

# **Genesis' True Story of the Mysterious Origins of Humankind**

*di Brendan Purcell*

*The Genesis story of Adam and Eve is discussed within the context of human origins as presented by evolution and the Church's teaching on Original Sin. The article points out that human existence cannot be explained simply by natural selection but requires a series of "major Big Bangs" that go beyond the natural or biological sciences.*

## I. Introduction

Isn't that where we all have to start, «In the Beginning»? As in Genesis, there are two aspects of that beginning, there's God who creates out of nothing, and there are all the creatures who through that act of divine creation come into existence out of nothing.

Piero Coda has brought out beautifully that God's creation out of nothing is out of the nothingness of divine love:

«The nothing... does not only say, negatively, that before creation there was nothing except God. It also says, positively, that God's act of creation is an act of pure love, an act in which He makes himself Nothing, in relation to the created, so that the created may exist.»<sup>1</sup>

Our own reflections on our own mysterious beginning is one way of coming to understand the two aspects of Genesis' mystery story. Especially first-time parents experience the sheer miracle of the birth of their new child as a gentle reminder from the Beyond of our world, of the child's and all our existence as having a mysterious source. In chapter 11 of *From Big Bang to Big Mystery* I explored this amazing act of co-creation by which our parents brought each of us into existence. One way of understanding our first moment of conception is, in T.S. Eliot's phrase, as occurring at «the point of intersection of the timeless with time.»<sup>2</sup> Our parents' act of co-creative love participated in the one divine act of creative Love which generated each of us as incarnate spirits.<sup>3</sup>

The authors of Genesis were human beings like ourselves, with equivalent questions, not only of the beginnings of humanity but of the whole world. They experienced themselves as deeply penetrated by that mysterious Beginning, beyond their ordinary existence. They realized that God elevated human existence beyond all the animals, beyond the sun, moon and stars, so much so that they saw each human being as the «image of God.»

Because they were God's image, they experienced their existence in Eden as a close friendship with God. In the next book of the Pentateuch God revealed himself as the ineffable «I AM WHO AM» of Exodus, the I AM who addresses each individual human being as «Thou», most clearly in the Decalogue with its ordered sequence of «Thou shalt.» Chiara Lubich has said that this development makes each

---

1 - P. Coda, *Dalla Trinità: l'avvento di Dio tra storia e profezia*, Città Nuova, Roma 2011, p. 572.

2 - T.S. Eliot, *The Dry Salvages* (1941), in *Four Quartets*, Mariner Books, New York 1968, p. 32.

3 - B. Purcell, *From Big Bang to Big Mystery: Human Origins in the Light of Creation and Evolution*, Veritas, Dublin 2011.

human person «a you for God.» We should remember the prophetic writings of Ezekiel, Hosea and the Song of Songs here, because they bring out that relationship between humanity and God in a loving covenant.

But not only with the whole human family. Genesis shows us that before there was the Chosen People there was a Chosen, Beloved Couple. In and through that Chosen Couple, Genesis saw the origin and unity of the whole human family. As the International Theological Commission (ITC) notes in its 2004 paper, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, that while the views of those around them were that only their king was the image of God on earth, for Genesis, the image of God includes every human being.<sup>4</sup>

So what most makes them human is their relationship with God. Philosopher of history Eric Voegelin notes that there's no such thing as a human species in a biological sense – what gives us a shared history is that every human being is in relation to God. Without that, we'd just belong to a biological species:

«...there would be no more a history of mankind than there is a history of catkind or horsekind. If mankind is to have history, its members must be able to respond to the movement of divine presence in their souls. But if that is the condition, then the mankind who has history is constituted by the God to whom man responds.»<sup>5</sup>

Of course our humanity is also rooted in the material and biological cosmos – Adam means “Earth,” Eve “Life,” both created from pre-existing material and biological reality. Since the writings of the Old Testament Prophets often lament Israel's falling away from God's Love-Covenant, I think we can understand the Fall in Genesis, written around the same time as them, or a little later, as reflecting on a falling away from their response to the love God offered to our first parents.

Dante surely got it right when he put Judas, Brutus and Cassius as nearest to Satan's inner essence – worse than the pride of an individual is the betrayal of the love that should have been there between Judas and Christ, Brutus & Cassius and Julius Caesar: together they stand for the zero point where humanity betrays both God in Christ and Man in Caesar.

And no less than the writers of Genesis, we're only too aware of the presence of the personal, social and historical effects of evil – from our own experience of being tempted, from living in a society seemingly ruled by the Evil One. In the Book of Job too, there's a similar vivid awareness of Satan, the hate-filled Accuser and

4 - International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, Città del Vaticano, Roma 2004, n. 4.

5 - E. Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge 1974, p. 305.

his effect on our lives. And with St Paul in chapter seven of Romans, we're aware of being caught up in that same drama of Genesis – the good we want to do, we don't do, the evil we don't want to do, we do. So that we too belong to his autobiography of spiritual division and say with him: «Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ» (*Rm* 7:19, 25).

## **II. The Church's Defence of the True Story of Adam and Eve and Their Fall**

Since for Catholics, the Bible is understood in the wider context of tradition and the Church's teaching office, how has the Church interpreted Genesis and St Paul regarding Adam and Eve, and their original sin?

Let's start with what Pope Pius XII says in what's perhaps the key document in Church teaching on human origins, his 1950 encyclical, *Humani Generis*. He very clearly notes that while we can accept what science and theology say regarding evolution «in as far as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter – Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God.» (§36).

Since 1950, there's been a huge development in paleontology and archaeology indicating what seems a clear hominid sequence within which modern *Homo sapiens* can be located. As the International Theological Commission puts it:

«While the story of human origins is complex and subject to revision, physical anthropology and molecular biology combine to make a convincing case for the origin of the human species in Africa about 150,000 years ago in a humanoid population of common genetic lineage.»<sup>6</sup>

Returning to *Humani Generis*, Pius XII opposes the then current theory of polygenism – which held that there were multiple, separate origins of the human family, or the view that Adam represents a certain number of first parents:

«Now it is in no way apparent how such an opinion can be reconciled with that which the sources of revealed truth and the documents of the Teaching Authority of the Church propose with regard to original sin, which proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which through generation is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own» (§37).

---

6 - *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, cit., n. 63.

The theory that there were multiple separate origins for humans, held in the 1950s up to the late 1980s has been more or less definitively dismissed. As Spencer Wells writes in the preface to the 2017 edition of his *The Journey of Man: A Genetic Odyssey*, «we now know that our most recent common male ancestor – whom we call Y-chromosome Adam – lived closer to 200,000 years ago, much closer to the date for mitochondrial Eve, and that the expansion [of the first humans] out of Africa started around 60,000 years ago.»<sup>7</sup> Pope Pius XII goes on:

«... the first eleven chapters of Genesis, although properly speaking not conforming to the historical method used by the best Greek and Latin writers or by competent authors of our time, still belong to history in a true sense, which however must be further studied and determined by exegetes; the same chapters...state the principal truths which are fundamental for our salvation, and also give a popular description of the origin of the human race and the chosen people» (§38).

In other words, Genesis tells a true story of the origins of humanity, in the language most suited to a story, but «still belong to history in a true sense» (§38). Blessed Paul VI, St John Paul II, and Pope Benedict XVI have all contributed to this difficult discussion. So, John Paul II, in harmony with St Paul and the Council of Trent, insists on what we can call the historical Adam as the one who committed the original sin, and goes on to quote from Paul VI's important 1966 statement:

«...the basic truth in Saint Paul's text [is]...that Adam's sin (the sin of our first parents) had consequences for all mankind. Moreover, in the same chapter of the Letter to the Romans, the Apostle writes: "By one man's disobedience all became sinners" (5:19) and in the preceding verse: "one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men" (5:18). Saint Paul therefore connects the sinful situation of all humanity with the fall of Adam (§3).

In particular, the words of Paul VI to a symposium of theologians and scientists are valid...: "It is evident that the explanations of original sin given by some modern authors will appear to you as irreconcilable with genuine Catholic teaching. Such authors, starting from the unproved premise of polygenism, deny, more or less clearly, that the sin from which such a mass of evils has derived in humanity was, above all, the disobedience of Adam, the 'first man' figure of that future one, which occurred at the beginning of history"» (§4; AAS LVIII, 1966, 654).

---

7 - S. Wells, *The Journey of Man: A Genetic Odyssey*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 2017, p. XIII.

And John Paul underlines that in all of humanity which contracts Adam's personal and original sin, that inheritance doesn't destroy our human nature, nor is original sin in itself a personal sin:

«The Tridentine Decree contains another statement: Adam's sin is transmitted to all his descendants by generation and not merely by way of bad example. The Decree states: 'This sin of Adam which by origin is unique and transmitted by generation and not by way of imitation is present in all as proper to each' (DS 1513). In this context it is evident that original sin in Adam's descendants has not the character of personal guilt. It is the privation of sanctifying grace in a nature which through the fault of the first parents has been diverted from its supernatural end. It is a "sin of nature" and only analogically comparable to "personal sin"» (§5).<sup>8</sup>

Underlining that original sin isn't personal sin, Cardinal Ratzinger said in 1981, «Theology refers to this state of affairs by the certainly misleading and imprecise term "original sin."»<sup>9</sup> Before having a look at various Catholic and Protestant attempts to understand the doctrine in the light of new scientific knowledge I'd like to have a brief interlude on an important ontological question.

### III. Humankind's 'Ontological Leap'

A principle objection to what's called *evolutionism* is its presentation of all living beings in evolutionary sequence as if that sequence were somehow autonomous. The American atheist philosopher, Thomas Nagel, has been scathing of this, noting in his review of Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* that Dawkins «simply asserts, without evidence, that the origins of life are chemical, that life emerged once, and that it is likely that there is intelligent life elsewhere in the universe...» For Nagel, Dawkins has taken for granted the existence of the physical-chemical material that is «a precondition of the possibility of evolution.» Since this is so, «evolutionary theory cannot explain its [own] existence... So the problem is just pushed back one step: how did such a thing come into existence?..»<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> - Summary of Catechesis on Original Sin: John Paul II, Given at weekly public audiences, September 8–October 8, 1986 (Numbers of paragraphs 3, 4 and 5, refer to the numbered paragraphs as given in *L'Osservatore Romano*).

<sup>9</sup> - 'In the Beginning...' *A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1995, p. 72.

<sup>10</sup> - T. Nagel, *The Fear of Religion: Review of Richard Dawkins' The God Delusion*, in «The New Republic» (2006-235), p. 27.

Evolution gives an understanding of major advances *within* created reality – say from the simplest bacterial life forms to the emergence of the higher animals, in terms of what we can call the sequence of minor Big Bangs – the emergence of various species over evolutionary time. Biologist Eugene Koonin calls these BBB's or biological big bangs. Koonin is quite aware that biology hasn't actually explained what he calls «major transitions in life's evolution.»<sup>11</sup>

This isn't a question of «gaps» in evolution, as Intelligent Design proponents are keen to point out, since they're often discovered not to be gaps at all, just lacks in current biological knowledge. There are no gaps from the viewpoint of creation, since creation in God is one act, even if from our viewpoint divine creation unfolds over nearly 14 billion years. In this context, Voegelin notes that «...the epiphany of structures in reality – be they atoms, molecules, genes, biological species, races, human consciousness, or language – is a mystery inaccessible to explanation.»<sup>12</sup> I'd read that as saying that the emergence of *every* new species – never mind the first appearance of human beings – requires an explanation at the level of ontology, since it can never be adequately explained at a merely biological level.

Let's call developments *within* the evolutionary sequence *Minor Big Bangs* (*MiBBs*), whose mechanisms within that sequence may one day be explained – such a MiBB could include what Sean Carroll in his *Endless Forms Most Beautiful* calls the sudden emergence of complex animal life, about 600 million years ago: «The Big Bang of Animal Evolution.»<sup>13</sup> Of course, ontologically all such MiBBs occur within the one divine act of creation.

We can call *Major Big Bangs* (*MaBBs*) those few events that can't ever be adequately explained by the natural sciences. So the original Big Bang, some 13.8 billion years ago would be one of these. Leaving the mystery of the emergence of life to biology – since some day its development from a biochemical base maybe be discovered – the other MaBB is the creation of the first human beings, a mystery going beyond the natural sciences to explain, because it involves spiritual as well as material reality. And of course the co-creation of each individual human being is also a MaBB for the same reason. Some of the most accessible evidences for the MaBB of humanity are the sudden explosion of Paleolithic art and architecture we find, for example in Chauvet (34,000bc), Lascaux (15,000bc), and the amazing temples of Göbekli Tepe (10,000bc).

---

11 - E.V. Koonin, *The Biological Big Bang model for the major transitions in evolution*, «Biology Direct» (2007), p. 2.

12 - E. Voegelin, *In Search of Order*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge 1987, p. 17.

13 - S. Carroll, *Endless Forms Most Beautiful: The New Science of Evo-devo and the Making of the Animal Kingdom*, Norton, New York 2005, p. 138.

The ITC in its *Communion and Stewardship* document writes:

«Catholic theology affirms that the emergence of the first members of the human species (whether as individuals or in populations) represents an event that is not susceptible of a purely natural explanation and which can appropriately be attributed to divine intervention. Acting indirectly through causal chains operating from the beginning of cosmic history, God prepared the way for what Pope John Paul II has called “an ontological leap...the moment of transition to the spiritual”» (§70).

While I discussed this issue in *From Big Bang to Big Mystery* in detail, I think it's always helpful to turn to paleontologists themselves, who, though generally agnostic at best, have little difficulty in noting that humankind isn't simply continuous with pre-human hominid existence, even if they mightn't go as far as to raise it to the level of an existential mystery in the tradition of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas and Heidegger, in what John Paul II is quoted as calling «an ontological leap.» I'll limit myself to some fairly recent comments from leading paleontologist Ian Tattersall, who compiled with Jeffrey Schwartz the standard 4-volume survey of recent hominid discoveries up to 2005.<sup>14</sup> He writes that

«[B]y about 40 kyr ago we have abundant evidence of the arrival of the modern human spirit. . . . At first glance, the gap between a non-symbolic, non-linguistic ancestor and a symbolic, linguistic descendant seems virtually unbridgeable. Certainly, the latter is not a simple extrapolation of, or improvement on, the former. Indeed, the only reason for thinking that such a transition *could* be made, is that it *was* made.»<sup>15</sup>

This ontological leap reminds us that the question of Adam and Eve could never be reduced to a merely evolutionary or genetic question – as Voegelin would say, it's «a mystery inaccessible to explanation» – at least by the natural sciences. Allowing for that, let's return to our question of how we may try to reconcile revelation and Church teaching with recent paleontological and genetic science. We'll have a look at how some Catholic and Protestant writers face the question of how Adam and Eve can be the first parents of the whole human family in light of recent genetic and paleontological data.

---

<sup>14</sup> - J.H. Schwartz, I. Tattersall. *The Human Fossil Record*, Vols. 1–4, Hoboken, NJ, Wiley-Liss, 2002–2005.

<sup>15</sup> - I. Tattersall, *Human evolution and cognition*, «*Theory Biosci*» 219 (2010), pp. 193-201, at p. 199-200.



#### IV. Attempts at reconciling the true story of Genesis and St Paul with paleontology and genetics

I used to think that we could approach the mystery of how original sin was handed on to the whole human race by seeing Adam and Eve as representative of us all, much as political leaders represent us, whether we like it or not. If they walk our country into a war, we're all caught up in their decisions. But the various, some more, some less, authoritative statements of the Church's teaching seem to explicitly rule «representation» out as an adequate explanation. So even if none of the efforts at reconciling the true story of Genesis and St Paul are fully convincing, the First Vatican Council taught that God is the source of all truth, so we can be sure there'll never be a contradiction between the truth of revelation and whatever the natural sciences arrive at. We'll look at a few approaches at uniting Church teaching and the current biological or paleontological evidence – which, by the way, is constantly changing, being corrected and updated.

(i) *Kenneth Kemp*: Philosopher and biologist Francisco Ayala had «argued that recent genetic evidence shows that the origins of the human race cannot be monogenetic, as the Church has traditionally taught.» But philosopher Kenneth Kemp tries «to show that there is no real contradiction between a theologically conservative (monogenist) account of anthropogenesis and the scientific insights of evolutionary biology and modern genetics.»<sup>16</sup> Replying to Ayayala, Kemp develops a distinction «between biological and theological species first proposed by Andrew Alexander in 1964.»<sup>17</sup>

Kemp suggests a population of 5,000 hominids (beings with what would seem to be human bodies but without our capacity for thought). God chooses two and endows them with rational souls, along with what are called the preternatural gifts. These two fully human beings misuse their freedom by choosing to commit the original sin, losing those preternatural gifts, though not divine friendship. The descendents of this original couple interbreed with the other non-intellectual hominids among whom they live.

This approach fits both the theological doctrine of monogenesis as well as the genetic evidence – that our current genetic diversity requires more than a single couple as our origin. The theological doctrine of monogenesis only requires that all later human beings descend from the original couple, not that every ancestral line

<sup>16</sup> - K. Kemp, *Science, Theology, and Monogenesis*, in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 85, 2, 2011, pp. 217-36, a 235.

<sup>17</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 217.

in each one's family leads back to that original couple (many of us already, according to Pääbo and others, have at most 4% Neanderthal genes).<sup>18</sup> So we can have the several thousand hominid ancestors that Ayala says are required by the genetic evidence. Kemp's theory «is monogenetic with respect to theologically human beings but polygenetic with respect to the biological species.»

«A theology in which the existence of a Chosen People is a central theme in salvation history can surely accommodate the existence of a Chosen Couple. God did not owe Adam and Eve's cousins a rational and therefore immortal soul. The hominization of Adam and Eve was a free gift. Since Alexander called his article "Human Origins and Genetics," I might highlight the point at which my idea differs from his by calling my account "Human Origins and Grace."»<sup>19</sup>

(ii) *Another philosopher, Edward Feser* has a series of blog posts on this topic, with the same approach as Kemp:

«[T]he claim that modern humans are descended from an original pair does *not* entail that they received all their genes from that pair *alone*. . . [C]ritics like Jerry Coyne confuse the claim that *there is one man from whom all modern humans are descended* – a claim that is part of the doctrine of original sin – with the claim that *all modern humans are descended from only one man* – a claim which need *not* be understood as part of the doctrine.»<sup>20</sup>

(iii) *And biologist Fr Nicanor Austriaco* adds some comments regarding the centrality of our inheriting original sin from our First Parents, an inheritance which is not biological but spiritual:

«[W]hen the Council of Trent teaches that the consequences of the original sin are transmitted by propagation and not by imitation, we should understand this as a metaphysical and not a biological claim. As an immaterial spirit, our soul and its properties are not determined by our genes. Instead, when God creates our souls when we are conceived, He creates them without the graces and gifts that we should have inherited from our original parents.»<sup>21</sup>

---

18 - S. Pääbo, *Neanderthal Man: In Search of Lost Genomes*, Basic Books, New York 2015, pp. 189, 194, 239.

19 - K. Kemp, *Science, Theology, and Monogenesis*, cit., pp. 231-233.

20 - E. Feser blog, Monday, September 12, 2011, *Monkey in your soul*.

21 - N.P.G. Austriaco O.P., blog, *The Historicity of Adam And Eve* (Part II: The Doctrine of Original Sin) [s.d.].

In his next post he quotes the Catechism of the Catholic Church which reminds us of how the doctrine of original sin is connected with the doctrine on Christ: «The Church, which has the mind of Christ, knows very well that we cannot tamper with the revelation of original sin without undermining the mystery of Christ» (CCC, 389).

As do Kemp and Feser, Fr Nicanor makes the distinction between morphological and behavioural humans, and asks:

«[W]hy is this transformation from anatomically modern to behaviourally modern humans so important for our discussion of the historicity of Adam and Eve? It is critically important because, philosophically, this transformation can be understood to be archeological evidence for the appearance of the rational soul in human evolution. Theologically, this transformation would be a sign of the arrival on the stage of world history of the *imago Dei*, the creature made in the image and likeness of God with intellect and will.»<sup>22</sup>

(iv) *Philosopher Dennis Bonette* questions Ayala's genetics argument, finding such predictions «radically tentative,» and quotes later studies that disprove Ayala's claim. Simplifying the argument as much as I can understand it, in 1995 Ayala said 32 specific genetic lineages existed at the time of the first hominids. But only 4 genetic lineages can pass through a single couple, so for Ayala, «a literal Adam and Eve was scientifically impossible.»<sup>23</sup> ...He also claimed that the population never fell below four thousand, which would again render impossible a bottleneck of a single mating pair of first true human beings.<sup>24</sup>

Bonnette says that Ayala's claim of 32 ancient «genetic lineages» has been corrected in a 1998 study led by Tomas Bergström, which found that only seven such lineages existed at the time of the first hominids.<sup>25</sup> And in 2007 the same Bergström group in 2007 lowered that number of ancient lineages to four.<sup>26</sup> Just two mating

22 - N. Austriaco, O.P., blog, *The Historicity of Adam And Eve* (Part III: Scientific Data).

23 - F.J. Ayala, *The Myth of Eve: Molecular Biology and Human Origins*, «Science» 270 (1995), pp. 1930–1936.

24 - F.J. Ayala, *Response to H.A. Erlich et al.: HLA sequence polymorphism and human origins*, «Science» 274 (1996), p. 1554.

25 - T. Bergström et al., *Recent Origin of HLA-DRB1 Alleles and Implications for Human Evolution*, «Nature Genetics» 18 (1998), pp. 237–242.

26 - J. von Salomé et al., *Full-length sequence analysis of the HLA-DRB1 locus suggests a recent origin of alleles*, «Immunogenetics» 59 (2007), pp. 261–271.

hominids can pass on four, ancient genetic lineages, with other lineages appearing later, this requires further study.<sup>27</sup>

Bonnette also disagrees with Kemp and Feser on interbreeding between merely morphological humans (what Bonnette calls «subhuman primates») and behavioural humans.<sup>28</sup> Still, Ian Tattersall, who has no interest in this topic could still express a view that might support Kemp and Feser's approach to this issue – that there were morphological humans long before behavioural humans appear.<sup>29</sup>

Whatever about his differences with Kemp and Feser, I think we can agree with Dennis Bonnette when he writes that «Legitimate science can never assert that Adam and Eve are impossible. It might claim that they are improbable, but never impossible. God's omnipotence can always make short work of long odds.»<sup>30</sup>

Still, not everyone takes that view, so here's the approach of two Evangelical writers – certainly not bound by the Church's magisterium:

(v) *Dennis Venema & Scot McKnight, Adam and the Genome.*<sup>31</sup> The writers make a case that St Paul's Adam is «a Jewish Adam,» «not simply the *literary-genealogical, image-of-God Adam* but is instead that Adam as interpreted in the Jewish tradition... Paul's Adam has become more than he was in Genesis» (180). The writers tend to agree with other authors that Adam in St Paul is less a historical individual than the archetype of «everyman» (see 182).

McKnight writes that «Paul... is not saying that all have sinned in Adam and therefore die but instead *that each person, like Adam, sins and therefore dies because of that sinning*. Humans somehow inherit something from Adam, but they die not because of that inheritance but because they sin» (185).

He agrees «that Adam is our representative and what he did[,] we did,» but his own view is «there's a profound hitch in this passing on that breaks down all attempts to forge unbroken solidarity... The big picture is that Adam brings death and Christ brings life, but the *mechanism* for each to become effective is the act of the human being: those who remain in Adam's line perform the act of Adam – that is, they sin – while those who enter into Christ's line perform the act of Christ – that is, they trust Christ» (186).

---

27 - D. Bonnette, *Time to Abandon the Genesis Story?*, in «Homiletic and Pastoral Review» (2014).

28 - D. Bonnette, *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?*, in «Crisis» (2014).

29 - I. Tattersall, *Human evolution and cognition*, cit., p. 199.

30 - D. Bonnette, *Time to Abandon the Genesis Story?*, in «Homiletic and Pastoral Review» (2014).

31 - D.R. Venema & S. McKnight, *Adam and the Genome: Reading Scripture after Genetic Science*, Brazos Press, Grand Rapids, MI 2017.

His view escapes the difficulties of all humanity as directly descended from, and contracting original sin from an original couple, since the sin of the non-historical Adam is effectively the personal moral failure of all who sin: «Paul's Adam is the *archetypal, moral, and exemplary* Adam...Adam is the precise counterpart to Christ – what Adam did[,] Christ undid, what Adam did not do[,] Christ did» (187). And speaking of «the various sorts of Adams and Eves the Jewish world knew», he concludes that:

«One sort that Paul didn't know because it had not yet been created was what is known today as the *historical* Adam and Eve. Literary Adam and Eve, he knew; genealogical Adam and Eve, he knew; moral, exemplary, archetypal Adam and Eve, he knew. But *historical* Adam and Eve came into the world well after Paul himself had gone to his eternal reward, where he would come to know them as they really are» (191).

However, it's hard to see how, if what Paul was writing about was merely an «archetypal, moral, and exemplary Adam,» that his Christ wasn't also merely an archetypal, moral and exemplary figure, and not the one he says is «descended from the flesh (*kata sarka*) and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness (*kata pneuma*) by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord» (Rm 1: 3–4). The Church's doctrines seem to me to more fully take into account both the mysterious truth of the Genesis story and St Paul's deeper understanding of it in the light of Christ as the New Adam who definitively overcomes the radical evil of Adam's sin.

BRENDAN PURCELL

Adjunct Professor emeritus in Philosophy at University College Dublin

[brendanpur@gmail.com](mailto:brendanpur@gmail.com)