consequences. There is not even a brief explanation, which his readers might reasonably expect, why, for instance, it is "of first

13. Ibid., 147.

14. Ibid., xix, 102, 143; see other similar statements, 92, 95, 123, *passim*.

15. Ibid., 123, 131, 143, *passim*.

importance" in the gospel Paul preached that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures," and therefore "that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3–4), or what it means that he "was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25), to quote another New Testament gospel summary.

Enns is silent about how Christ's death functions for the salvation of sinners—a silence to which he is hardly entitled, given his assertion that the cross is at the heart of the gospel that he is concerned to assure his readers is not put in jeopardy by his views on Adam and sin. Unsurprisingly in light of what has already been noted about his view of sin, there is no mention of the death of Christ as God's unparalleled display of his great love for guilty sinners. It does not enter the picture for him that the cross manifests the depths of God's mercy in establishing permanent peace and reconciliation with sinners by propitiating his just and holy wrath against their sin and so removing the guilt that their sin incurs. It is difficult to see what place, if any, Enns sees for the penal substitutionary aspect of the atonement taught in Scripture. Beyond its exemplary aspect, Christ's death appears to be no more than the necessary precondition for his resurrection as the event that overcomes the power of sin and death.¹⁶

16. The issue here is not: either penal substitution or *Christus Victor*. Both views of the atonement are true. But the latter, properly understood, is true only because of the former. There is no deliverance from sin's power and enslaving corruption (sanctification) without freedom from its guilt (justification). As it has been put rather pungently recently, "Sorry, but victory without the penal is pyrrhic." Robert H. Gundry, "Smithereens!" review of *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture*, by Christian Smith, <http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2011/sep/oct/smithereens.html>, para. 12.

For Enns, the permanent truth of the Christian gospel, the enduring good news for today, is the resurrection of Jesus. Unlike Adam as the first to sin, he considers the resurrection a historical event. This resurrection-focus, however, raises a number of questions and prompts the following observations. At best unclear, despite his affirmation of its historicity, is the reality and significance of the resurrection—whether for Jesus himself or for Christians, both for their present experience and as their future hope.

Without arguing in detail here, the New Testament teaches that both the resurrection of Christ and the future resurrection of Christians at his return is bodily (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:12–23). With all the attendant mystery and discontinuity undoubtedly involved, there is underlying continuity, bodily continuity. Their future resurrection bodies will be the outcome of the transformation by the Holy Spirit of their present psychophysical existence. The magnitude of this Spirit-worked change will be such that they will be permanently freed from sin and death along with all the other ravages of sin, a freedom in which the entire creation will share (e.g., Rom. 8:19–22; 1 Cor. 15:42–54; Phil. 3:21).¹⁷ In other words, with all the mystery and whatever more may be involved, the resurrection includes an inalienable biological aspect: the removal of biological death.

It is difficult to see how the evolutionary understanding of human beings and their origin embraced by Enns and others can accommodate this biblical, Pauline understanding of res-

17. Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 206–14, remains one of the best treatments of this bodily change to be experienced by Christians.

urrection. Evolution has no place for human existence without biological death.

For Enns and others of like mind, then, Paul is quite wrong when he says, with bodily, biological death surely included, that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). And if Paul is wrong about that, then he is equally wrong in teaching, as he clearly does in Romans 4:25 and 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, 17, for instance, that bodily resurrection is an essential and climactic aspect of salvation from sin. In other words, if Paul is wrong about bodily death as a consequence of sin, then he is seriously in error about the *gospel*. Enns’ assurances notwithstanding, the gospel does in fact stand or fall with the Bible’s teaching on the origin, nature, and consequences of human sin, as that teaching depends upon the historicity of Adam and his fall into sin.

Evolution excludes biblical teaching on “last things” no less than on “first things.” The two, as we will presently note further, are inextricably tethered to each other. The Bible’s eschatology is no more compatible with evolution than its protology.

For Enns, the present validity and relevance of the gospel appears to center specifically on the “experience of the risen Jesus” had by Paul (and presumably other New Testament writers, though he mentions only Paul).¹⁸ That experience Enns sees as the heart of what the gospel has to offer people today, an experience that possesses enduring reality, he reasons, because Jesus’ resurrection was a historical event in the recent past for Paul. His witness to its historicity and to his experience rooted

18. Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, 135, 142.

in it therefore has credibility, unlike his belief in the historicity of Adam in the distant primordial past.¹⁹

Paul's experience of the resurrected Christ can hardly be construed in this fashion. What we know about his experience comes from what he says about it. That happens as notably as anywhere else in Philippians 3:10–11, "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." Here, autobiographically but representatively for all Christians, Paul expresses his deep aspiration for a full, experiential knowledge of Christ.²⁰ That knowledge, he says, consists in his present union²¹ with the resurrected Christ, marked by the fellowship of suffering and cross-conformity that this union entails. At the same time, this present resurrection experience is oriented to the future, to the resurrection of the body at Christ's return (see also vv. 20–21).

Elsewhere, Paul expands on the future experience of resurrection not just as it will be for him, but for all Christians. "As was the earthly man, so also are those who are earthly, and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are heavenly. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man" (1 Cor. 15:48–49).²² "The earthly man" is "the first man Adam" (v. 45), and in relation to Adam as the first human being, Christ, "the heavenly man," is "the second man," "the last Adam" (vv. 47, 45).

19. *Ibid.*, 125–26.

20. Summed up as "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (v. 8).

21. "That I may gain Christ and be found in him" (vv. 8–9).

22. My translation; "heavenly" here describes the resurrected Christ as ascended.

Within the comprehensive outlook of the immediate context (1 Cor. 15:42–49), spanning as it does the whole of human history from its beginning to its consummation, no one else but Adam and Christ comes into consideration; no one else “counts.” In their representative and determinative roles, there is no one before Adam, no one between Adam and Christ, and no one after Christ. Christ, in his person and work, is “second” and “last” in relation to Adam as “first.” Furthermore, Adam is “first” in relation to those who “bear [his] image.” Adam is in view here in solidarity with all other human beings, who, by descending from him, are in natural image-bearing union with him.

Verse 49 is clear. Christians will bear with Christ the “heavenly” image that is now his, the image of God redeemed and glorified by his death, resurrection, and ascension—but only as they have borne Adam’s “earthly” image, the original image of God defaced by sin and its consequences. It is quite foreign to this passage, especially given its comprehensive outlook, to suppose that some not in the image of Adam as the first human being will bear the image of the exalted Christ. There is no hope of salvation for sinners who do not bear the image of Adam by ordinary generation. Christ does not and cannot redeem what he has not assumed, and what he has assumed is the human nature of those who bear the image of Adam by natural descent.²³

23. Enns is sure that in Genesis 1–2 the image of God is no more than functional: it does not refer to a “quality that separates humans from animals” but to “humanity’s role of ruling God’s creation as God’s representative.” Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, xv. Yet as Paul understands Genesis 2:7 in its context with its implications (1 Cor. 15:45–49) and as Scripture as a whole teaches, the image of God is above all the body-soul, psychophysical personal being that man, male and female, in distinction from all other animate beings, primate or other, is. Biblical anthropology excludes a purely functional view of the divine image. In distinguishing as Scripture does

This passage has in view full, bodily bearing of the image of the resurrected Christ in the future. Elsewhere, Paul is clear that for believers the experience of being conformed to Christ's glory-image is already underway (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6; cf. 4:16). Present experience of the risen Christ consists in this ongoing conformity "from one degree of glory to another," but only as that experience will culminate in the future resurrection-glorification of the body. Essential to Paul's present "experience of the risen Jesus," then, is his envisioning its consummation in the future in his own resurrected body. There is no place for the former experience without the eventual realization of the latter.

Enns does not discuss the future bodily resurrection. But it is difficult to see, as already noted, how he could find Paul's teaching credible and still relevant today. Furthermore, the difficulty here is in seeing how his evolution-determined approach to the text would leave him with any good reason for not viewing that teaching as couched in the imaginative, speculatively colored apocalyptic outlook present in Second Temple Judaism. This apocalypticism, too, like assumptions about an original first man, is expressed "in the biblical idiom available to him."²⁴ Since that is the case, the one is no more valid today than the other. Whatever else it may be, Enns' evolution-conditioned "experience of the risen Jesus" is not Paul's.

between ontology or being (who man as God's image is) and function (what man as God's image is to do), the former is antecedent to the latter and the latter unintelligible apart from the former. As far as I can see, evolution-determined approaches to Scripture, such as that of Enns, are hard-pressed to come to terms with the body as a constitutive element of the *imago Dei*, a truth that the resurrection of the body, as taught in this passage for one, makes clear.

24. Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, 142.

With all the differences there undoubtedly are, it is difficult to evade the conclusion that Enns' assessment of Paul, like the assessments dealt with by Versteeg, is akin to the view perhaps most clearly articulated in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Older Liberal treatment of Paul with its categorical disjunction between the religion of Paul and the theology of Paul. The former is what is essential: the enduring, perennially valid core of religious conviction and experience to be freed from its outer shell marked by theological dissonance and misconception.²⁵ Pertinent in this regard is Ned Stonehouse's perceptive observation about the positive understanding of contemporary Christianity that invariably results from the conclusions reached by the historical-critical approach to the Bible. He speaks of "what may with very little exaggeration be characterized as the persistence of Liberalism."²⁶

Finally, not to be missed is the view of Scripture involved in making contemporary evolutionary theory decisive for interpreting Scripture and for deciding what in it is or is not valid and relevant today. Enns effectively denies the divine authorship and commensurate authority of the Bible according to its own self-witness. This happens largely through his misuse of the analogy between Christ's incarnation and Scripture.²⁷ On his

25. On this Liberal view, see Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 17–22.

26. Ned B. Stonehouse, *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels: Some Basic Questions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 154 (with an eye to mid-twentieth-century developments).

27. Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, xi–xii, 143–45. Enns' lengthy quote (144) from Herman Bavinck to support his use of this analogy is specious to an extreme. It would be difficult to find a more misleading understatement when he adds, "By citing Bavinck, I do not mean to suggest that he would apply this principle precisely as I do to this same issue" (161n3). In fact, in applying the "principle" (the incarnational analogy) to the "issue" involved, Bavinck reaches conclusions that could

construal of this analogy, Scripture as a whole embodies God's accommodation to the point where divine authorship, if he still wishes to affirm it in some sense, is no more than a function of human authorship, rather than the reverse.²⁸ Divine authorship is reduced to the questionable efforts of the human authors—to texts decisively determined, in content as well as form, by their personal limitations and their inadequate and now-outdated cultural assumptions and outlooks, including their errors, even massive errors, both historical and theological, such as Paul's on Adam. On Enns' understanding of divine accommodation and the incarnational analogy, the Bible's divine authorship, that it is ultimately *God's Word*, his *written Word*, has been effectively abandoned in any meaningful sense.

The words with which Versteeg ends his study sound a still-timely warning—appropriate, too, for concluding this Foreword:

As the first historical man and head of humanity, Adam is not mentioned merely in passing in the New Testament. The redemptive-historical correlation between Adam and Christ determines the framework in which—particularly for Paul—the redemptive work of Christ has its place. That

hardly be more diametrically opposed to those of Enns—basic conclusions about Scripture that Enns rejects. See Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *God's Word in Servant-Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck on the Doctrine of Scripture* (Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic Press, 2008), 4–5, 47–107; on the passage Enns cites in its immediate context, 76–79.

28. Repeatedly, without exception as far as I can see, Enns characterizes all the Old and New Testament documents, particularly Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch, as having no higher authorial origin, as texts, than that they are various reflexive efforts, dubious at numerous points, at “self-definition,” as Israel's or the church's “self-defining” statements. Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, xviii, 6, 32–34, 59, 65, 73, 141 (*italics added*).

work of redemption can no longer be confessed according to the meaning of Scripture, if it is divorced from the framework in which it stands there. Whoever divorces the work of redemption from the framework in which it stands in Scripture no longer allows the Word to function as the norm that determines *everything*. There has been no temptation down through the centuries that theology has been more exposed to than this temptation. There is no danger that theology has more to fear than this danger.

Richard B. Gaffin Jr.
June 2012

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THE CONCEPT “TEACHING MODEL”

THE WAY the Bible speaks about Adam is under vigorous discussion today. That way of speaking is often characterized as a “teaching model,” a notion found in the booklet of H. M. Kuitert, *Do You Understand What You Read?*

For Kuitert, the all-important consideration is that we see the biblical writers within the framework of their own time. “The time-bound dimension of Scripture,” he says, “is . . . essential to its very character.” Important questions for understanding Scripture have a direct relation to this “time-boundedness.” Kuitert points, for example, to the fact that the biblical writer can speak of a “firmament” that God has created (Gen. 1:6 KJV), while we know that one cannot speak of a firmament in a literal sense. The blue expanse above our heads is not an outspread blue cloth or something of that sort but an effect of light. In the same context, Adam and Eve are mentioned. Just as we find little to indicate that the “firmament” really exists in the sense of something spread out

above us, so we find little evidence—the farther we go back in history—for a first set of parents in a garden of Eden. “On the contrary, the oldest humanity for which we have evidence appears to be of a very primitive sort, hardly like the neatly portrayed Adam of Genesis.” Therefore Kuitert has “as little difficulty” with the existence of Adam and Eve as with the existence of the firmament. “The living world in which the writer of Genesis expresses himself as he proclaims God as the creator was a world in which a first married couple was as much a natural part as was a firmament. Both elements fit the picture people had of the world at that time. When we confess today that God is the creator, we do that with the help of our current scientific knowledge and thus we speak about evolution, cells, and atoms.”¹

The way the New Testament speaks about Adam does not force Kuitert to revise this conclusion. That would be necessary if we had to understand what the New Testament says about Adam, especially what Paul says in Romans 5, in the sense it was usually taken in earlier times, namely, as decisive for the question concerning the historicity of Adam. According to Kuitert, however, modern biblical study has made clear that the question about the historicity of Adam does not come within the purview of the New Testament, not even Romans 5. When in Romans 5 a parallel is drawn between Adam and Christ, that happens only for the purpose “of illuminating through Adam the meaning and scope of Jesus Christ and his

1. H. M. Kuitert, *Do You Understand What You Read?*, trans. L. Smedes (Grand Rapids, 1970), 36–37.

work. Adam serves Paul by helping the apostle preach Jesus."² Because of this specific connection in which Romans 5 speaks of Adam, namely, in the interests of instruction about Christ, the historical aspect we wish to retain for Adam could be considerably less conclusive for Paul than for us. Then follow the words in which the term "teaching model" occurs: "As a pedagogical example or, if you will, a teaching model, Adam does not have to be a historical figure."³ In order to avoid any misunderstanding, Kuitert has explicitly assured us that the historical aspect of Adam was far less important for Paul than for us. He derives this from the fact that in Romans 5:12–21 it is essential to Paul's argument that Adam and not Eve was the first transgressor, while in 1 Timothy 2:14 the reverse is the case. There Paul argues that Eve, not Adam, began to sin. According to Kuitert, the one instance in the nature of the case excludes the other and proves that Paul was not interested in the historical course of things. As a student of the rabbis, Paul used all sorts of Scripture passages for his own purpose, and that purpose was to make clear the significance of Jesus as the Messiah. Paul was concerned with Adam not as a historical figure but only as an instructional or teaching model.⁴

It is not clear from whom Kuitert borrows the term "teaching model," granted that he borrows it and that it is not his own invention. His use of the term displays an obvious similarity to the use of the term "model" by C. A. Van Peursen in his *Filosofische orientatie*. In this study the concept "model,"

2. Ibid., 40.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., 40–41.

borrowed by Van Peursen from the natural sciences, occurs repeatedly. He points out that both quantum mechanics and astronomy work with models. "These models," says Van Peursen, "are not 'pictures' of reality; they only intend to make it understandable."⁵

Apart from whether speaking about a model indicates a direct relation between Van Peursen and Kuitert, it seems that what Van Peursen understands by a model is precisely what Kuitert means by this term. When he calls Adam a "teaching model," he intends to make clear that in all the New Testament says about Adam we do not have a "picture" of the reality of Adam but (only) an illustration, an explanation of the reality of Jesus as Messiah.

Thus speaking of a teaching model contains two inter-related elements. First, the teaching model always serves to illustrate, so that it always points away from itself. The second element is that the teaching model has no independent significance apart from what it intends to illustrate, so the historical aspect is entirely missing from it, or at least can be missing.

It has to be said that the concept "teaching model" is not a felicitous choice, if it is used with reference to the New Testament. The concept calls up clear associations with the concept "model" as employed in the natural sciences, and perhaps has been borrowed directly from them. The concept is scarcely compatible with the language of the New Testament and cannot be considered useful for letting the New Testament say what it intends to say.

5. C. A. Van Peursen, *Filosofische orientatie* (Kampen, 1958), 155.

Many have the same view as Kuitert of the way the New Testament speaks of Adam, although they do not use the concept "teaching model" with reference to Adam. Two recent studies from Roman Catholic circles may be used as examples.

In *The New Catechism*, which is a "declaration of the faith for adults" and was published by order of the bishops in the Netherlands, how Adam is to be spoken of comes up for discussion. *The New Catechism* starts from an evolutionary picture of the world. In the development of our earthly reality, different phases are to be recognized; concerning these, "Nearly everything is uncertain: dates and points in time, the interrelationships between phases. Only an unexpected line stands out with ever greater certainty: a species of animal, living in trees and plains, ascends in a slow development (evolution) to . . . us."⁶ Thus Genesis 1–3 does not give us a description of the beginning of things. Nor does the New Testament make an exception on this point, not even what Paul says in Romans 5. "At first sight" it may have the appearance that in Romans 5 Paul intends to emphasize the fact that through one man sin has come into the world. "But this echo of the word 'one,' corresponding to the world view of that time in which Paul took his point of departure, is a literary form, not his message."⁷ Thus *The New Catechism* too will not admit to an Adam who, as a historical person, stands at the beginning of the history of humanity. Adam serves only to illustrate the message concerning Jesus.⁸

6. *De nieuwe catechismus* (Hilversum, 1966), 13.

7. *Ibid.*, 308.

8. With reference to Rom. 5:12–21, then, *The New Catechism*, 308, concludes: "The message in this difficult passage is this: how much sin, along with death, reigns in humanity, and how much grace, restoration, along with eternal life, has come in greater abundance through Jesus."

We find the same ideas expressed in the strongest terms in a study, *Adam und Christus*, by the German Roman Catholic theologian P. Lengsfeld. When in Romans 5:14 Paul calls Adam a type of Christ, according to Lengsfeld he makes use of this typological conception to achieve a certain end. That means the typology is not an end in itself but a means and tool. The only point of the typology is to explicate the Christ event for Christians.⁹ Therefore, nothing can be read into the typology concerning the historical individuality of the figure of Adam. Paul neither intended nor was able to make historical pronouncements about Adam and his descendants. He intended with the help of Adam simply to explicate the Christ event, that is, he was only interested in the “role” of Adam as the porter who opened the door for the entrance of the dominion of sin, in order to be able to accentuate more sharply the function of Adam as the type of Christ, who establishes the dominion of grace. For Paul the point in the figure of Adam is the “typical” factor and not the historical reality of a man from whom all other men are descended biologically.¹⁰ Thus for Lengsfeld, Adam as a historical person and Adam in his explicating significance with reference to the Christ event come to stand in competition.

To answer the question whether Adam is spoken of in the New Testament as a teaching model in the sense understood by Kuitert—for the purpose of clarifying the message concerning Christ so that the historical element is of no significance—we

9. P. Lengsfeld, *Adam und Christus. Die Adam-Christus-Typologie im Neuen Testament und ihre dogmatische Verwendung bei M. J. Scheeben und K. Barth* (Essen, 1965), 218–21.

10. *Ibid.*, 115ff.

want now to turn to the New Testament itself. In doing so we will confine ourselves to the texts and passages where Adam is mentioned explicitly.¹¹ We begin with Romans 5:12–21 because, as we have seen, this passage occupies the central place in the discussion concerning Adam as a teaching model.

11. Texts in which Adam is not mentioned by name but which also could be discussed in this connection are, e.g., Matt. 19:4 and Acts 17:26.

Denying the historicity of Adam has become increasingly present within evangelical circles. Was Adam the first historical man? Does the answer really matter? And does it affect any important doctrines in the Bible?

Carefully examining key passages of Scripture, Versteeg proves that all human beings descended from Adam, the first man. He argues that if this is not true, the entire history of redemption documented in Scripture unravels and we have no gospel in any meaningful sense.

“Many thanks for reissuing this helpful work. . . . Anyone reading this will appreciate that contemporary discussions of Adam are still treading the same ground.”

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