



Launching Peaceful Science

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<https://peacefulscience.org/articles/launching/>



What if we could work together, across our differences, to serve the common good? What if science could be, instead of a focal point of conflict, a place of common ground? These are some of the questions I worked through over the last decade. I now see an opportunity for a peaceful way.

Peaceful Science began as a blog, then added a forum. A surprising community grew. “I” became “we.” Now we are growing into an organization partnered with a university. Fall 2019, *Peaceful Science* is publicly launching, articulating and acting together on our shared identity, mission and values.

We are located at Washington University in St. Louis (WUSTL). This coming year, a new non-profit will form, and *Peaceful Science* will proceed as a funded partnership between WUSTL and this new non-profit. This will be our organizational structure, but a vibrant and diverse community is already forming around our mission.

Many of us are scholars, and we want to engage with the public. We see a better way forward, even on contentious topics like human origins. We want to find this better way together.

How We Got Here

In 2016, *Peaceful Science* began as my personal blog, seeking a new way forward in the creation wars. I was speaking frequently at [Veritas Forums](#) and [my work](#) was becoming more public. Some of our first articles were initially published on my lab’s website at WUSTL, and then transferred here. An article about [evidence for evolution](#) sparked an online exchange with another organization, and I needed a better platform to dialogue with others.

In 2017, the importance of *Peaceful Science* became more clear. Our values and approach became more clear, and [were distinct](#) from [other communities](#). We wanted to take questions seriously, no matter from where they came. In considering questions, [several insights](#) into the science of ancestry [came to light](#). These insights created new space for research, engagement, and dialogue on questions of human origins. We needed a place for this work to grow.

In 2018, we officially [launched our online discussion forum](#), which quickly attracted a surprisingly diverse community of accomplished scholars. The *Peaceful Science* forum became an [important platform for dialogue](#). [Office hours with scholars](#) were a beautiful opportunity for experts to engage in depth with other experts and the public. Several vocal critics became friends and allies as we took the time to

understand each other. Most important, key partners joined our team, and we grew in a common experience together.

Our work on ancestry attracted the attention of *The John Templeton Foundation* (JTF). They invited us to apply for a grant, both to workshop my book and to sort out our long term plans.

In 2019, JTF [granted us \\$103K](#), and a private donor matched with \$75K. We used this money to organize two workshops on [The Genealogical Adam and Eve](#) (GAE; IVP, 2019). We also hired a consultant to determine if and how *Peaceful Science* should launch as a new effort. A community crystallized in the GAE workshops, and the book was [endorsed by](#) secular scientists ([Nathan Lents](#), Philip Payne, and [Alan Templeton](#)) and the founders of four important faith-science communities (*Reasons to Believe*, *BioLogos*, *Reasonable Faith*, *Intelligent Design*).

A unique and uncommon community arose around a new vision. Our consultant, Jim Heyen, recommended that *Peaceful Science* launch under the organizational structure we are now adopting.

What is Peaceful Science?

Peaceful Science is a diverse community of scholars, advancing science in a fractured society, engaging the grand questions together. We see a new way forward where we organize around common questions, values and virtues, rather than seeking agreement on particular answers. In dialogue with others, we want to understand and to be understood.

We want to make space for differences with a civic practice of science, aspiring to [humility](#), [tolerance](#), and [patience](#). Questions, we believe, should be welcomed with [courage](#), [curiosity](#), and [empathy](#). Scientists, at our best, engage questions with [rigor](#) and [honesty](#). Practicing these virtues grows trust, even when we disagree on the most contentious of questions.

We are topically organized around the question: *What does it mean to be human?* We are launching, initially, with three topic areas: *ancestry*, *art*, and *artificial intelligence*. Questions about human



The Genealogical Adam and Eve workshop in January 2019 was a key event for us. A large group of diverse scholars gathered to discuss the GAE book.

origins are included, but our interests extend far beyond those of origins.

We are diverse and we value lucid self-disclosures (which we sometimes term “confession”). Transparency builds trust. Speaking for myself, I am a Christian that affirms the Lausanne Covenant. *Peaceful Science*, the organization, however, includes scientists and scholars with many different personal beliefs and non-beliefs. Along with most scientists, I also affirm evolutionary science. *Peaceful Science*, however, is committed to serving everyone, including those who do and do not affirm evolution.

We are guided by a trust-building strategy, rather than a knowledge-deficit model or an appeal to authority. We invite trust by seeking understanding and common ground, and by acting in ways worthy of trust. We want to be trustworthy. This follows the AAAS/DoSER recommendations explained in *Scientists in Civic Life*, so effectively demonstrated in their *Science for Seminaries* program, where I served as a science advisor.

We serve overlooked communities, institutions, and scholars with innovative partnerships, collaborations, and content. Our audience includes communities with questions and conflicts about human origins, but we are also engaging broader questions too. On all fronts, we are seeing trust grow in unexpected places as we respond to difficult questions with empathy, humility, and rigor.

What Lies Ahead

Our 2019 fall launch is an exciting milestone. We are gathering key team members, partnerships, advisors, and funding.

Leadership team. *Peaceful Science* is transitioning from a personal blog to a professional organization with a defined leadership team. Dr. Walter Rogero (formerly with AAAS/DoSER) is now serving as our Executive Director. In the coming months, we will introduce both him and additional members of our team.

Advisory council. We are gathering an advisory council, and will share its member list by the end of the year. This council includes institutional leaders planning to partner and collaborate with us. It also includes scholars and scientists seeking interdisciplinary exchanges, and opportunities to engage the public.

Building a funding plan. Finally, this next year our goal is to establish a long-term funding plan. We expect this will include grants from foundations, but also growing a donor base. *Peaceful Science* fills a unique role and has an important voice. Consider joining our team.

A Symphony of Collaborations

Almost everything *Peaceful Science* does is in partnership or collaboration with other scholars and institutions. We will be formalizing and making these partnerships public in the coming year. Some key projects include:

Scholar’s workshop on “The Questions of Artificial Intelligence.” In 2020, we are gathering a diverse group of scholars together to engage the scientific, ethical, and theological questions raised by AI. Partnerships on this workshop are forming, but one important partner will be Cordell Institute at WUSTL.

Engaging questions on human origins from *Reasonable Faith* (RF) and *Reasons to Believe* (RTB). These two organizations represent significant and important communities at the interface of science and faith. Trust has grown as their questions about Adam and Eve were seriously engaged. William Lane Craig (RF) and I are writing a book together. A dialogue with RTB passed its formative phase and is now progressing with ongoing scholarly engagements slated this coming year.

Science and the Bible exhibit at *The Museum of the Bible* (MOTB). Several *Peaceful Science* scholars are advising MOTB on a new exhibit. MOTB will offer the GAE in their book store and may host a GAE book launch event.

Theological seminaries and centers. We are becoming a point of collaboration for several theological centers. Our advisory council already includes leaders from four important theological centers. We will soon be making these relationships public. We are actively expanding this network with new theological seminaries and centers.

Art and the science of ancestry. The science of ancestry spans from Adam and Eve to evolution, from origins to race and inheritance. A designer at WUSTL with experience gathering artists is joining our team to launch a collaboration between artists and the science of ancestry.

This is just a small sample of our partnerships and collaborations. We are currently developing our media strategy. As it crystallizes, we will share more information at our blog and other venues. There is quite a bit to celebrate, some good stories to tell, and many people to introduce.

A Personal Note

I am a full-time scientist at WUSTL. I lead a scientific group using AI to engage scientific questions at the intersection of biology, chemistry, and medicine. Launching non-profits is outside my job description, and I never expected to be doing anything like this.

For me, the journey has been costly. This last year was intense. My second child was born, and at the same time I wrote the GAE. The time required for my public engagements snowballed. What was a “hobby” for so long is now growing into something larger than me.

I am not suited to do this alone. I am deeply grateful, and a bit awed, at finding the impeccably well-suited and qualified Walter Rogero to lead *Peaceful Science* as Executive Director. I eagerly anticipate his increased role in this new venture.

The costs have been worthwhile. An uncommon community, filled with unexpected people, is gathering here. We are gathering around common values and a compelling vision for this moment and our influence in society. Our community includes a wide and varied range from secular biologists to creationists of many sorts. Partnerships are forming in all sorts of ways. Forming and growing this diverse community of scholars has been worth the cost to me.

So now, in this diverse and scholarly community, come wonder about the grand questions with us. Come reason with the scientists. In dialogue with historians, artists, theologians, ethicists, and philosophers, let us together wrestle with the grand: ***What does it mean to be human?***

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