

Aftershow Thoughts on Adam and Eve

I'm not an expert philosopher or theologian. I'm a studious amateur who's interested in these topics. I'm 100% open to correction. I'm going to catalog what I see as different options for Catholics attempting to deal with the mainstream scientific evidence that says the human race did not start from an original couple. Again, if I get something wrong here, I am open to correction as I continue to learn about these things. I'm hoping this podcast episode can be a small part of a larger conversation on the matter.

- 1) **Young Earth Creation Model:** Mine the literature of young-earth creationists and dispute assumptions of science that lead to the issue with genetic diversity arising in a short amount of time. Visit sources like *creation.com* and *AnswersinGenesis.org* and read articles there. Typically young-age believers make a point about the uniformitarian assumption (i.e. natural laws and things have been pretty much the same since God made the world) vs. a catastrophism assumption (after the biblical flood, things changed dramatically, which could include mutation rates, the decay rates of various elements, and so forth).
 - a) They dispute the scientific claim that our current levels of variation must have come from a population around 10,000 individuals. I'll link to [one article](#) about this in the show notes page. It's a bit technical, and unless you're studied in biology and genetics, this argumentative route is going to be very difficult for you.
 - b) Also, dialectically, it's often unhelpful to ever refer to young-earth creation literature, because people will immediately dismiss it as a crank theory. That does not mean it's ipso facto ruled out. Personally, I dabbled in young-earth creationism for a bit in college. But overall, if your argument comes down to depending on young-age literature, it will be tough to persuade anyone.
- 2) **Old Earth Creation Model:** The most popular website for those who accept old-ages but deny the general theory of evolution is Hugh Ross's ministry at Reasons to believe. They can be found at *reasons.org* and I'll link to a 2016 article they posted on a historical Adam and Eve. They hold that the even allowing for an old earth and universe, the human race still descended from an original pair. The article also disputes the method and assumptions of the science that has led to the conclusion that human origins cannot go back to a population smaller than 10,000 individuals.

So, both Old-earth creationists and young-earth creationists are disputing the mainstream science. That doesn't mean they are wrong, but unless one really understands their points and *why* the mainstream scientific conclusion doesn't go through, that's a hard case to make. So, the remaining models, which are more typically held by Catholics, are compatible with the mainstream scientific claim that human origins go back to a population rather than a pair. How can this be? Let's consider some different scenarios.

- 3) Next, I'll look at **Theistic Evolutionary Models**, since they are compatible with the modern scientific evidence for common ancestry and evolution of species occurring through random mutation and natural selection (and other mechanisms the evolutionist wants to throw in the mix). I like the phrasing of "model" whereas Alvin Plantinga explains in his book *Knowledge*

and Christian Belief, “to give a model for a proposition is to ... [show] how it could be true.” So, in providing models, we are not committing whole-heartedly to their truth, but rather showing one way that the scientific evidence can be incorporated into a Catholic understanding of Adam and Eve.

- a) The best way I’ve seen this done is by **Kenneth Kemp in his 2011 article, “Science, Theology, and Monogenesis”** which appears in the American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly Journal. Fortunately, it’s now available to read free online so I can link the article in the show notes page. Notably, Dr. Edward Feser defended Kemp’s proposal (he actually calls it the Flynn-Kemp Hypothesis, incorporating some ideas from blog articles by Mike Flynn). I’ll link to Feser’s work in the show notes page as well. The proposal is definitely within the bounds of orthodoxy and Feser sees no irresolvable difficulties with it. I also asked another Catholic philosopher about it, one with a background in biology, and he too said that he saw no substantive difficulties with Kemp’s proposal.¹

- b) Antoine Suarez, another Catholic philosopher working on these things, has a somewhat more exotic proposal that he defended in a 2016 article, **“Transmission at generation”: Could original sin have happened at the time when Homo sapiens already had a large population size?** - This is also available to read for free online and I’ll put the link in the show notes. On my reading, Suarez’s proposal is similar to Kemp’s but it avoids having fully rational humans interbreed with non-rational biological human beings. Suarez proposes that Adam and Eve were specially created with a rational soul, but then **upon their transgression**, they lost their original holiness and justice, but also, God simultaneously raised all biological humans around them to a rational level, though deprived of grace because of Adam’s sin. This bypasses the bestiality issue since all of the men at that time would be rational and they would all presumably descend from Adam in the sense of being created after his sin in a state deprived of grace. Suarez says, “According to this hypothesis the consequences of the first sin didn’t propagate laterally to other existing innocent persons at any moment. The lack of righteousness emerges in all persons coming into existence after the fall at the very moment of their generation. God didn’t take away his grace from persons who didn’t sin, but doesn’t give original grace to the persons He creates after the first sin.” ([source](#)) Suarez goes through a lot of detail and attempts to show that his proposal is consistent with Catholic teaching at Trent and elsewhere. I’d say his proposal is interesting, and I’m not sure if it succeeds.

- c) Fr. Austraiico’s proposal at thomisticevolution.org is also interesting. I’ve struggled to pin down exactly what he is saying regarding there being an original couple or not. I’m hoping to have him on the show to clarify a few things. At the end of an article on Adam and Eve, he says, **“I am often asked three questions in response to this theological narrative. First, does the narrative presuppose single or multiple**

¹ Dr. Dennis Bonnette has also written an interesting article in which he seems to update Kemp’s proposal and provide his own. <https://strangenotions.com/the-scientific-possibility-of-adam-and-eve/>

original parents? Neither. It suggests that both possibilities can be reconciled with the theological data because there could either have been one contemporaneous original couple or a handful of original contemporaneous and even related members of a family. In the same way that Eve led Adam to sin, if there was in fact a first community, one or more of the original speaking bipeds could have led his or her relatives to do the same.” This last portion about an original first community is what seems to be tough to square with Humani Generis and the Council of Trent’s canons on original sin. But perhaps there is more nuance here than I am understanding at first glance. I seek to find out more about this view.

4) Finally, we get to Swamidass’ proposal, the genealogical Adam and Eve. **Is there a faithful Catholic perspective that has room for people outside of the garden?**

a) I’m still exploring this myself. My knee-jerk answer was no, absolutely not.

i) Trent says in Fifth session, canons 1-3:

1. If any one does not confess that the first man, Adam, when he had transgressed the commandment of God in Paradise, immediately lost the holiness and justice wherein he had been constituted; and that he incurred, through the offence of that prevarication, the wrath and indignation of God, and consequently death, with which God had previously threatened him, and, together with death, captivity under his power who thenceforth had the empire of death, that is to say, the devil, and that the entire Adam, through that offence of prevarication, was changed, in body and soul, for the worse; let him be anathema.
2. If any one asserts, that the prevarication of Adam injured himself alone, and not his posterity; and that the holiness and justice, received of God, which he lost, he lost for himself alone, and not for us also; or that he, being defiled by the sin of disobedience, has only transfused death, and pains of the body, into the whole human race, but not sin also, which is the death of the soul; let him be anathema:--whereas he contradicts the apostle who says; By one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death, and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned.
3. If any one asserts, that this sin of Adam,--which in its origin is one, and being transfused into all by propagation, not by imitation, is in each one as his own, --is taken away either by the powers of human nature, or by any other remedy than the merit of the one mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath reconciled us to God in his own blood, made unto us justice, sanctification, and redemption; or if he denies that the said merit of Jesus Christ is applied, both to adults and to infants, by the sacrament of baptism rightly administered in the form of the church; let him be anathema: For there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved. Whence that voice; Behold the lamb of God behold him who taketh away the sins of the world; and that other; As many as have been baptized, have put on Christ. ([source](#))

ii) Humani Generis 37 says:

“When, however, there is question of another conjectural opinion, namely polygenism, the children of the Church by no means enjoy such liberty. For the faithful cannot embrace that opinion which

maintains that either after Adam there existed on this earth true men who did not take their origin through natural generation from him as from the first parent of all, or that Adam represents a certain number of first parents. Now it is 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.” ([source](#))

- b) But then I was made aware of an entry in the 1911 Catholic Encyclopedia (which is definitely not a liberal document) in an entry on “Pre-Adamites” which says the following:

The Catholic Encyclopedia (1911), 12: 370–371:

The question whether we can admit the existence of Preadamites in the strict sense of the word, i.e. the existence of a human race (or human races) extinct before the time of Adam or before the Divine action described in Genesis 1:2 sqq., is as little connected with the truth of our revealed dogmas as the question whether one or more of the stars are inhabited by rational beings resembling man. Palmieri (“De Creatione”, Prato, 1910, p. 281, thes. xxx) does not place any theological censure on the opinion maintaining the past existence of such Preadamites, and Fabre d’Enviu (“Les Origines de la terre et de l’homme”, Paris, 1873, lib. XI, prop. 1 [Correction: this should be Bk 2, Prop 50—KWK]) defends the theory as probable.

But the case is quite different with regard to the view upholding the existence of Preadamites taken in the common acceptation of the term. It maintains that the men existing before Adam continued to coexist with Adam, and his progeny, thus destroying the unity of the human race. Palmieri (loc. cit.) brands it as heretical, and Father Pesch (“De Deo creante et elevante”, Freiburg, 1909, n. 154) endorses this censure; Esser (Kirchenlex., s.v. Präadamiten) considers it as only theologically certain that there were no Coadamites who were not the progeny of Adam and Eve. ([source](#))

- i) They leave open the possibility of a race of men that preceded Adam and Eve yet died out before them. They do not deem it possible to hold that race of men persisted down to Adam’s time to coexist with him. Swamidass would require something like that for his proposal.
- ii) However, this entry shows that, theoretically, Trent did not rule out men outside the garden. It left open the possibility of non-Adam descended men. Perhaps, taking this as similar to an interpretation with Humani Generis’ statement of “true men” they also refer to Adam-descended men. In other words, perhaps, there could be theoretical room for men outside of the garden that did not descend from Adam, that were never raised to original holiness and justice, and that eventually died out after interbreeding with the race descending from Adam and Eve. What would be their eternal lot? We would have no idea since we don’t have revelation regarding them. What might be the benefit of this?

- (1) Could make sense of some indications in Genesis 4 and 6 that there are people who did not come from Adam and Eve. Who was Cain afraid of? Where did he get his wife? Who were the “sons of God” in Genesis 6?
- (2) It could allow an Adam and Eve in the relatively recent past, which might be more comforting to those who want to give a more literal reading of events in Genesis 1-11.
- (3) It seems that Fr. Austriaco and others are using a 2004 document of the International Theological Commission² to leave the door open for polygenistic accounts. I’m not at all persuaded that it works or that it is a way to proceed that is faithful to Church teaching. Maybe it is, but I’m not convinced. **Nonetheless, if that door is opened to allowing some rational men outside the garden, then it seems that Swamidass’ proposal would be in principle possible and there could be a Catholic version of the Genealogical Adam and Eve.**

Some open-ended questions:

- 1) If the possibility is granted that there were/are men outside the garden that did not descend from Adam (e.g. pre-Adamites or rational aliens on another planet), then why are other men not descended from Adam ruled out? Especially in light of the fact that nothing at the Council of Trent seems to rule them out.
- 2) If polygenistic accounts turn out to be compatible with Catholicism in some way, then could Catholics opt for Swamidass’ proposal? If not, then why not?

My Conclusions

I think there’s some interesting work to be done in exploring these questions. Personally, I am not an expert and do not want to lead anyone astray from Christ and his Church. So, all that being said, I find **Kenneth Kemp’s proposal to be a great way to hold to an original couple, Adam and Eve, in a way that is compatible with the scientific evidence.** For anyone inclined to accept the general theory of evolution and tenets of mainstream science, that’s the path I’d recommend as a Catholic. Though, also, we can stay tuned for further inquiry on these matters.

² The relevant quote is in paragraph 70, “With respect to the immediate creation of the human soul, Catholic theology affirms that particular actions of God bring about effects that transcend the capacity of created causes acting according to their natures. The appeal to divine causality to account for genuinely *causal* as distinct from merely *explanatory* gaps does not insert divine agency to fill in the “gaps” in human scientific understanding (thus giving rise to the so-called “God of the gaps”). The structures of the world can be seen as open to non-disruptive divine action in directly causing events in the world. Catholic theology affirms that 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.” ([source](#))

This need not be read as an endorsement of polygenesis. Rather, it can be read in continuity with Catholic teaching as saying God could have created the first human beings as individuals separated from other primates (i.e. “as individuals”) or within a population of biological but non-rational humans (i.e. “in populations”).