This Cursed Earth: Is ‘the Fall’ Credible?\(^1\)

The bible story of the Fall in Genesis 3 is commonly referred to as a ‘myth’ but this does not help us to understand what reality there may be behind the biblical account. The interpretation suggested here is that:
a. Adam could not be an historical individual if God’s image, which distinguishes humans from other animals, is regarded as a divine act somehow linked to in-breathing (without genetic connotations) at some point in history;
b. If Adam was created during history, there is no problem in assuming that he also rebelled against (disobeyed) his creator (i.e. sinned) at a time within history; the primary effect of this would be alienation from God, the source of his life, i.e. that he died. Since animal and plant death pre-dated Adam, the key to this human death is that it is specifically spiritual death, i.e. separation from God;
c. God’s first commands to the newly created humans were to care for and pastor the rest of creation, acting as God’s vicegerents; the consequence of separation from God is that our first parents failed to steward creation for God, producing disorder. Our continuing failures are due to un (or self) directed disorderliness not the result of an innate defect.
d. Christ has enabled us to resume our intended role through his reconciling work. But creation will continue to ‘groan’ until we accept the responsibilities which are part of the privileges of becoming a ‘new creation’ in Christ.

**Key-words:** Fall, Adam, death, Eden, covenant, reconciliation.

1. **Introduction**

The Fall is much debated and its historical reality much doubted\(^2\). The story in the second and third chapters of Genesis about Adam and Eve, and the

\(^1\) Based on a paper given at the joint CIS-ASA Conference, August 1989; I am grateful to those who commented on it at the time, mainly positively. My thanks are also due to Ernest Lucas and two anonymous referees, who have helped me to be more rigorous in the arguments in this paper. Christians in Science have held two conferences on the Fall, in 1956 and 1990. These both informed me and stimulated me to delve more deeply. I am grateful to those who contributed to the conferences, and especially to Oliver Barclay who masterminded and inspired the contributors at both events. The problem with seeking to expound the Fall is when to omit material. I have written nothing directly in this essay about theodicy, yet many would argue that the Fall story is the basis for an acceptable theodicy. Nor have I said anything about the anti-Augustinian rhetoric of Mathew Fox and his followers, which is undeservedly popular in some parts of the world.

\(^2\) The most extensive treatments in modern times are by N.P. Williams (The Ideas of the Fall and of
disobedience which led to God expelling them from an original Paradise and thence extending to the whole of humanity, seems to stretch credulity beyond reasonable limits. Enlightenment thinking has largely replaced the idea of a cosmic Fall by an evolutionary humanism in which we progress inexorably in moral improvement. If this was so, we would have no urgent need for restoration or reconciliation with God (even if we still retain a belief in the existence of God).

Conservative commentators resist this dismissal of the 'traditional view' since if creation was originally 'good . . . very good' as Genesis 1 records seven times, there must have been a time when disorder entered. For example Francis Schaeffer, insisting that 'at creation, creation was at peace with itself' and basing himself on such apocalyptic passages as Is. 11:6–9 ['The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid. . . . The cow and the bear will be friends. . . . The infant will play over the cobra's hole . . .'] argues that the Fall involved 'an objective change in the external world. . . . The creation which God made was at peace with itself and will eventually be restored with itself'. Commenting on Genesis 3:17 ['On your account (or for your sake) the earth will be cursed'], he says 'Profound changes make the external, objective world abnormal. In the phrase for your sake God is relating the external abnormalities to what Adam has done in the Fall'.

Laudable as such attempts are in attempting to defend scripture, they extend beyond the plain statements in the bible through incorporating a particular view of creation and divine activity. We are told nothing about the ecological and moral state of creation before the 'Fall' other than it was 'good'. Since God alone is the sole Creator (Psalm 104) and he is wholly good, creation must be good; the Fall story is a description of evil entering the world (see below). Secondly in what sense is the present world objectively 'abnormal' as suggested by Schaeffer? It is certainly 'red in tooth and claw' with much apparent waste, predation, parasitism and death, but is this 'abnormal' in God's sight as it seems to be to us, viewing it from a twentieth century Western viewpoint?

And third, how should we interpret the Genesis story? If we abandon a literal interpretation of talking snakes, toxic trees and a physical Eden, do we inevitably empty the account of all historical and objective significance? It is this last question which is my main reason for examining the topic.

4. Schaeffer, loc. cit., p. 95.
5. Hugh Ross (Creation and Time: a biblical and scientific perspective on the creation-date controversy. Colorado Springs, Co:NavPress. 1994:63) has pointed out that 'considering how creatures convert chemical energy into kinetic energy, we can say that carnivorous activity results from the laws of thermodynamics, not from sin. . . . We tend to anthropomorphize and thus distort the suffering of animals. But even plants suffer when they are eaten.'
2. The Fall in the Bible

It is usual to describe the Genesis accounts of creation and fall as 'myth'. The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* is typical: 'In modern times the whole concept of the Fall has often been rejected as inconsistent with the facts of man's development known to science, especially with evolution. The biblical story itself belongs to the realm of myth and is told with much anthropomorphic and metaphorical detail.' Unfortunately, in Howard Marshall's words 'Myth is a confusing and slippery term in theology; it is used in so many ill-defined ways by individual theologians, that it would be no bad thing if its use were prohibited'.

Marshall points out that the Genesis 3 account can be read in four ways:

1. An explanation of how sin and disobedience came into the world;
2. An expression of the present fallen state of mankind – 'our' plight in the form of a story;
3. A poetic description of the human predicament, with symbolism capable of further re-interpretation;

and

4. A story whose actors include God and a serpent who miraculously speaks.

I suggest we can go beyond the semantic swamp of describing Genesis 3 as myth by taking into account both books of God – the scriptural and the scientific records.

In fact there is surprisingly little in the bible about the Fall. The Genesis 3 account is not directly referred to in other parts of the Old Testament. Neither the rabbinic nor the Jewish apocalyptic tradition has any doctrine of the Fall; Judaism (along with the bulk of the New Testament) emphasizes individual responsibility for our failings, both towards others and before God. The Christian understanding of the Fall is based almost wholly on the New Testament, particularly Paul's teaching in the fifth and eighth chapters of Romans. The New Testament is therefore a necessary preliminary to understanding the Genesis 3 narrative.

A key verse is Romans 5:12. 'It was through one man that sin entered the world, and through sin death, and this death pervaded the whole human race'. The one man was, of course, Adam. Immediately we find a difficulty, because by the early 19th century the fossil record was sufficiently known to show that extinctions (and therefore death) were widespread before humans appeared on

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earth. This recognition had nothing to do with evolution, although it depended, of course, in acknowledging that creation was older than the often-assumed six thousand years or so. There was no insuperable problem about this. For example, Thomas Chalmers commented in 1804.

'It has been said that geology undermines our faith in the inspiration of the Bible. ... This is a false alarm. The writings of Moses do not fix the antiquity of the globe.'

The problem is death. In his Bridgewater Treatise (1837) the Oxford geologist William Buckland devoted a chapter to suffering in nature, arguing that carnivory produces a check on population numbers, which would otherwise increase and lead to starvation among herbivores; he suggested it was a sign of God's goodness that by this means he produced the greatest amount of enjoyment for the largest number of individuals. Buckland believed that human death is distinct from animal death, and that there is a 'law of universal mortality [as] the established condition, on which it has pleased the Creator to give being to every creature upon earth; it is a dispensation of kindness to make the end of life as easy as possible ... the feeble and disabled are speedily relieved from suffering and the world is at all times, crowded with myriads of sentient and happy beings.'

Unsurprisingly Buckland's views caused controversy, which he sought to answer in a sermon preached to the University of Oxford in 1839, 'An inquiry whether the sentence of death pronounced at the fall of man included the whole animal creation or was restricted to the human race'. His text was Romans 5:12. He argued that there was no biblical foundation for the belief that carnivorous animals did not exist before the Fall, nor for the assumption that they will not exist in a future world of peace and perfection. Hence 'we are free to conclude that throughout the brute creation death is in no way connected with the moral misconduct of the human race, and that whether Adam had, or had not ever transgressed, a termination by death is, and always has been, the condition on which life was given to every individual among the countless myriads of beings inferior to ourselves, which God has been pleased to call into existence.'

These ideas failed to get wide acceptance, and within a generation had been

8. Cited by Davis Young (1982). Christianity and the Age of the Earth. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p. 49. Francis Schaeffer (loc. cit., p. 27) comments, 'In regard to the use of the Hebrew word day in Genesis 1. It is not that we have to accept the concept of the long periods of time that modern science postulates, but rather that there are no clearly defined terms upon which at this time to base a final debate. ... Prior to the time of Abraham, there is no possible way to date the history of what we find in Scripture.' Schaeffer quotes B.B. Warfield, who wrote 'It is to theology, as such, a matter of entire indifference how long man has existed on earth.' Ronald Numbers (Darwinism Comes to America. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 1998) has documented the widespread acceptance of an 'old Earth' by the early Nineteenth Century.


submerged by the wider debates about evolution, but Buckland expressed an
important truth in distinguishing between animal and human death: I return to
it below.

Henri Blocher has recently (1997) reviewed the vicissitudes of the notion of
original sin from the time of Augustine of Hippo, who linked Paul's statements
about sin coming into the world through Adam's transgression with the psalm-
list's plaint, 'From my birth I have been evil, sinful from the time my mother
conceived me' (Ps. 51:5). As he points out, it is a doctrine embedded in the
understanding of the Reformers. Article IX of the Church of England's Thirty
Nine Articles states in part that 'Original sin . . . is the fault and corruption of the
Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam;
whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness and is of his own
nature inclined to evil . . . [and] deserveth God's wrath and damnation.'

Augustine defined original sin as inherited sin; he believed the fallen nature of
Adam was transmitted, as we would now describe it, genetically, and that our
own fallen nature is therefore identical to that of Adam. This seems inequitable if
we (never mind newborn children) are blamed for Adam's disobedience; on the
other hand, if the condemnation for wrong-doing is entirely ours, Adam's role
would be relegated to a mere figurehead, which seems contrary to the obvious
meaning of scripture and Paul's detailed analogy between the roles of Adam and
Christ (Romans 5:12–18; see also 1 Corinthians 15:21).

Blocher suggests another possibility. As he points out, we assume from simple
logic that we are condemned for our sins, but this can only apply when there is a
law to be broken ('In the absence of law, no reckoning is kept of sin,' Romans
5:13b). Blocher's proposal is that 'the role of Adam and of his sin in Romans 5 is
to make possible the imputation, the judicial treatment, of human sins. His role
thus brings about the condemnation of all, and its sequel death. If persons are
considered individually, they have no standing with God or relationship to his
judgement. They are, as it were, floating in a vacuum. Sin cannot be imputed.
But God sees them in Adam and through Adam in the framework of the cove-
nant of creation . . . . Before the law of Moses was promulgated, sin was imputed
and therefore death reigned owing to the relationship of all humans to Adam,
the natural and legal head or mediator'.

This interpretation is attractive: it makes sense in the context of Paul's argu-
ment about Abraham and law in Romans 4, and accords with what Blocher
calls 'Paul's acute theologico-juridical mind'. Blocher paraphrases Romans
5:12,13, 'Just as through one man, Adam, sin entered the world and the
sin-death connection was established, so death could be inflicted on all as the
penalty of their sins . . . .'. In other words, the traditional understanding of
the Fall is maintained in that we are condemned because Adam's sin is imputed

to us, putting us outside God’s purpose, irrespective of any good or bad deeds on our part. The important factor is that salvation (i.e. restoration to life, otherwise called regeneration or rebirth – see next section) becomes possible because we are joined with Adam in the creation covenant made by God with the creature in his image.\(^{14}\) If Blocher is even approximately correct in his exegesis, it helps to build up a coherent understanding of the Fall.

### 3. Sin and Death

Adam was told that ‘the day you eat from [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil], you are surely doomed to die’ (Genesis 2:17). Returning again to Romans 5:12, Paul is unequivocal, ‘it was through one man that sin entered the world and, through sin, death’. Now the sin referred to can best be seen as a grasping for spiritual and moral autonomy: its primary consequence was a rupture in the personal relationships of Adam (and Eve) with God (‘The Lord God called to the man, “Where are you”?’ Genesis 2:19). The essential point is that this sin-caused rupture produced death by cutting off Adam (and Eve) from their source of life, just as cutting off the supply of oxygen produces physical death. When the bible – and particularly Paul – speak of ‘death’ they are concerned essentially with spiritual death. Our first parents lived for many years after ‘dying’ in the Garden of Eden; their sons were born after the expulsion from Eden.

Centuries later, Paul wrote to the Ephesians, ‘You were once dead because of your sins and wickedness . . . [but] God brought us to life in Christ when we were dead because of our sins . . .’ (Ephesians 2:1, 4; cf. John 3:4). It can be risky to distinguish between physical and spiritual death in this way because of the danger of an illegitimate body-soul dualism in our understanding of human nature, but this should not inhibit us from following Paul’s teaching. He deals with the question of dualism on a number of occasions, such as when he discusses the relationship between the earthly and the spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:35–49) or the practice of baptising the dead (1 Corinthians 15:29).\(^{15}\) But Paul’s main

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14. Although several covenants are described in the Old Testament (with Noah, Genesis 6:18; Abraham, Genesis 17:7; Moses, Exodus 20:4–12, 31:16; Aaron, Leviticus 24:8, 9; Phinehas, Numbers, 25:13; David, 2 Chronicles 13:5, 21:7), the Old Testament regards them as one (Exodus 2:24; 2 Kings 13:23; Psalm 105:9, 10). God’s covenant includes successive generations of the person with whom he joins himself in covenant, including Adam (Genesis 1:27–28, 3:15; Hosea 6:7; Romans 5:12–18); all else in covenant theology which progressively occurs in the Old Testament will be deducible from this’ (Dumbrell, W.J. (1984). *Covenant and Creation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Barber Book House, p. 42). This topic has been explored in depth by Robert Murray (*The Cosmic Covenant*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1992).

15. For a detailed discussion of body-soul dualism in the light of current knowledge of neurology and psychology, see Brown, W.S., Murphy, N. & Malony, H.N. (eds) (1998). *Whatever Happened to the Soul?* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress; Booth, D.A. (1998). Human nature: unitary or fragmented? *Science & Christian Belief, 10*: 145–162. As far as ‘death’ is concerned, M.J. Harris in the *New Dictionary of Theology* (loc. cit.) recognizes four senses in which death is used in the bible: physical, spiritual, second (the ultimate fate of the unrighteous) and to sin. He points out that although Christians regard physical death as a destructive force, it is repeatedly described positively (and distinguished from spiritual death) as God reclaiming the breath of life, as resting from one’s labours, as the surrender of the spirit into divine hands, and as the believer’s departure from this life to the immediate presence of the Lord.
concern and passion is God and our relationship to him, not the hazards and privations of this present life (1 Corinthians 12:10; Philippians 3:10); death to him was a mind set on the ‘flesh’ and a life lived according to the ‘old nature’ (Romans 8:6, 12). Commenting on Romans 6:2 (‘We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?’), John Stott notes that ‘Death is represented in Scripture more in legal than in physical terms; not so much as a state of lying motionless but as the grim though just penalty for sin. Whenever sin and death are coupled in the Bible, from its second chapter (“the day you eat from [the tree of knowledge of good and evil] you are surely doomed to die”) to its last two chapters (where the sin of the impotent is called “the second death”) the essential nexus between them is that death is sin’s penalty’.16

Once we accept that Adamic death is primarily a description of alienation from God, the Fall and its effects begin to fall into place. There was indeed physical death in the world before Adam (It is worth remembering that God gave ‘all green plants . . . for food to the wild animals’; plant death is biologically just as much death as animal death. So God expressly includes death in his created order, as Buckland argued 160 years ago9,10). There could not be spiritual death until there were creatures in a personal relationship to God (recognizing that all created beings have a relationship to their Creator, albeit not one that is ‘personal’ as implied by ‘being made in God’s image’). There is no problem in asserting that the initial act of disobedience took place at a specific time in history (or pre-history): indeed it must have so occurred if the first man and woman existed in time.

4. An Historic Adam?

The bible seems to intend us to accept the historicity of Adam and Eve. The biblical genealogies trace the human race back to Adam (Genesis 5:3ff; 1 Chronicles 1:1ff; Luke 3:38); Jesus himself taught that ‘in the beginning, the Creator made them male and female’ and thence instituted marriage (Matthew 19:4–6); Paul told the Athenian philosophers that God had made every nation from ‘one man’ (Acts 17:26); and most notably and important in the present context, Paul’s carefully constructed analogy between Adam and Christ depends on the equal historicity of both (Romans 5:12–19; see also 1 Corinthians 15:21,45).17

16. Stott, J.R.W. (1994). The Message of Romans. Leicester: I.V.P., p. 172. Stott apparently contradicts himself here, because with regard to Romans 5:14 (‘Death held sway from Adam to Moses’) he asserts ‘the reference is clearly to physical death’ (loc. cit., p. 152). He seems to be inconsistent, because he argues that animal death is a ‘natural process’ (loc. cit., p. 165) and that ‘our bodies are related to the primates, we ourselves in our fundamental identity (Stott calls us Homo divinus) are related to God’ (loc. cit., p. 164). This difficulty disappears if we accept Blocher’s suggestion for the understanding of the death that entered through Adam (see ref. 12).

17. James Dunn (Word Biblical Commentary 38A. Romans 1–8. Dallas, TX: Word, 1988) excludes the possibility that Adam can be interpreted as a mere representative: ‘Although he [Paul] will use Adam to characterize the state of humankind (Romans 8:15–19), he does not use anthropos here to characterize humankind as a whole; the concept of “corporate personality” is more of a hindrance than a help here; still less can it be maintained that Paul has in mind some universal mythical Man – as the distinction between “one man” (v. 12) and “all men” (v. 14) makes clear. . . . It highlights the universal sweep of God’s saving purpose through Christ: God is Saviour (vv. 9–10) as Creator (cf. 4:17) and not merely as God of Israel’ (p. 272).
Genesis is explicit, that humans are unique because we are made 'in God's image' (1:27,28): this was a specific bara act by the creator, not a 'moulding' or 'shaping' asa act, which is the more common word for describing God's creating work. 18 Bible scholars agree that God's image is non-anatomical, that it is a relational, not a physical entity. For example, Emil Brunner, commenting on 2 Corinthians 3:18 ('For us there is no veil over the face, we all see as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, and we are being transformed into his likeness . . .'), noted that 'man's meaning and his intrinsic worth do not reside in himself, but in the one who stands "over against" him . . . Man's distinctiveness is not based upon the power of his muscles or the acuteness of his sense-organs, but upon the fact that he participates in the life of God, God's thought and God's will, through the word of God.' 19 C.F.D. Moule concluded 'The most satisfying of the many interpretations, both ancient and modern, of the meaning of the image of God in man is that which sees it basically as responsibility . . . Responsible authority is God-like . . . as 1 Peter 4:19 puts it, God is a "faithful Creator" - that is a trustworthy, consistent Creator, one who, in that sense, is responsible.' 20 Brunner agrees: 'One who has understood the nature of responsibility has understood the nature of man. Responsibility is not an attribute, it is the substance of human existence . . .'. 21 For H.D. McDonald, 'image should be taken as indicating "sonship", which holds together both the ontological and relationship aspects of the image'. 22 Jürgen Moltmann explores some implications of this: 'The nature of human beings springs from their relationship to God - not some characteristic or other which sets human beings apart from other living things. The God who creates for himself his image on earth finds his correspondence in that image . . . As God's image and appearance on earth, human beings are involved in three fundamental relationships: they rule over other earthly creatures as God's representatives and in his name; they are God's counterpart on earth, the counterpart to whom he wants to talk and who is intended to respond to him; and they are the appearance of God's splendour, and his glory on earth . . . What makes the human being God's image is not any particular characteristic or other - something which distinguishes him above other creatures; it is his whole existence'. 23

18. David Atkinson (The Message of Genesis 1–11. Leicester: IVP, 1990) points out that 'although the word bara when used elsewhere in the Old Testament does not necessarily mean creation out of nothing, that is certainly the emphasis here' (p. 21).
23. Moltmann, J. (1985). God In Creation. London: SCM, pp. 220–1. As far as Moltmann's views on the Fall are concerned, David Fergusson comments (The Cosmos and the Creator. London: SPCK, 1998): 'Moltmann's treatment of creation out of nothing, though imaginative and moving, is ultimately unconvincing. He reinterprets creation out of nothing through Isaac Luria's cabalistic doctrine of zimzum. Zimzum means concentration and withdrawal. It signifies God's withdrawal into the divine being, as it were, and the consequent creation of a nothingness in which creation has its finite being . . . His use of zimzum is an attempt to explain the incursion of evil in the world by seeing this as a necessary condition of its creaturely status. This makes problematic any notion of the goodness of creation. The Fall now becomes an integral feature of the very act of creation' (p. 27).
These exegetical points are important, because they enable us to distinguish true human-ness (i.e. as creatures made in God's image) from membership of an animal species called Homo sapiens. The Genesis 2:7 account of human creation strengthens this distinction: 'The Lord God formed a human being from the dust of the ground i.e. from part of the existing creation "dust of the ground" could mean literal dust or a God-derived derivative of that dust, such as a living primate; in the context, the phrase emphasizes our link to and dependence on the earth) and breathed the breath of life (a warmly personal act) so that he became a living being'.

The verb is important: God did not add his image to an existing physical entity as much Greek-derived Christian thought has assumed; we do not 'have' a body plus a soul, we are body-souls. There is thus no conflict in assuming that we have had a pre-Adamic history but that we are also special creations in God's image. Likewise there is no reason to believe that the change from pre-Adamic to (post)Adamic existence (we might use the term Homo divinus for the latter, to describe a state which is outside the sphere of biology, strictly speaking) would produce any change in the skeleton which could be detected by anthropologists, nor in the genome which could be found by genetic analysis, nor in culture which might be remarked by archaeologists.

Jared Diamond has pointed out that if we apply normal biological criteria, we would almost certainly be classified as a third species within the chimpanzee genus: we share 98.4% of our total DNA with the two living chimpanzee species. We must insist that God's image in us is not genetic; it is not an element carried on the chromosomes or transmitted in sexual reproduction (as Augustine seemed to believe). There is a widespread Christian belief that true human-ness must be somehow inherited since it is such an essential part of our being. It is important to dissent from this:

24. Only in the case of a human are we told that God breathed 'the breath of life' into a creature. In Genesis 1:30, 7:21–23 identical language is used of humans and non-humans with regard to the 'breath of life'. It would be inappropriate to place too much weight on Genesis 2:7, but relevant to note its symbolism, supporting the key description of humans 'made in God's image'.
25. Gordon Wenham (Word Bible Commentary 1. Genesis 1–15. Dallas, TX: Word. 1987) points out that Genesis 2:7 says the human being became a living creature, not merely a creature. 'The adjective is significant in this phrase... . It is not man's possession of "the breath of life" or his status as a "living creature" that differentiates him from the animals. Animals are described in exactly the same terms. Genesis 1:26–28 affirms the uniqueness of man by stating that man alone is made in God's image and by giving man authority over the animals. There may be a similar suggestion here, in that man alone receives the breath of God directly (cf. 2:7 and 2:19)' (p. 61). See also Jeeves, M.A. & Berry, R.J. (1998). Science, Life & Christian Belief, especially chapter 8. Leicester: Apollos.
26. See Day. A. (1988). Interpreting the biblical creation accounts. Science & Christian Belief, 10: 115–143. There have been many suggestions about social traits which might be characteristic of true, post-Adamic humans. The most commonly proposed are funeral practices and domestication of animals and plants. It may turn out that a good marker does exist, but it would be wrong to place too much emphasis on it if the nature of true human-ness is God's image in us. After all, many animals bury their dead, and a range of insect species 'cultivate' fungi or 'slave' animals from other species.
a. The 1.6% of our DNA which is not possessed by the chimpanzees could naively be assumed to be the genetical material which 'makes' us truly humans; in principle it would be easy to identify and sequence. However it would be wrong to believe that it carries the genes which determine our human-ness. Quite apart from the fact that most of our differences from other apes are the result of developmental rates and (probably) laryngeal anatomy, species distinctiveness is far too complicated and integrated a process to be specified by a small number of genes taken out of context.

b. There are hints in both scripture (from Exodus 21:22, suggesting that an early or 'unformed' foetus is not valued in the same way as a late foetus and adult29, although they are, of course, genetically identical) and from medical observation (since two-thirds to three-quarters of early conceptuses spontaneously miscarry) that human-ness ought not to be attributed to every fertilized human egg. Even though he was arguing from an anti-abortionist standpoint, John Rogerson concluded from a review of the relevant biblical data that 'even if we assume that the "image" is asserting something ontological about mankind, what we do not know is whether the "image" (whatever it is) is present from the moment of conception or whether, in Old Testament terms, it is there only after the "unformed substance" has reached its definitive human form. . . . Nothing in the Bible clearly shows that the image of God is "present" from the moment of conception'.30

c. The Old Testament emphasis on the Jews as God's chosen race is a genetical concept, backed by the command to increase in number and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28, 9:1) and the Levitical teaching on marriage and the importance of reproduction. The significance of the Old Testament genetical line was abruptly and radically terminated, however, by the nature of the Church founded by Christ, which is completely independent of any genetical links for its existence and spread (John 1:12–13; Romans 4:16; 1 Peter 2:9; etc). Indeed, the Old Testament treatment of family life lays more emphasis on the over-riding importance of social as opposed to genetic context.31

If the origin of Homo divinus is not a genetical event, it gives a new perspective on the historicity of Adam and Eve. The bible describes Adam as a Neolithic farmer, placed in a garden to till and care for it. His son Abel was a shepherd, tending domesticated animals; another son (Cain) was a town-dweller (Genesis 4:17); a few generations later Tubal-Cain was born 'the master of all copper-smiths and blacksmiths' (Genesis 4:22), i.e. an early Bronze Age man. Less determinative but supporting the same order of dating is the place and climate described in Genesis 2:5,6; 2:10; 3:8, which can be equated with the probable

early post-Pleistocene conditions on the edge of the Anatolian Plateau. All these hints date Adam as living 10–15,000 years ago. By that time there were Aborigines in Australia and Amerindians in the Americas. The Adam of Genesis could not be the genetic parent of all modern men and women. Any ancestor common to the whole of humankind is thought to have lived in Africa from one to two hundred thousand years ago.

However Adam (and Eve) could be the spiritual founder of humankind, since the 'spiritualness' in us (i.e. God's image) is not a genetic factor. (God's breath is given and withdrawn: Job 34:14; Psalm 104:29) according to his sovereign power and will: it is a change in an animal as a whole, not a discrete element contributed by a mendelian (or any other) mechanism. There is no problem in believing in an historic Adam at a fairly recent date if we accept that our biological history (shown by fossils, genes, to some extent culture) is not the same as that which makes us fully human (i.e. members of H.divinus), which is wholly dependent on a specific act of the creator himself.

Once this is agreed, we can readily see that God could have gone on to put ('breathed') his image into all members of the species of H. sapiens alive at the time of Adam. Such an act is hypothetical but consistent with all we know or can deduce about human beings and our relation to our creator. It is the interpretation taken by Derek Kidner in his Tyndale Commentary on Genesis:

'With one possible exception (Genesis 3:20, naming Eve as "mother of all the living"; the concern of the verse, however, is principally to reiterate in the context of death, the promise of salvation through "her seed": Genesis 3:15), the unity of mankind "in Adam" and our common status as sinners through his offence, are expressed in Scripture not in terms of heredity (Isaiah 43:27) but simply of solidarity. We nowhere find applied to us any argument from physical descent, such as that of Hebrews 7:9,10 (where Levi shares in Abraham's act through being "still in the loins of his ancestor"). Rather, Adam's sin is shown to have implicated all men because he was the federal head of humanity, somewhat as in Christ's death "one died for all therefore all died" (2 Corinthians 5:14). . . . After the special creation of the first human pair clinched the fact that there is no natural bridge from animal to man, God may have now conferred his image on Adam's collaterals to bring them into the same realm of being. Adam's "federal" headship of humanity extended, if that was the case, outwards to his offspring, and his disobedience disinherit ed both alike'.

34. Somewhat trivially, this interpretation answers the old chestnuts of where did Cain get his wife, and why the world seemed so populous soon after Eden (Genesis 4:17).
35. Kidner, D. (1967). Tyndale Commentary on Genesis. London: Tyndale Press, pp. 30, 29. Kidner notes that his suggestion 'is only tentative, as it must be, and it is a personal view. It invites correction and a better synthesis; meanwhile it may serve as a reminder that when the revealed and the observed seem hard to combine, it is because we know too little. . . . What is quite clear from these chapters in the light of other scriptures is their doctrine that mankind is a unity, created in God's image, and fallen in Adam by the one act of disobedience: and these things are as strongly asserted on this understanding of God's word as on any other' (p. 30). I agree wholeheartedly.
5. An Historic Fall

If we concede that an historic Adam is credible and not a relapse into naive literalism, we can be much more open-minded about the reality of an historic Fall.

The story of the Fall is of a four-fold breakage in relationships: of humankind from God, from each other, from the rest of creation, and through the consequent disorder, a breakage of order within our individual lives. "This multiple disarray is from one aspect, our punishment pronounced from God; from another it is the plain outcome of our anarchy." 36

Jonathan Clatworthy suggests that "part of the world’s goodness is the capacity God has given humans to chose freely between good and evil. The ability to sin needs four ingredients: freedom, creativity, law and desire, described in turn in Genesis ch. 2." 37 This is sometimes expressed as the 'risk' God took in giving us freewill. Francisco Ayala has examined the implications of this from the point of view of an evolutionist 38. He argues that there has been strong selection in the past for high intellectual ability, and this has pleiotropically (or serendipitally) resulted in a state where moral judgements become possible. His belief is that this state is not due to any fitness gains resulting from moral decision-making as is assumed by sociobiologists, i.e. it is not a Darwinian adaptation. Furthermore 'biology is insufficient for determining which moral codes should be accepted... moral norms are not determined by biological processes, but by cultural traditions and principles that are products of human history'. In this way, Ayala distances himself from evolutionary humanists such as Julian Huxley, G.G. Simpson or C.H. Waddington who see the direction of human evolution as directed by the evolutionary process itself. As Ayala points out, the approach of such authors falls into the naturalistic fallacy, because it is based on value judgements about what is or is not progressive in evolution 39.

I am quite happy to go this far with Ayala but I want to go further: for a theist, the human history which shaped our culture(s) is not fortuitous, but is an outworking of God's ordering and outworking purpose. To regard history as nothing more than a collection of contingent, deterministic influences is an expression of old-fashioned deism 40. Perhaps the most important lesson from

36. Kidner, loc. cit. p. 73.
contemporary science-religion analyses is the possibility as well as theological necessity of a God who upholds and decrees the events of our world moment by moment. One of the few truly original thinkers in this area in the past few decades has been Donald MacKay, and probably his most important legacy is his exploration and convincing application of a logical compatibility between scientific and divine causation.\(^{41}\)

For MacKay and those who follow his acceptance of a critical complementarity and repudiation of ontological reductionism, a strong doctrine of providence is a necessary consequence of a God who works in and through natural processes and who is both immanent and transcendent as scripture insists. The creature who became Adam was in the place and at the time of God's choosing.

This leads us to God's continuing care and love despite Adam's failure. The early Church theologians argued over whether Adam's sin was inevitable.\(^{42}\) It was a sterile debate. More pertinently, we sometimes speak of the loss of human-kind's 'primaeval innocence' or 'original righteousness'. The bible speaks of the need for 'redemption', implying the recovery of something that was lost. Oliver O'Donovan focuses on this: 'When we ask what it is that was given and lost, and must now be recovered, the answer is not just "mankind", but mankind in his context, of the ruler of the ordered creation that God has made; for the created order, too, cannot be itself while it lacks the authoritative and beneficent rule that man was to give it...'.\(^{43}\)

O'Donovan's understanding brings us starkly back to the Fall: as mere animals we could not fall, because we were not in a personal relationship to the creator. Once we became Homo divinus, our rebellion necessarily disrupted the newly-established relationship; we offended against the harmony intended by the creator for the men and women he had made in his image and for whom he had provided an environment. The notion of God's creature in God's place is meaningless to the non-believer. He or she is bound to reject the idea of a Fall, unless it has consequences in nature: can we identify God's curses in nature? Did Adam's sin (however we interpret it) produce any discernible effects which can be unequivocally attributed to the event we call the Fall?

6. Consequences of the Fall

In the Genesis 3 story, we are told that God cursed the serpent ('On your belly you will crawl, and dust you will eat all the days of your life' v. 14) and the earth

\(^{41}\) See, for example, his essay on 'The sovereignty of God in the natural world' (Scottish Journal of Theology, 21: 13–26, 1968, reprinted in The Open Mind and Other Essays: 184–196. Tinker, M. (ed.) Leicester. IVP, 1988). Colin Russell has examined the relationship between a deterministic world-view and a caring creator in his Templeton Lectures, published as The Earth, Humanity and God (London: UCL Press, 1994); see also the discussion and references in Jeeves & Berry. loc. cit..
(‘It will yield thorns and thistles v. 18’) and told Eve and Adam that there would be consequences of their disobedience (‘Great labour in childbearing. . . . You will desire your husband and he will be your master’; and ‘You will get your food from [the earth] only by labour . . . only by the sweat of your brow will you win your bread’, respectively), including exclusion from the garden of Eden.

These statements have to be interpreted in terms of God’s verdict that creation was ‘“good” . . . “very good”’. If Adam lived in Eden around 10,000 years ago, there were certainly thorns and thistles, earthquakes and cruelty on earth during (and before) his time. To our way of thinking they are signs that all was not ‘very good’ but that is our own, culture-mediated perspective. The point about creation is that it is God’s work alone (Psalm 104): God through Christ created ‘everything in heaven and earth . . . the whole universe has been created through him and for him’ (Colossians 1:16). It had no other origin; apart from God, there was nothing before creation. Consequently, creation necessarily reflects God and his character—and the undeviating theme of scripture is the utter, reliable, radically absolute goodness of God. As God is good, so is creation: any defects and blemishes which we find in the original (i.e. pre-Adamic) creation can only be in our interpretation of it. The adjective translated ‘good’ in Genesis 1 draws attention to an object’s quality and fitness, like the English word. But the Hebrew word relates more closely to the mind and opinion of God than the English one. God is preeminently good, and his goodness is reflected in his works (Psalm 100:5). As in so many ways, God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, and our ways are not his ways (Isaiah 55:8). We may shudder at what we regard as waste and futility in nature, but we must beware of questioning the ways of a perfect God. Certainly we are not free to ascribe immorality to natural events and processes simply on the grounds that they are the effects of the Fall.

Bearing this in mind, how can (or should) we interpret Genesis 3?

a. The Serpent

Henri Blocher points out that ‘everything concerning the serpent can be read in a “naive” manner. . . . Such literal readings carry us into the worlds of legend and popular fables . . . this writer’s approach (i.e. the author of Genesis 3) and his

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44. Assuming creation ex nihilo: see my article in Science & Christian Belief, 7: 22, 1995. The concept is not explicit in the bible, but if the creation accounts are taken merely to describe God organizing formless matter, we are left with the problem of matter existing alongside God and the implication that God is not absolute (q.v. Kelsey, D. The doctrine of creation from nothing. In Evolution and Creation: 176–196 McMullin, E. ed.). University of Notre Dame Press. 1985).
45. Wenham, loc. cit. p. 18.
46. Stephen Jay Gould has written about efforts to learn moral lessons from nature (including William Buckland – see note 10). His conclusion – albeit non-theological – is that ‘the factual state of the world does not teach us how we, with our powers for good and evil, should alter or preserve it in the most moral manner’ (Nonmoral nature. In Hen’s Teeth and Horse’s Toes: 32–45. New York: W.W. Norton. 1983).
treatment of the two trees make it almost certain that he does not speak literally.

When we examine the text in detail, we find that Genesis 2:4–3:24 falls into seven 'scenes' (2:5–17; 2:18–25; 3:1–5; 3:6–8; 3:9–13; 3:14–21; 3:22–24) arranged in mirror-image (palistrophic) style, with the fifth scene of the 'curses' (3:14–21) a reflection of the second, the story of the creation of Eve (2:18–25). In both, the action takes place within the Garden, with God as the principal actor. The earlier scene describes the ideal, the later the actual. Each scene asserts the hierarchy of God as supreme, the man next, and finally the relationship between the man and the rest of creation. Wenham argues that the curse should not be taken merely as 'a “just-so” story explaining why snakes are so unpleasant; many elements in it are highly symbolic, and the dialogue between snake and woman employs ambiguity and innuendo with great subtlety. If elsewhere in the narrative we have double-entendre and symbolic language, it would be strange for it to disappear here, so that the snake becomes just a snake and not an anti-God symbol. Once admitted that the serpent symbolizes sin, death, and the power of evil, it becomes much more likely that the curse envisages a long struggle between good and evil, with mankind eventually triumphing. Such an interpretation fits in well with 4:7 where Cain is warned of sin lurking to catch him, but is promised victory if he resists. 48

Blocher concludes similarly 49, seeing the key to the interpretation of the serpent in Revelation, which twice refers to 'the dragon, that ancient Serpent, who is the Devil or Satan' (Revelation 12:9, 20:2); Blocher points out that Paul makes the same identification in 2 Corinthians 11:3,14. The serpent is a symbol, and it is the serpent who is cursed; this is the context for the story.

b. The Man and the Woman

Adam and Eve are not explicitly cursed, but their disobedience has significant consequences for them both. Their sentences take the form of disruption in their appointed roles. The woman was created to be the man’s companion and the mother of children (2:18, 23–24). The first part of the judgment is that parturition will be painful, the second is that the relationship of 'love and cherish' will become 'desire and dominate'. For the man, the land is cursed 'until he returns to the earth' (3:18); as the woman suffers in her fundamental role as wife and mother, the man will be afflicted in his role as farmer and provider. However, for Claus Westermann 'the real sentence is expulsion from the Garden (vv. 20–24); this is the only punishment that fits the crime. To make this clear, we should first read the narrative without verses 14–19, and then consider those verses as a unit. They develop and expand the punishment; they describe human existence without God. They are not actually punishments, but rather states that reflect the condition of separation from God. 50 David Atkinson agrees: 'The people who

hide behind the trees for cover from God's searching and questioning voice experience disruption. . . . Blessing becomes curse. . . . Complementarity becomes subordination. . . . Work becomes toil . . . .

For Adam and Eve, exclusion from Eden was banishment from God's presence, comparable in later years to expulsion for Israelites from the camp with its Tabernacle (Leviticus 13:45, 46; Numbers 5:2–4; 1 Samuel 15:35). Away from the Garden, God seems to be distant, and life without God becomes detached from our understanding of a purpose in history. Notwithstanding, Wenham argues that the stories of Cain and Abel and the genealogy in Genesis 5 linking Adam with Noah shows that the author of Genesis 3 treated his account as being about real people. This encourages Wenham to see Eden and the Fall as having historical significance, 'both paradigmatic and protohistorical. It is paradigmatic in that it offers a clear and simple analysis of the nature of sin and its consequences, albeit in rich and symbolic language. . . . But in all societies and especially the tightly knit society of ancient Israel, the behaviour of the parents has great impact on their children for good or ill; it therefore follows that the disobedience of the first couple from whom Genesis traces the descent of the whole human race must have had grave consequences for all mankind. In this sense, then, the story offers a protohistorical account of man's origins and his sin'.

c. Nature

Does this interpretation help at all in understanding and identifying the effects of the Fall on nature, 'the profound changes [which] made the external objective world abnormal' according to Francis Schaeffer?

The key verses in this respect are Romans 8:19–22: 'The created universe is waiting with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed. It was made subject to frustration, not of its own choice but by the will of him who subjected it, yet with the hope that the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and is to enter upon the glorious liberty of the children of God. Up to the present, as we know, the whole created universe in all its parts, groans as if in the pangs of childbirth.'

This is a difficult passage. Most expositors do not help much. Handley Moule says, 'Among the many explanations of its meaning, two are the most representative and important. Of these (A) takes the passage to refer to the vague but deep longings of mankind for a better future; (B) to the longings, in a certain sense of "creation" as distinguished from man, for a coming glory.'

52. Wenham, loc. cit., p. 91.
Lloyd-Jones seems to regard it as wholly apocalyptic.\textsuperscript{56} James Dunn comments: 'The point Paul is presumably making, through somewhat obscure language, is that God followed the logic of his proposed subjecting of creation to man by subjecting it yet further in consequence of man's fall, so that it might serve as an appropriate context for fallen man: a futile world to engage the futile mind of man. . . . There is an out-of-sortness, a disjointedness about the created order which makes it a suitable habitation for man at odds with his creator.'\textsuperscript{57}

But what is this 'disjointedness' in creation? Blocher points out that while Paul 'declares that the whole created order has been subjected to vanity because of Adam – for the fall of the head had repercussions over the whole domain entrusted to him . . . he gives no indication of either the extent or, above all, the form of the change. The Psalms which sing of God's creation as we now see it and the texts in the book of Job which celebrate its awesome beauty stand as a warning against the temptation to exaggerate the difference for nature itself.'\textsuperscript{58} Blocher quotes Arthur Lewis, 'Nothing in the narrative suggests that the realm of nature has been altered in a fundamental way. . . . There is no indication that the Lord God added thorns to the roses or sharp teeth to the carnivorous animals.'\textsuperscript{59}

In his commentary on Genesis, Derek Kidner refers directly to the Romans passage in a way that links the pre-Fall situation with our present existence: 'Leaderless, the choir of creation can only grind on in discord. It seems from Romans 8:19–23 and from what is known of the pre-human world that there was a state of travail in nature from the first, which man was empowered to "subdue" until he relapsed into disorder himself.'\textsuperscript{60}

Charles Cranfield has powerfully extended the same idea with a reductio ad absurdum argument:

'What sense can there be in saying that "the sub-human creation – the Jungfrau, for example, or the Matterhorn, or the planet Venus – suffers frustration by being prevented from properly fulfilling the purpose of its existence?" The answer must surely be that the whole magnificent theatre of the universe, together with all its splendid properties and all its life, created for God's glory, is cheated of its true fulfilment so long as man, the chief actor in the great drama of God's praise, fails to contribute his rational part. The Jungfrau and the Matterhorn and the planet Venus and all living things too, man alone excepted, do indeed glorify God in their own ways; but, since their praise is destined to be not a collection of individual offerings but part of a magnificent whole, the united praise of the whole creation, they are prevented from being fully that which they were created to be, so long as man's part is missing, just as all the

\textsuperscript{57} Dunn, loc. cit. p. 487, 488.
\textsuperscript{58} Blocher, loc. cit. 1984, p. 183.
\textsuperscript{60} Kidner. loc. cit., p. 73.
other players in a concerto would be frustrated of their purpose if the soloist were to fail to play his part.  

Blocher makes essentially the same point: 'If man obeys God, he would be the means of blessing to the earth; but in his insatiable greed ... and in his short-sighted selfishness, he pollutes and destroys it. He turns a garden into a desert (cf. Revelation 11:18). That is the main thrust of the curse of Genesis 3.

Logic and exegesis come together to suggest that the earth’s curse is not a change in ecological law, but a massive failure in what an ecologist might call a ‘key-stone species’: the fault lies in human carelessness and greed. By rejecting our God-given purpose of dominion, we sanction disorder so that the ‘whole created universe groans’.  

The weeds and thorns of the Genesis curse are a direct and causal consequence of the stewardship which God ordained for us; ‘man who is no longer responsible is not man who God intended’. The irony is that ‘when new technology eases the burden of labour in many respects this is only to be welcomed; but it is typical that at a time when work has been lightened considerably, we speak more than ever of stress and strain.’

7. Conclusions and Implications

The Fall is not primarily about disease and disaster. Rather it is a way of describing the fracture in relationship between God and the human creature made by God in his own image; it is produced by the self-seeking disobedience of the creature. This rupture means that we rattle around in our space, as it were, producing disorder within ourselves, with our neighbours, and with our environment. Our biological nature is such that we continue randomly to ricochet with our ‘environment’ (human and non-human) until our relationship with God is restored and we become ‘at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ who has given us access to that grace in which we now live; and we exult in the hope of the divine glory which is to be ours’ (Romans 5:1,2) – words of Paul which condition and explain the promise for the state of nature which he describes in Romans 8:19–21. C.F.D. Moule comments that these verses mean ‘that man is responsible before God for nature. As long as man refuses to play the part assigned him by God, so long the entire world of nature is frustrated and dislocated. It is only when man is truly fitting into his proper position as a son in

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64. It is worth noting that neither weeds nor thorns are intrinsically evil. The definition of a weed is an organism growing where it is not wanted; a thorn is simply a defence for its possessor.


relation to God his Father that the dislocation in the whole of nature will be reduced'.

The most important implication of the Fall is the need for redemption to make good the break in relationship with God. The possibility of doing this is, of course, the gospel; we are assured that God, through Christ, has 'reconciled all things to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood on the cross—all things, whether on earth or heaven' (Colossians 1:20).

But there are other issues:

a. Disorder arises from our failure to exercise dominion or properly tend our garden. We are called to be responsible stewards not mere protectors of our environment. The often repeated indictment of Lynn White that Christianity is to blame for the ecological crisis because it insists 'that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends' or of Clare Palmer that stewardship implies an absentee landlord miss the active involvement laid upon us in the creation stories (as well as such teaching as that of the Parable of the Talents). Interestingly White concluded that 'what we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. . . . Both our present science and our present technology are so tainted with orthodox Christian arrogance towards nature that no solution for our ecologic crisis can be expected from them alone.' A sociological analysis by Robin Grove-White points in the same way. He believes that 'the orthodox description [of the environmental crisis] embodies a seriously inadequate conception of human nature at its very centre . . . of an isolated, atomistic individual . . . a being for whom social interaction and mutuality are merely means for achieving personal ends . . . a human person whose only authoritative knowledge is that modelled on the natural sciences, positively conceived.'

Surely the need identified by both White and Grove-White is for men and women made whole in Christ.

b. The bible teaching on stewardship carries with it the message that it is positively wrong to adopt a biocentric or deep ecology attitude to our environment. We are called to be managers not curators or mere actors on a neutral stage.

c. Romans 8:21, a key text in understanding the Fall, implies that creation will

67. Moule, loc. cit., p. 12. This interpretation is wholly contrary to that of Clatworthy (loc. cit.) who regards 'Every theory (of the Fall) involves compromising God's power or knowledge or goodness. . . . Humanity-as-a-whole is up against the way things are. In this sense, the doctrine of the Fall converts Jewish monotheism back into pagan polytheism' (p. 33). In his enthusiasm for 'green' involvement with creation, Clatworthy is forced to eviscerate the doctrine.

68. The word implies rule. But kingly rule in ancient Israel was sensitive pastoral care, not arbitrary dictatorship.


71. White, loc. cit.


be renewed; that it is more than a temporary theatre for God’s saving work. This is a consistent theme; even such verses as 2 Peter 3:1 (‘The day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will disappear with a great rushing sound, the elements will be dissolved in flames, and the earth with all that is in it will be brought to judgement’) is in a passage which emphasizes the scrutiny of human deeds rather than annihilation, consistent with other passages about the refining effects of fire. Indeed ‘all eschatologies anticipate significant degrees of continuity between our present earth and the future world . . . since God will transform the earth we now have, this earth must be precious to God and proper stewardship of nonhuman nature is a task with eternal consequences.’

d. The interpretation adopted in this paper could be regarded as naturalistic in suggesting that the overriding and determining key is the relationship between God and humankind and not some physical change at the creation of humans or direct pathological occurrences following Adam’s disobedience. Obviously, my naturalism is utterly different to that of either Peter Singer or E.O. Wilson: it depends crucially on God working through providence, in bestowing his image on our first parents, and his response as a jealous God (Exodus 20: 2–6; Deuteronomy 4:24,25) to our disobedience to his first command (or constraint).

e. Commentators often write about the need for creation to be ‘redeemed’. The bible does not explicitly connect redemption with the non-human creation, but it comes very close with the statement that God chose ‘to reconcile all things to himself [by Christ], making peace through the shedding of his blood on the cross – all things, whether on earth or in heaven’ (Colossians 1:20). O’Donovan is confident enough to make the connection and link it to our involvement: ‘In speaking of the redemption of all creation, we must not allow the idea to float free in independence of the revealing of the sons of God (Romans 8:19ff). We cannot speculate on what “redemption” will mean for the non-human creation, and yet Scripture speaks of such a redemption. For redemption is what God has done for the whole and not just for a part of that he once made.’ This leads us beyond a mere restoration of the past as assumed by the traditional

75. ‘Sociobiology . . . enables us to see ethics as a mode of human reasoning which develops in a group context . . . so ethics loses its air of mystery. Its principles are not laws written up in Heaven. Nor are they absolute truths about the universe, known by intuition. The principles of ethics come from our own nature as social reasoning beings’ (The Expanding Circle, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 149).
understanding of the Fall. O’Donovan continues, ‘The redemption of the world and mankind does not serve only to put us back into the Garden of Eden where we began. It leads us on to the future destiny to which even in the Garden of Eden, we were already directed. For creation was given to us with its own goal and purpose, so that the outcome of the world’s story cannot be a cyclical return to the beginnings, but must fulfil that purpose in the freeing of creation from its “futility”.’ 79

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