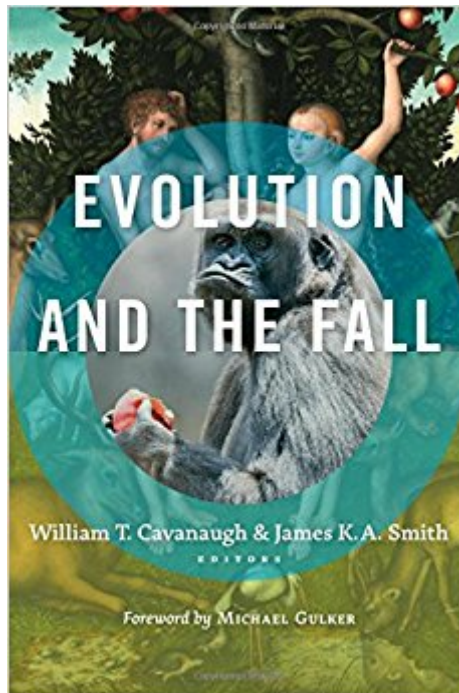




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# Evolution And The Fall



## Synopsis

What does it mean for the Christian doctrine of the Fall if there was no historical Adam? If humanity emerged from nonhuman primates—as genetic, biological, and archaeological evidence seems to suggest—then what are the implications for a Christian understanding of human origins, including the origin of sin? *Evolution and the Fall* gathers a multidisciplinary, ecumenical team of scholars to address these difficult questions and others like them from the perspectives of biology, theology, history, Scripture, philosophy, and politics.

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## Customer Reviews

John H. Walton of Wheaton College was stretched by this book and found myself sometimes arguing with it and at other times enthusiastically affirming it. We need to do more creative thinking about science, tradition, theology, and the Bible, and as the authors affirm, we have to do that as it has always been done when done well—as a community of God's people seeking to be faithful interpreters. We will have to take risks, as the authors and editors of this volume do, even as we constrain ourselves to the fundamentals that must not be undervalued or dismissed. This book salted my thinking with new ideas and sailed into what, for me, were some uncharted waters. Such mind-stimulating and faith-affirming contributions should be welcomed for thorough sifting as we work together to address the issues that so desperately cry for our attention.

William T. Cavanaugh is director of the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology and professor of Catholic studies at DePaul University. His other books include *Being Consumed* and *The Myth of Religious Violence*. James K. A. Smith is professor of philosophy at Calvin College, where he also holds the Byker Chair in Applied Reformed Theology and Worldview. His previous books include *How (Not) to Be Secular* and *You Are What You Love*.

The ten essays in this book provide a wide range of ways that Christians should approach the intersection of Christian doctrinal traditions with knowledge from outside those traditions. (p. xv) The editors note in their introduction that the scientific consensus points to the evolution of humans from primates. It indicates that humans emerged from nonhuman primates "as genetic, biological, and archeological evidences seems to suggest" in a group, not an original pair. The emergence of humans from primates seemingly leaves little room for an original historical state of innocence from which humanity suffered a Fall. What then are the implications for Christian theology's traditional account of origins, including both the origin of humanity and the origin of sin? (p. xv) The editors suggest a rather conservative approach, focused on tradition, wherein any modifications, revisions, and reformulations will (a) need to provide an account of how they are faithful extensions of the tradition and (b) have to concede that the discernment of what counts as faithful extension is determined by the community of practice, and not just the realm of expertise. (p. xxv) After Darrel R. Falk's opening essay on the scientific story of human origins, only two of the remaining nine essays directly address the issue of how developments in biological evolution could affect Christian doctrine. In his essay, James K.A. Smith takes a conservative approach, attempting to preserve a fall from good to not good without requiring belief in a first human couple. On the other hand, Joel B. Green appears to be more willing to make modifications because of how little Scripture actually has to say on the subject. After examining Jewish texts on Adam from the Second Temple period and the writings of Paul and James on the character of sin, Green finds that neither set of texts refers to a Fall as an event, and that neither suggests that humanity's sinfulness is determined by Adam's sin. Green suggests that a careful reading of Paul and James would be amenable to an account of the Fall that would be compatible with scientific evidence, that is, an account of the Fall as a gradual emergence of sin as a pervasive quality of human experience. (p. xxvii) Green concludes that the qualified view of original sin to which scripture bears witness does not require belief in a first human couple, Adam and Eve, or in

traditional notions of a historical *Ætall*, or in the traditional view of sin's genetic transmission. (p. 116) The book does a good job of discussing the problems with the traditional interpretations of Genesis and of the origin of sin. I would have liked it better if there had been more exploration of how best to proceed theologically given what we have learned about human evolution.

Several years ago, I read Mark Noll's *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*, and was excited by the orthodox vision and creativity it encouraged and anticipated on so many levels. The latest contribution to that effort is Bill Cavanaugh and Jamie Smith's *Evolution and the Fall*. In an age where, as Charles Taylor puts it, belief is contestable and contested, there is much to be confident and excited about. For any Christian engaging with science, history, philosophy, education, theology and/or culture (i.e. everyone), I highly recommend this book.

good.

I have not had a chance to fully read this book yet, but the table of contents and a quick thumbing through the book looks promising.

It is sad that atheists have come to this point, and that such misinformation exists to continue defending the modern fairytales that have been time and again proven false by the ever-growing group of scholars who argue that the most common way of reading Genesis since the early church fathers up to Aquinas was not as a science text-book, but as a metaphysical and symbolic text. I am confident that by the time my son grows up and has children of his own, atheists will be more enlightened and get on with the fact that religion is going in the world, and that their own ultra-darwinism or philosophical secularism will be viewed with the same scope as other mythologies that are thriving religions.

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