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First and Last Adam

Probably the greatest obstacle to belief in the existence of a benevolent Creator is the presence in the world of so much suffering that cannot be attributed simply to human sin. An earthquake, for example, destroys both good and bad together. Any Christian who wishes to share his faith with others, particularly one who visits people pastorally, cannot avoid grappling with this question.

A common way to absolve God of blame for these things is to blame them all on 'the Fall', to say that man and his world were created perfect, but he 'fell' from this state and brought the rest of creation down with him, by his disobedience recorded in Genesis 3. This concept is embedded so firmly in Western Christian thought that it may surprise some to realize that it is nowhere taught in scripture,¹ as I shall demonstrate later in this article. We may be thankful that it is unscriptural, since this concept raises more problems than it solves.

Theological objections

Quite apart from the question whether a 'perfect' being who can lose that perfection can really be said to be perfect, the traditional view of 'the Fall' raises difficulties for our view of the Incarnation. Did the Son of God take upon himself 'fallen' or 'unfallen' human nature?

Paul's parallelism between Christ and Adam (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21, 22, 45-49) might suggest he took the 'unfallen' nature that Adam had before he disobeyed. But, if being conceived 'in the likeness of sinful man' (Rom. 8:3) meant that he only *appeared* to be the same as us, but actually was 'unfallen' while we are 'fallen', this would seem perilously close to the 'Docetist' heresy, that denied that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh' (1 John 4:2). How could he have 'been tempted in every way, just as we are' (Heb. 4:15) unless he fought and overcame in the flesh that propensity to sin that is claimed to be the common lot of 'fallen' man?

On the other hand, to affirm that he took upon himself 'fallen' human nature may appear to deny that he was 'without sin', as Edward Irving

1. On Ezek. 28:11-19, the only possible exception, see footnote 1 to R. H. Allaway, *Expository Times* (1986), 97, 108-110.

was accused of teaching (falsely, I believe) when he upheld this view in the last century.² Even greater problems are raised if the classic Augustinian view of the Fall is held, whereby 'fallen' man not only inherits a propensity to sin from Adam, but Adam's guilt.³ In this case, Christ, if sharing our 'fallen' nature, *deserved* to die, so his death was not that of the righteous undeservedly bearing the sins of the unrighteous in their place, and could bring no one forgiveness.

Scientific objections

Contrary to popular thought, the major scientific objections to ideas of a Fall are not theories of human evolution. Darwinian evolution is by no means proven, and, even accepting that Man may have been derived from other animal forms, if being 'in the image of God' means having a capacity to have a relationship with him, which is a straightforward yes-or-no matter, one could postulate a creature who first had such a capacity, who would then be the first 'man'. The historical disobedience of Adam, to sever that relationship, is not, then, incompatible with theistic evolution.

The 'Fall of Man', regardless of whether he is thought of as 'evolved' or 'specially created', is contrary to something far more basic, namely the Laws of Thermodynamics. Human death, like all death, is a consequence of the Second Law, that in any physical process, the total entropy (disorder) of the universe must increase. As Paul observes in Rom. 8:21, the whole of creation is in 'bondage to decay'. Since he says that creation will be set free from that bondage, along with redeemed humanity, at the Parousia, it would presumably follow that, if Man 'fell' into that state, creation fell into it along with him. Such, as has been said, is the classic Western view.

In that case, there could have been no death or decay in the world of nature prior to Adam's disobedience. Yet there self-evidently was such. Even if the entire fossil record is written off as a consequence of the Deluge,⁴ we still have to explain astronomical observations from systems existing ages before man, which appear to be following the Second Law just as in our time. The only way to fit a 'Fall' into this would be to take the 'Omphalos'⁵ argument to an incredible extreme

2. See G. Strachan, *The Pentecostal Theology of Edward Irving*, Edinburgh (1973).

3. e.g. Augustine, *The City of God*, 13:14.

4. as in J. C. Whitcomb Jnr. and H. M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood*, Grand Rapids (1961).

5. Greek for 'navel', which, it is argued, Adam would have had, even though he had never been in a womb. Similarly, trees created fully grown would have had rings as of earlier growth, and so forth.

and argue that God not only created light from distant parts of the universe so that it appeared to have come from objects that had been there for millions of years, when they were only created two days before man, but that he then changed that light on its way, so that it appeared to have come from objects that had been 'fallen' for millions of years, when they only 'fell' shortly before. Such an argument, which turns the whole universe into a gigantic hoax perpetrated by God, makes a mockery of Paul's claim that 'God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made' (Rom. 1:20).

Now let us consider what the Bible actually teaches.

Man in the Bible

It is often assumed that, because Adam was warned, 'You must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die' (Gen. 2:17), he was created inherently immortal, and lost that immortality by his disobedience. He 'fell' from eternal life. Yet we read in Gen. 3:22, 'The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live for ever.' The clear implication of this is that he had not yet 'eaten of the tree of life', had not yet gained immortality. He died the day he disobeyed, in that he lost something potentially coming to him, not something he already had. Man's initial state was one of probation, not perfection.

That life in the Garden of Eden was not intended to be Man's final state was recognized by the speculations of some first century Rabbis. Commenting on Gen. 2:7 (where there are two 'yods' in the Hebrew for 'formed', by contrast with Gen. 2:19, where 'formed' has only one 'yod') it was argued that man had a two-fold formation: one (in common with the animals) 'of earth' in 'this age' and one 'of heaven' belonging to 'the age to come'. This throws light on the meaning of 1 Cor. 15:44f.

If there is an animal body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is also written:

'The first man, Adam, became a living animal;
the last Adam, a life-giving Spirit'

But it is not the spiritual which is first, but the animal, then the spiritual. The first man is of the dust of the earth, the second man is of heaven.⁷

'Of heaven' is not a passing reference to Christ's pre-incarnate

6. see Allaway, *op. cit.*

7. my translation, see *op. cit.*

state, but speaks of the nature of his resurrection body (as in 2 Cor. 5:1–4), the destiny that Adam should have had, but lost for himself and all 'in' him, and which Christ has gained for himself and all 'in' him. (1 Cor. 15:21, 22).

Such appears to have been the view of Christ himself, in Mark 12:25 and parallels. Since man and woman, as created, were ordered to 'be fruitful and increase in number' (Gen. 1:28) and 'become one flesh' (Gen. 2:24), the resurrection state cannot be that in which man was created.

This view of Man's initial state was held by such early Christian apologists as Irenaeus, Tatian and Theophilus, though for another reason.⁸ It was still the view of later theologians, such as Athanasius, who writes in 'De Incarnatione':

He brought them into his paradise and gave them a law, so that, if they kept the grace and remained good they would enjoy the life of paradise, without sorrow, pain or care, in addition to having *the promise of immortality in heaven*.⁹

We may, then, conceive of Man as created a 'perishable' creature in a 'perishable' universe, just as we are now, though protected from its dangers by his fellowship with God in the 'Garden' (as Jesus was able to heal diseases and still the storm),¹⁰ but with the prospect, when he had completed all he was intended to do in this life, of being transformed into a glorified, heavenly, spiritual body, without passing through death, as Christians will be who are alive at the Parousia (John 11:26, 1 Cor. 15:51, 52). He would have had freedom from suffering and the promise of immortality, but only as the gifts of God, conditional on obedience, not as inherent consequences of his created state.

The Son of God became *Man*, just as we are. Yet his perfect obedience in our state meant that he bore death undeservedly in our place. Thus he won for us the destiny of which Adam, by his disobedience, fell-short, and of which all Adam's descendants have fallen-short ever since (Rom. 3:23).

8. They distinguished (incorrectly) between the 'image' and 'likeness' in which God intended to make man in Gen. 1:26. Since he was only created in God's *image* (v. 28), it was argued, the *likeness* was still to come. For references, see Allaway, *op. cit.*

9. Athanasius *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione* e.t. R. W. Thomson, Oxford, 141 (my italics), 1971.

10. The curses on childbearing and the ground in Gen. 3:16–19 are then seen to be curses on Adam and Eve in being expelled from the Garden, so they are then subject to the unpleasant consequences of life in our world, that had been there all along. While Christ, by virtue of his relationship with the Father, could have protected himself from these, he voluntarily chose not to do so, for our sakes.

Creation in the Bible

Someone may ask, 'If the universe in which Man was first created was 'in bondage to decay' just as ours is, and hence imperfect, how could it be said to be 'good' so often in Gen 1? Yet God is said to have pronounced his creation 'good' on every day, even though it was not complete until the sixth day. Even the completed 'good' creation of Genesis 1 is still imperfect, since the night and the sea, though restricted, are still present, but in the 'new heaven and earth' in Revelation 'there will be no more night' (22:5) and 'there was no longer any sea' (21:1). Why should it be 'good' to have present the night and sea, which, in Gen. 1:2 seem to be symbols of darkness and chaos, only one step removed from the Nothing from which God created all things?

Might it not be because God desired to create, not robots, but beings who would freely respond to him in love, who could be adopted as his children? Such a response was only possible in an 'imperfect' world, in which Man, poised between 'light' and 'dark', could have a choice, to 'eat of the tree of life', to humbly turn to the light and grow in God's grace, and finally receive the gift of his eternal life, or to 'eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil', to turn his back on the light, go his own way in pride, and fall back into the darkness, chaos and ultimate non-being from which he was created. Alas, Adam disobeyed, and died, as all 'in Adam' have done ever since, but the eternal Son of God, making within that human nature, that we all share, the filial response to his Father that he had made from all eternity, overcame the same weakness and temptation, that we all face, to gain the gift of eternal life for all 'in him'.

This is not to belittle our present creation. No doubt it was always God's intention, when it had fulfilled its purpose of providing the environment in which he could 'bring many sons to glory' (Heb. 2:10), to deliver it from its 'bondage to decay' to share that glory with them (Rom. 8:21). Though 'subjected to frustration' (Rom. 8:20) by man's disobedience, the resurrection of Christ is the assurance that not only we, but all creation, *will* one day share his glory with him 'that God may be all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28).

A pastoral postscript

I began this article with the problem of suffering. It is not my purpose in the above to explain such suffering away. Job never does find out why he had to suffer, but it is enough for him that he has encountered God in his own experience (42:1-6), and so *knows* the God with whom

he deals. The Christian response to suffering is not to produce some glib answer to explain it, but to point to Christ, in whom we meet the God behind creation, who in his love shared our suffering with us and for us. The great value of this view of Adam's disobedience as a 'fall-short' rather than a 'fall' is that it enables us to see Christ as both truly a 'second Adam' and truly one of us, sharing our human nature as we now experience it.