

Study Guides for Faith & Science Integration

Summer 2017

How Can We Reconcile the Theory of Evolution and Our Theology of the Fall? (Participant's Guide)

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Participant's Guide to

How Can We Reconcile the Theory of Evolution and Our Theology of the Fall?

A Study of William Cavanaugh and James K. A. Smith's
Evolution and the Fall

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How to Use This Material?

This study of various ways to view the theology of the Fall and original sin in light of modern science (the theory of evolution in particular) and cultural influences is composed of six modules (not counting the introductory module). Each module contains two sections. The first section presents a set of Reading and Reflection questions that are to be completed before each meeting and are meant to help the participant wrestle with the concepts introduced in that week's chapters. The second section consists of two (or more) Discussion questions, which will be written by the participants and the leader as they read. Both sets of questions are meant to foster discussion, but your group should by no means limit itself to the questions contained in these sections.

This study is intended for **informal, small group** discussion, such as that of a Bible study, catechism, or family reunion. Each theme may be unpacked on its own, but it is the hope of the authors that the entire study may be useful to the interested reader (leader and participant alike). The study is also aimed toward **high school students, college students, and post-college adults** with an interest in how science and the Christian faith interact.

As you read, it is our hope that you will come across (and come up with) questions which challenge you, both in understanding your personal faith and in understanding science. In these questions, you will have the opportunity to grow through asking and answering these questions in a healthy setting. Consider the context and history of these questions: Why has the church historically believed in *this* answer or *that* answer? What might you say if you were a Christian scientist? How might you be challenged to defend your answer?

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Week 0: Before You Begin

Overview Questions

Over the next six weeks, you and your small group will discuss Evolution and the Fall and topics related to the theory of evolution and our theology of the Fall. These pre-questions are designed to help you think about these topics and to provide you with a record of how your thoughts have developed throughout the session. These questions might not be discussed, but please answer them thoughtfully and honestly nonetheless.

How do you interpret the story in Genesis 3?

What impact has the Fall had on humankind?

What impact has the Fall had on the natural world?

What implications might biological evolution have for your understanding of the Fall? Can your theology of the Fall and biological evolution be compatible?

Read the bios of the authors who contributed to this book. How many theologians are represented? How many biologists are represented?

Do these authors seem qualified to speak on the theology of the Fall? On the theory of evolution?

Module 1: An Introduction to Human Origins

Chapters covered: "Introduction," "Human Origins"

Reading and Reflection

"Introduction: Beyond Galileo to Chalcedon"

1. Neither William Cavanaugh nor James K. A. Smith are scientists. How might their educational or occupational background impact how they approach the topic of biological evolution and the Fall?
2. What do you think of the Galilean model? What is your perception of the interaction between Galileo and the Catholic Church? Do you think that geocentrism (the idea that the sun orbits the earth) was a "key theological conviction"? What parallels do you see between conflict about what lies at the center of the solar system and conflict about the nature of the Fall?
3. Smith and Cavanaugh say that the Galilean model assumes "a paradigm in which science is taken to be a neutral 'describer' of 'the way things are'" (xvi). Describe your understanding of what science is. What is the goal of science? Does it fit or conflict with the model that science serves to describe the nature of Creation?
4. What do you think the "core" markers of the Christian tradition are?

Module 2: Thoughts on Original Sin

Chapters covered: "In Adam All Die," "What Stands on the Fall"

Reading and Reflection

"In Adam All Die?"

1. What might it mean for Jack Mahoney to reject the Fall and original sin? What do you know of the development of the theology of original sin?
2. On page 30, Deane-Drummond says that, "Theology is to be written anew in every generation, even if that means that it is in need of constant revision." What do you think of that statement? Do you think that this is a helpful way to view theology?
3. What is niche construction theory? How is it related to a theology of original sin?
4. How does Dean-Drummond understand original sin? Do you agree or disagree with this position, and why?

"What Stands on the Fall?"

1. What did John Schneider mean when he said that "matters of western teachings on origins cannot be resolved hermeneutically, but can only be resolved *theologically*" (49)?

2. What stages compose the basic plot of the Biblical story, according to Smith?

3. What do you think of the idea that pre-Fall humanity was not perfect? What implications might this have for our understanding of the basic plot of the Biblical story?

Discussion Questions

In addition to answering the Reading and Reflection questions, please write two of your own questions based on the reading for this week.

1.

2.

Module 3: Reading Genesis 3 for the Themes

Chapters covered: “Reading Genesis 3 Attentive to Human Evolution”

Reading and Reflection

“Reading Genesis 3 Attentive to Human Evolution”

1. What do you think of the statement, “As an alternative to a naively concordist attempt at reconciling scripture with science, the embrace of NOMA by contemporary Christians is fully understandable” (70)? Do you think Middleton is right to describe positions that try to maintain the literal historicity of the creation account while affirming certain parts of modern science as “naively concordist”?
2. What do you think of Brown’s idea that science may “nudge the work of biblical theology in directions it has not yet ventured” (71)? Do you think that science should inform our theology and/or that theology should inform our science?
3. What do you think of Middleton’s description of what it means for humans to bear the image of God (*imago Dei*)?
4. What do you think of the idea that death is “the antithesis of flourishing” (79)? Does it fit with your understanding of the creation account?

Discussion Questions

In addition to answering the Reading and Reflection questions, please write two of your own questions based on the reading for this week.

1.

2.

Module 4: New Testament Views and Apologetics of Tradition

Chapters covered: “Adam, What Have You Done?” and “The Mystery of Adam”

Reading and Reflection

“Adam, What Have You Done?”

1. What do you think of the statement “Sin is not compulsory, even if its ubiquity might suggest its inevitability” (105)?
2. How does Paul understand “sin”? Does this understanding of sin fit with how you understand sin?
3. Green concludes that the doctrine of original sin is not an unavoidable conclusion based on readings of New Testament and second temple literature. Did the case he makes convince you? What evidences did you find most compelling or most troubling?

“The Mystery of Adam”

1. What (Who) is the “Paradox of paradoxes,” and why do you think that Riches use that phrase?

“On Learning to See a Fallen and Flourishing Creation”

1. How do your physical location, time, philosophical and religious commitments, and standing within your culture impact how you view the world generally (and your Christian faith in particular)? It may be helpful to consider the way someone in a different cultural and historical context may view the world and Christianity so you can contrast your view with his or hers.
2. Summarize Wirzba’s thoughts on a “Christian Way of Seeing” (164). Do you agree with his thoughts about a Christian hermeneutic of the world?
3. On page 167, Wirzba says that “Jesus is the interpretive key that allows us to unlock the meaning and significance of everything that is.” What do you think of that assessment? Does it fit with the way you view Creation? (If not, why?)

Discussion Questions

In addition to answering the Reading and Reflection questions, please write two of your own questions based on the reading for this week.

- 1.
- 2.

Module 6: Political Theologies and Another Perspective on the Relationship Between Science & Religion

Chapters covered: “Being All We Should Have Been and More” and “On Learning to See a Fallen and Flourishing Creation”

Reading and Reflection

“The Fall of the Fall in Early Modern Political Theory”

1. Have you considered the ways that political systems or philosophies influence our views of human nature and sinfulness previously? If so, in what contexts? What were your conclusions?
2. Do you agree with Thomas Aquinas’s assessment that “political community is natural” (185)?
3. Does the case Cavanaugh makes for the secularizing influence of politics convince you? If you believe that what Cavanaugh has written is accurate, how would that influence how you view politics? If you believe that his claims are untrue, how would you refute them?

“Is Science-Religion Conflict Always a Bad Thing?”

1. Do you agree that “mainstream Christian denominations take a similarly dim view of scientific creationism” (204)?

2. Some people pursue peace between science and faith by maintaining that science and religion deal with wholly different realms, and thus have no overlap. Others believe that science and faith cannot be in conflict because God authored both the book of Creation and the book of Scripture. Which position do you align with most closely? What are the strengths of each position? What are the weaknesses?

3. What is the soft irenic position? Does this perspective align with your view of science and religion, or does it conflict with your view? In what ways?

4. Is the idea that science is not consistently “truth tracking” sufficient evidence to mistrust science as a whole? Why or why not?

5. Have there been instances in which theology is not consistently “truth tracking” either? If there have been, should we mistrust theology as well? If not, how should we understand both theology and science, given what we know about human propensity to error?

6. Do you agree that pursuing knowledge of nature has less value than the pursuit of virtue (214)? What purpose does exploration of Creation serve?

Discussion Questions

In addition to answering the Reading and Reflection questions, please write two of your own questions based on the reading for this week.

1.

2.

Bibliography

Cavanaugh, William T; Smith, James K.A. *Evolution and the Fall*.

Grand Rapids: W.M. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017.

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