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accepted belief in the literal existence of Adam and Eve is under attack. It is not hard to see why. Reconciling the existence of a literal Adam and Eve with standard accounts of evolution is not easy, and people will criticize anyone who questions the veracity of evolution. The fact non-Christians would deny Adam and Eve's existence is not surprising, but the growing trend within the Christian community is to do the same.

ADAM, EVE, and the Gospel

By RICHARD DAVIS and PAUL FRANKS

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For example, Christian evolutionist Denis Lamoureux writes, "My central conclusion in this book is clear: Adam never existed, and this fact has no impact whatsoever on the foundational beliefs of Christianity." On this account, Adam did not exist, but was simply a mental construct - a figment of the prescientific Near Eastern mind.

Brian McLaren is equally explicit in his denial that we are not to take the accounts of Adam literally. Of the Genesis accounts of Adam, including those describing the Fall, McLaren writes, "It is patently obvious to me that these stories aren't

Many responses to such statements focus on how to properly interpret those early passages. While those responses are necessary, and quite helpful, we hope to provide an additional type of response. We aim to show: 1) there are problematic *theological* consequences in rejecting a literal Adam and 2) there is a powerful philosophical argument demonstrating the need for a literal Adam.

intended to be taken literally."2

Two questions now arise. First, how could Jesus' teaching on divorce be better than the Pharisees' teaching if Jesus based His teaching on something that was false? He did not appeal to a "figment of the prescientific Near Eastern mind" to justify His teaching, He appealed to the existence of Adam and Eve.

A second, and more theologically troubling, question is this: What do we make of the fact God incarnate held false beliefs about Adam and

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THEOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF REJECTING THE LITERAL EXISTENCE OF ADAM

First, let us begin with a consideration of what Jesus thought about Adam's existence. When the Pharisees asked Jesus whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife, Jesus pointed out that Moses allowed for divorce (Deuteronomy 24), but only because of the stubborn reality of human rebellion. God's intention, however, was that divorce would never take place, but " 'from the beginning of creation, "God made them male and female." "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate' " (Mark 10:2-9, ESV³).

Although not specifically named, anyone with even a passing familiarity of the Creation story knows whom Jesus is talking about. The "them" are Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:27). Now what is helpful about this passage is this: The Pharisees based their understanding of divorce on Moses' teaching. But Jesus pointed out that Moses was simply conceding that divorce would occur because of the hardness of human sin and weakness. The Pharisees had an inadequate basis for their teaching on divorce whereas Jesus based His teaching on divorce premised on certain facts about Adam and Eve. That is, Jesus thought the existence of Adam and Eve provided a better basis for understanding how God views divorce.

Eve? Even if one says He did not believe Adam existed, but just used the idea to communicate to His audience, it seems strange for God, who is incapable of lying (Numbers 23:19), to use false ideas to communicate truth. If there were no Adam and Eve, then surely Jesus, God the Son, would have been able to communicate His thoughts on divorce without, at the same time, propagating false beliefs. In sum, if there were no physical Adam and Eve, then, in addition to His teaching on divorce being less well grounded than the Pharisees', Jesus also either held false beliefs or willingly propagated them.

There are further theological concerns though. Consider what the apostle Paul said about Adam. Paul quite clearly links our redemption in Christ with the historic reality of the fall of Adam. At the core of his theological masterpiece Paul writes, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Romans 5:12, ESV). This pinpoints sin's entry into the world. How did sin, and through it death, gain its foothold in the world? It was "through one man." Notice Paul says "man" — not myth, legend, or Near Eastern construct — but man. Myths, legends, and constructs cannot sin. You need a moral agent with the power of choice to bring sin "into the world." There can be no sin (or death) without a sinner. Sin is not a free-floating airborne virus you simply breathe in. Rather, like a deadly cancer, sin gets its life from a host.

With the fall of Adam (and its effects) in place, Paul ratchets up the

argument to establish two major doctrinal points: 1) "If many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many" (5:15, ESV), 2) "If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" (5:17. ESV).

Notice the form of the reasoning in both cases: "If ... much more." It's the same way Jesus reasoned in Mark 2:9-11 — " 'Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Rise, take up your bed and walk"? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'" — He said to the paralytic — "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home" (ESV). The onlookers recognized that anyone could say, "I can forgive sins," regardless of an ability to do so. This is why Jesus provided them with something that was easier to believe, even if harder to pull off. Because they knew the man was paralyzed, once they saw him pick up his bed and leave, it was easy to believe that Jesus could heal. It was on that basis - Jesus' ability to heal - that they were to accept what was harder to believe — Jesus' ability to forgive sins.

How does this relate to what Paul tells us in Romans 5? Paul recognized that it was hard to accept that grace and life abound to many through one man — Christ. This is why he first calls their attention to what was easier to believe, that \sin and death entered through one \max — Adam. If you take away Adam and his trespass — the much easier thing to believe in Paul's mind — you lose his "much mores." If Lamoureux and McLaren, among others, are right, then we no longer have the grounds for accepting the wonderful promises Paul writes about in Romans — that grace and righteousness and life abound to many through Christ.

A PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF ADAM

So far we have seen that there are problems with denying the existence of Adam, but we need not stop at that. There are also good reasons to believe that Adam existed. This begins with something that we all recognize in ourselves — our basic operating systems are deeply flawed. Our natures are sinful and our hearts corrupt. What, then, could be the



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cause of this? What could cause us to have this sinful nature? There are three — and only three — possibilities for why we have a sinful nature. It is either uncaused (there is no reason or explanation for why we have it), self-caused (we brought it into existence ourselves), or it is caused by another. Consider each of these in turn.

Our sin nature is uncaused

The least plausible option is that there is no cause of a sin nature. Why is this the least plausible option? Well, simply put, because it is impossible. To say that our sin nature is *uncaused* would imply that something (a sin nature) came into existence out of nothing and for no reason. The problem with this is that it denies the obviously true principle that anything that begins to exist must have a cause for its existence. Imagine what denying such a commonsense principle would do to our scientific research. When trying to find the cause of cancer, medical researchers would have to entertain the possibility that there simply is no cause of cancer — it can just suddenly arise uncaused (perhaps this will be the next argument from the tobacco industry).4

Our sin nature is self-caused

The first option is obviously a failure, but what about the second? Could each of us be the cause of our own sin nature? The prospects do not look all that promising because on this view our choosing to sin would precede our possessing a sin nature, but things are precisely the other way around. Not only is this confirmed in our personal experience, but Scripture also teaches that our sin nature comes first and our sinful choices come second. Jesus tells us that " 'out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexually immorality, theft, false witness, slander' " (Matthew 15:19, ESV). Our evil thoughts do not cause our malformed heart; it's the other way around. Here someone might object to this ordering by saying, "You do not know that there wasn't a time much earlier — one you cannot now remember — where (like Adam) you had no sin nature but then brought one into existence by your own free choice." The problem with this objection is that it flies in the face of Psalm 51:5: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." None of us were sinning from the time of conception of course; that is not even possible. But David says we were nevertheless "sinful." The implication here is that you can be sinful without actually sinning and that such sinfulness is present from conception. Clearly then, our sin nature comes first and our sinful choices later, thus ruling out the second option.

Our sin nature is caused by another

The final option is that another caused our sinful nature. We inherit

our fallen natures from our parents, who also inherited theirs, and so on down the line. Now here is the important point. This chain of prior generations from which we inherited our sin natures cannot go back forever. For then there would be no explanation for why anyone had a sin nature – no explanation for how sin entered the human race in the first place. The best explanation for the existence of a sin nature is precisely what we see in the biblical account. There was an original human pair - Adam ("the man," Genesis 2:20, ESV) and Eve ("the mother of all living," Genesis 3:20, ESV) — who sinned but did not do so because they had a sin nature. It is the physical existence of Adam and Eve that stops the regress of sin natures and provides an explanation for why we have one now.

CONCLUSION

There are several ways one might go about arguing against false ideas. One way is to show that the idea has, unavoidably, problematic consequences. This method provides the resources for refuting Lamoureux's earlier claim that denying the real existence of Adam "has no impact whatsoever on the foundational beliefs of Christianity."

It is simply false that such a denial would have no impact on the foundational beliefs of Christianity. Any view that results in both Jesus and Paul believing and teaching false ideas will necessarily have a tremendous impact on one's understanding of Christianity. As we have seen, this is what happens. Denying that Adam and Eve existed means that not only did Jesus and Paul hold and communicate false beliefs (which would necessitate the denial of the inerrancy of the Bible), but also that we have no reason to accept some of their theological claims either because they depend on those false beliefs. We should also note that such an argument is not likely to persuade someone like McLaren, but that is not due to a fault in the argument. Instead, it is due to the fact McLaren is already committed to a radical reworking of historical notions of Christianity. Once you are ready to cast off entirely the notions of "the Fall" and "original sin," then the rejection of Adam and Eve is a minor issue.

Another way one might demonstrate that an idea is false is to give a positive argument establishing what the false idea denies. We have seen that there is a powerful philosophical argument for the existence of Adam and Eve - an argument that simply makes use of the thoroughly biblical notion of "sin nature." Combined, these responses show that one need not shy away from maintaining that there was a literal Adam and Eve. In fact, we ought to do what Jesus and Paul did, proclaim it boldly both among fellow believers and those outside the Christian community.



RICHARD DAVIS. Ph.D., Toronto, Ontario, is associate professor and chair of the Philosophy Department at Tyndale University College. He is the author or editor of books, including 24 and Philosophy: The World According to Jack and Alice in Wonderland and Philosophy.

W. PAUL FRANKS, Ph.D., Toronto, Ontario, is assistant professor of philosophy at Tyndale University College and a minister with the Assemblies of God. His academic research focuses on the problem of evil, petitionary prayer, and Christian apologetics.

NOTES

- 1. Denis Lamoureux, Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 367.
- 2. Brian McLaren, A New Kind of Christianity (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010),
- 3. Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version, copyright @ 2001, Wheaton: Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- 4. For further elaboration of this point, especially as it relates to God creating the universe from nothing, we highly recommend Paul Copan's article in Enrichment, "If God Made the Universe, Who Made God?" vol. 17, no. 2 (2012): 122-25.
- 5. McLaren, 43. Tellingly, according to McLaren, the account of "the Fall" is not only one absent a fall, but is actually the first stage of humanity's ascent (lbid., 50).

