



Paul Louis Metzger: On New Wine, New Wineskins

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<https://peacefulscience.org/articles/metzger-new-wine-new-wineskins/>



Peaceful Science is built around deep partnerships and collaborations. One partnership that has recently emerged is with the [The Institute for Cultural Engagement: New Wine, New Wineskins](#) (NWNW), an organization dedicated to building relational bridges through Jesus across cultural divides of class, sexuality, gender, faith and science, and religious pluralism.

Dr. Paul Louis Metzger is the founder and Director of NWNW, Professor of Christian Theology & Theology of Culture at Multnomah University and Seminary, and editor of NWNW's journal *Cultural Encounters: A Journal for the Theology of Culture*. Dr. Metzger is also a member of the [Center of Theological Inquiry](#), and has served as Senior Mission Scholar in Residence at the [Overseas Ministries Study Center](#).

He has authored and edited several volumes in systematic theology and theology of culture and is currently completing two others, including a Trinitarian social ethics for IVP Academic. He also writes regularly at his blog column "[Uncommon God, Common Good](#)" at Patheos.

Peaceful Science: Can you share with us the inspiration behind your institute's name "New Wine, New Wineskins?" What does it mean, and how does its mission intersect with that of Peaceful Science?

Dr. Metzger: [Chapter 5](#) of Luke's Gospel presents Jesus acting in ways that do not fit the dominant religious and cultural code of conduct. For example, he touches a leper to heal him and calls a tax collector to be his follower. Traditionally, lepers were regarded as unclean, and tax collectors were considered traitors who were allied with the



Roman authorities. Also, his disciples don't conform to the established order of fasting and praying at prescribed times.

Jesus tells his critics that he will not conform his new teaching to fit their old paradigm. To do so would be like placing new wine into old wineskins (ancient containers made of animal skin used for storing liquids), which would cause the skins to burst.

NWNW seeks to present Jesus and his teachings as the point of reference. Jesus builds bridges across cultural divides, including faith and science, which among other things will entail pursuing dialogue in the midst of discord. Jesus' followers are stretched like new wineskins in order to build such bridges between the faith and science communities through Jesus. We find a similar approach at Peaceful Science.

Peaceful Science founder Dr. Joshua Swamidass has spoken at one of your [conferences](#), published two articles in your journal, and recently endorsed it as well [here](#). At Peaceful Science, we share your peace-seeking work, addressing innovative and highly contentious questions, with grace, always with the common good in mind. Can you tell us more about the types of topics NWNW and *Cultural Encounters* have engaged with in the past, and what might we expect next?

This past year, we at NWNW focused on the topic of disabilities during our spring conference as well as our autumn retreat. The aim of the conference and retreat was to foster a mindset and heart-set in the Christian community to help address the isolation families and people with disabilities experience. The conference introduced people to pressing issues in the disability community, highlighted important policy initiatives, and specified various ways churches, organizations and community members can effectively engage in ministry for people with special needs.

This coming spring (2020), our conference is titled "[Religious Liberty—For All](#)." Here, we will consider the historical backdrop of our country's formation and explore present-day complexities surrounding advocacy for Christian freedoms in an increasingly pluralistic society. In 2021, we plan to focus on the topic of mental health.

As for our journal *Cultural Encounters*, the most recent issue was on the subject of "[Sex, Sexuality, Gender, and a Culture of Abuse](#)." Our forthcoming journal issue addresses the subject of historiography, intellectual humility and human flourishing. After that, we have a

journal issue slated for religious pluralism and religious persecution, followed by one on disabilities.

NWNW and *Cultural Encounters* always seek to account for Jesus' import for cultural engagement and human flourishing in a world often torn apart by cultural disengagement. As was noted, Joshua Swamidass has participated in one of our conferences, and contributed to our journal. He brings a fresh perspective that attempts to tear down boundaries between communities that often distrust one another, such as faith and science, or different approaches to science, in an attempt to cultivate new inroads to conversation and understanding. Joshua displays courage and creativity and is not willing to settle for old "wineskin" ways of operating as a scientist or person of faith.

Much like Peaceful Science, you invest in both scholarly endeavors and outreach to the general public, both through publications and larger gatherings. Why mix scholarly efforts with public engagement? What can one gain from the other?

I live in the Pacific Northwest, where we love our hybrid cars. In a similar vein, I love creating hybrid forms of engagement. All too often, the scholarly guild is content to remain in the lab or library. While we must do our homework and research to the best of our ability, we also need to build trust and show that theology as well as science promotes the common good in all sectors of society.

Unfortunately, the task of building trust is even more difficult in our day of the "Fake News" mantra. The distrust of our respective disciplines has grown in many circles, and we must make every effort to build trust. This takes public engagement and great patience to listen, learn, and communicate in ways that the general population comes to recognize as truthful and meaningful.

You met Dr. Swamidass through the [Science for Seminaries program of the AAAS/DoSER](#), where you and NWNW oversaw Multnomah Seminary's pilot project for Science for Seminaries. You have also served as a program advisor for a few years and currently advise several individual seminaries in the program. What have you learned from your experience in dialogue with science and scientists? In what ways is Peaceful Science able to partner with you more deeply as a result?

The partnership with AAAS has provided wonderful opportunities to build bridges of trust where there were often walls of suspicion and fear. The collaboration with AAAS has opened up new avenues for engagement with members of the scientific community. It has also provided scientists with occasions to build connections with people of faith.

Central to both our endeavors has been the sense of wonder that faith and science communities experience in relation to the natural

world. This mutual sense of wonder helps to foster greater respect and humility when engaging one another's disciplines and intellectual commitments in pursuit of collaboration wherever possible.

Peaceful Science continues to foster this attitude and posture through dialogue over monologue. Like NWNW, Peaceful Science seeks to operate inquisitively, not inquisitionally, pursuing a centered set approach to scientific inquiry over and against a bounded set model. We are excited about what our partnership will entail for faithful scientific discourse with people of faith(s) as we proceed down this path.

What value do you see in deepening your dialogue with scientists? What ways do you hope to benefit from working with Peaceful Science?

Science can serve the faith community well as long as it does not seek to replace faith with science. They have overlapping concerns such as the common good and human flourishing but approach these concerns from different angles.

Peaceful Science disrupts status quo antagonism between faith and science. It seeks to partner with the theological enterprise to make peace by helping rebind a broken cosmos (which is what the Latin word for religion signifies—"rebind"). Asking expansive questions in search of inclusive answers involving our respective communities is critically important to breaking down walls of distrust and building rapport.

Certainly, science informs faith, and I believe faith informs science. Peaceful Science welcomes such open-ended, centered forms of engagement that encourage an open posture for scientific discovery rather than entrenchment of scientism. Joshua's own inquisitive posture and passion for Jesus as a scientist has been inspirational. He reminds me of [Blaise Pascal](#), whose heart and mind were on fire, not for the god of the philosophers, but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Science has aided his quest.

Surely, such a partnership will aid us at NWNW to practice what we preach and continue to build bridges of trust and understanding with the scientific community in service to faith and human flourishing. We hope to be stretched to be vessels containing Jesus' "new wine" teaching for our scientific age. Since the partnership with AAAS, we have partnered with scientists on a variety of topics, including trauma and resilience, mental health, the history of faith and science, and disabilities. Peaceful Science will serve as a phenomenal dialogue partner as we keep such faith and science conversations going.

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