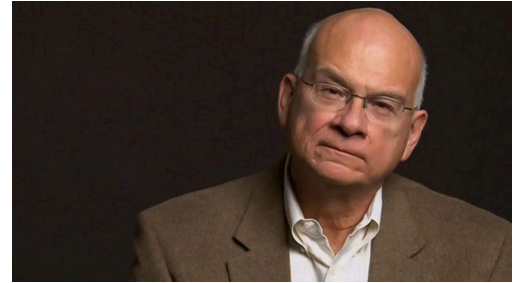




In Defense of Tim Keller

S. Joshua Swamidass 

<https://doi.org/10.54739/p9cc>



Recently, the well-known pastor, Tim Keller, participated in a [roundtable to discuss the essentials of creation theology](#) for every Christian. This conversation, admirably, touched on concerns we all care about deeply: the need to affirm universal rights and dignity of all humans in a world that continues to be scarred by racism. In response, the president of Biologos, [Deborah Haarsma](#), added [her own affirmation of universal rights and dignity](#). These conversations are difficult and important, so I am glad that they are happening. Especially in light of the ongoing protests in Saint Louis, where I live, the Church needs a coherent voice on race and racism.

The [BioLogos article](#) should be read in entirety. However, the article misrepresents Keller's statements in this video. Consequently, it is important to watch the video to understand Tim Keller's actual position.

The third essential belief proposed in this video is the supernatural, "de novo" creation of Adam and Eve as the first humans and sole progenitors of the entire human race. Keller, along with the other participants, believes this to be not only the clear message of Genesis but an essential part of the overall biblical message. ... We appeal to the Gospel Coalition to not frame the essentials of creation around the method God used to create humans, but around God's purpose and intent for humans. God made us to know him, love him, and to bear his image in this world. – [Deborah Haarsma](#)

The article's written description of the video is not accurate. Tim Keller does not make this claim. He makes no reference to "first humans" or "sole progenitors". All he says is that when he reads Scripture, he feels he must affirm *de novo* creation of Adam and Eve. In response to Keller's exegesis, Russell Moore adds the importance

BioLogos quickly endorsed [the science advanced in this article](#) as correct. After doing this, however, the scientific error in Haarsma's article was not corrected. For this reason, among others, I separated from BioLogos in 2017. In the aftermath, I was [permanently banned](#) from the BioLogos forum. Seventeen months later in 2019, BioLogos viewed a draft of [The Genealogical Adam and Eve](#). In response, [BioLogos silently edited Haarsma's response to Keller](#), removing one scientific error but introducing new ones. They did not explain why the change was made, clear the record, or open lines of communication with *Peaceful Science*. With the publication of the book, we eagerly await a public response from them.

of affirming *de novo* creation as a foundation for universal human rights.

I am an advocate of no-Adam *theologians*. But I am also an advocate of historical Adam *theologians* too. Without endorsing either side, I find it critical to accurately explain the science as a truthful witness of what I have seen.

My desire to defend of no-Adam theologians was an overriding reason why I chose to join the BioLogos speakers bureau in the first place. Regardless of my personal theology, they are full and dignified members of the Church. Most recently, [I argued to a conservative group of theologians](#):

We do well, then, to remember that the traditional marker of orthodoxy is the historicity of Jesus and the Resurrection, not Adam, and a confession that He rose from the dead (Rom. 10:9).

In response to Moore, I would also add an additional defense of no-Adam theologians. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is among the foremost advocates of universal rights. His advocacy is brought forward with a coherent theological case, even though Dr. King himself rejected any notion of a historical Adam. Dr. King's no-Adam theology did not limit his affirmation of human rights. At the same time, the historical Adam theology of Dr. King's contemporaries did not stop them from [justifying segregation on Scriptural grounds](#). This last couple weeks, I have watched police mistreat [non-violent protesters and bystanders](#), mere hundreds of feet from my home. This has a way of focusing the mind. If the *de novo* creation of Adam gives special resources to affirm universal rights, I would beseech Moore to deploy these resources on behalf of the non-violent protestors in the segregated city of Saint Louis right now.

Unfortunately, I still find myself defending historical Adam theologians from overstatements of evolutionary science. In contrast with Moore, Keller makes a more reasoned explanation of his confession, based on [his understanding of Scripture and theology](#). Perhaps Keller is wrong, but those arguing against him must do so without claiming the authority of science. There is absolutely **zero** evidence against Keller's confession of the *de novo* creation of Adam and Eve "from the dust." Entirely consistent with the genetic and archaeological evidence, Adam and Eve could have been specially created in a Garden and be ancestors of us all. This unequivocal scientific fact is an open secret among many BioLogos biologists, including many of those on the Board. Though he misrepresented my views, even [Dennis Venema](#), a well-known advocate of no-Adam theology, has [endorsed this scientific fact](#) in

print. As Tom McCall of The Creation Project [summarizes](#) our exchange:

So is belief in a historical Adam inconsistent with belief in the Common Ancestry Thesis and the Large Initial Population Thesis? Actually, it is not inconsistent; these are neither contrary nor contradictory...Swamidass offers one possible way of holding to both, and it is interesting to note that Venema admits that this is indeed possible; it is even more interesting to note that Venema's rejoinder to it is distinctly theological.

The evidence does show that our ancestors arise as a large population, and share ancestry with the great apes. However, nothing in science unsettles the confession that God specially created a single couple, Adam and Eve, from whom we all descend.

This article was updated October, 2019 to clarify the context, improve formatting, and link to the original version of Dr. Haarsma's responses to Keller.

For those who wish to discuss the science or theology further, I would direct you to [Jon Garvey](#), who has [written extensively](#). Regarding Dr King, as we approach the 50th anniversary of his assassination, I encourage us all to read [MLK and the Image of God](#) and Dr. King's own statement of his theology of creation: [What Is Man?](#)

References

- <https://peacefulscience.org/articles/genealogical-rapprochement/>
<https://discourse.biologos.org/t/a-flawed-mirror-a-response-to-the-book-theistic-evolution/38357/9>
<https://peacefulscience.org/books/genealogical-adam-eve/>
https://discourse.peacefulscience.org/t/_/4798
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/keller-moore-duncan-non-negotiable-beliefs-about-creation>
<https://discourse.biologos.org/u/deborahhaarsma>
<http://biologos.org/blogs/deborah-haarsma-the-presidents-notebook/essentials-of-creation-a-response-to-the-gospel-coalition>
<https://biologos.org/articles/essentials-of-creation-a-response-to-the-gospel-coalition>
<http://henrycenter.tiu.edu/2017/06/a-genealogical-adam-and-eve-in-evolution>
<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/evangelical-history/2016/07/26/is-segregation-scriptural-a-radio-address-from-bob-jones-on-easter-of-1960>
<https://m.riverfronttimes.com/foodblog/2017/09/20/chris-sommer-responds-after-police-union-puts-him-and-pi-pizzeria-on-blast>
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sinned-in-a-literal-adam-raised-in-a-literal-christ>
<https://discourse.biologos.org/u/dennisvenema>
<http://henrycenter.tiu.edu/2017/07/response-to-the-symposium-part-1>
<http://henrycenter.tiu.edu/2017/07/science-theology-charitable-discussion-a-symposium-recap>
https://discourse.biologos.org/u/jon_garvey
<http://potiphar.jongarvey.co.uk/2017/08/25/hump-articles-on-genealogical-adam-hypothesis>
<https://peacefulscience.org/books/martin-luther-king-jr-image-god/>
<http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/primarydocuments/Vol6/11July1954WhatIsMan.pdf>