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John Inazu: Humility, Tolerance, Patience

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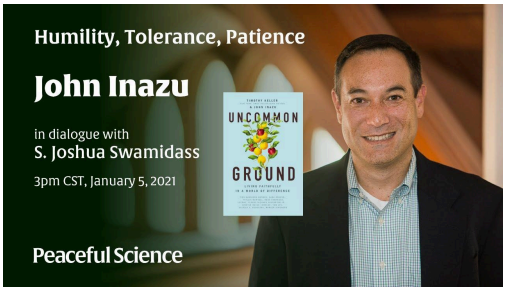


John Inazu's work brings us to fundamental questions about how we as a society engage one another. How do we treat the people with whom we disagree on the most important issues? Do we insult them or exclude them? Do we dehumanize them?

Or could we find a better way?

Can we live together across our differences? Do our differences prompt dialogue where we can understand one another? Could our response to them humanize us? And humanize those with whom we disagree?

The First Amendment Lawyer

John is a leading First Amendment scholar at the Washington University in St. Louis Law School. He is the founder of *The Carver Project*, a non-profit at the intersection of the university, the Church, and society.

Three of *Peaceful Science's* values (**humility, tolerance, patience**) are drawn from John Inazu's work in **Confident Pluralism: Surviving and Thriving Through Deep Differences**. Perhaps the most important chapter in my book, *The Genealogical Adam and Eve*, is titled "Humility, Tolerance, Patience," in reference to John's book. His book is a must read if you care about our mission, and want to know more about us.

In this conversation, John and I discussed his book and these three values in great depth.

The first objection for some will be to the term "pluralism," which is often connected to "relativism." But that isn't what John means. By "pluralism" John emphasizes the reality, often uncomfortable, that we live in a society with many deep disagreements. We do not have to agree with or endorse this reality to acknowledge that it is our reality. He does not mean that we are to endorse or support all views, but that we deeply hold different views, on important matters.

That brings us to the key question for our divided society. When we disagree on what is the common good, how do we pursue the common good together?

John advocates "civic practices" where we aspire towards "*humility*," "*tolerance*," and "*patience*." His most recent book, with Tim Keller and others, explores how several have put these values into practice: *Uncommon Ground: Living Faithful in a World of Difference.*

Here is how we adopted these values into Peaceful Science's "civic practice of science."

1. Humility

> By humility, we mean that we cannot convince everyone to agree with us, even if we are right and they are wrong. We are cautious to explain the limits and uncertainty of scientific claims.

I am Christian, but many others here are atheists. Humility means that I accept from the start that I may never be able to convince them to become Christians.

I affirm evolutionary science, and many others here think that evolution is implausibly impossible. Humility means that I accept from the start that I may never be able to convince them to agree with me on evolution.

The sentiment here is mutual. There are many atheists here that accept I am Christian, and they may not be able to change my mind. There are many creationists here that accept I affirm evolution, and they may not be able to change my mind.

This isn't mean't to relativize the disagreements here, suggesting both sides are equally right. Some of us are wrong, and it matters. But our solution to this standoff cannot be the unachievable goal of convincing everyone to agree with us in the end.

2. Tolerance

> *By tolerance, we mean to create space for those with whom we disagree, where we can engage larger questions together, even as we explain our own point of view.*

I am a skeptic of Intelligent Design, at least as it is presented by its leading proponents. Still, I want them to be treated fairly, to acknowledge when they are correct, and to give them a hearing. But I will also be honest, explaining were I disagree, and how I think it is a garden path.

Most scientists think that the Resurrection of Jesus is a myth, but I see evidence that Jesus really did bodily rise from the dead. Still, I want to make space for those with whom I disagree. *Peaceful Science* is not a Christian organization, including atheists like Nathan H. Lents and Stephen Matheson.

These are important disagreements. They matter, but to pursue the common good together, we have to find ways to work together across these disagreements.

3. Patience

> *By patience, we mean endurance with one another across our disagreements, where we seek to understand others, and help them understand us.*

Our differences are still important. They matter. As we work together, we will need to talk about them. But conversation about deep disagreements is difficult and frustrating. We need patience.

The simple, but often difficult, effort to understand one another, and to be understood, is humanizing work. In understanding one another, we can empathize, even if we disagree.

On the questions of origins, perhaps the most common response to controversy is *avoidance*. We move away from those we disagree. This only amplifies our disagreements. It does not serve the common good.

Could we find a better way? Could we find a way to engage with those with whom we disagree?

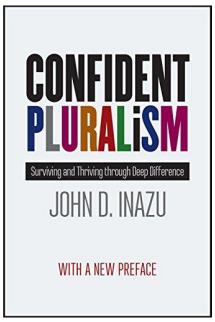
The Move Towards One Another

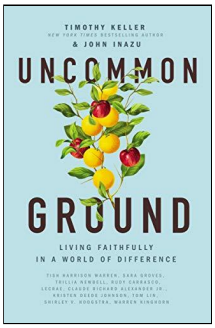
Deep differences drive us apart. The conflict shuts down real exchanges. These disagreements are about important questions, where are our answers matter. So avoiding the conversation leaves too far apart, moving away from one another.

We need to find a better way.

Could we move forward together, even if we still disagree on the most important of issues? I think we can. This is where John's ideas are important. Let our response to differences be humility, tolerance and patience.

We disagree. These disagreements matter. Let us move towards one another from here.





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