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A New Voice on Human Origins

S. Joshua Swamidass

https://peacefulscience.org/articles/new-voice/

A new voice on human origins just reached a major milestone. I am pleased to announce *Peaceful Science's* first grant with *The John Templeton Foundation*. This grant is for about $103,000, and was awarded to my group at Washington University in St. Louis. They asked us to make a plan for the future, and come back to them.

This grant has two components: (1) two workshops to refine my upcoming book on *The Genealogical Adam*, and (2) to architect an organization providing a new voice on human origins. We are inviting participation from everyone in both these efforts. Our public summary lays out exactly what we will be doing:

> On human origins, contention swirls around the conversation between science and theology. **We seek common ground by humbly engaging the grand questions together.** In this project, we will first workshop a book on The Genealogical Adam. Next, we will formulate a plan for the next phase of this effort…
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> With these two activities, a foundation will be laid from which to launch *Peaceful Science* as a new voice on human origins. From here, we will be uniquely equipped to identify new common ground and facilitate an exchange of questions between theology and science. This could be a new way forward, where we find common ground in grand questions, rather than common answers.
>
> JTF Public Summary

What Should We Become?

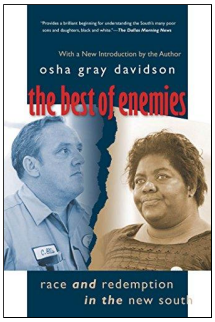
In this liminal moment, a questions haunts my mind: ***what should we become?*** Please let us know your thoughts, either at this link or the form at the end of this article. Whether you are part of *Peaceful Science* or skeptical of us, we want to know how we can serve you. Share this invitation far and wide. We want to hear what you have to say: how would you form a new voice on origins?

If you don't have any answers, bring your questions instead. We aim to gather people of different views around the grand questions, in a community that does not depend on agreement. We expect, in fact, that there will be lively disagreements on the most important of things. Grand questions draw us all.

Lessons from 50 Years Ago

A timely article was just published, about another time of intense societal acrimony and change. Just 50 years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, and so ended one of the most salient theological voices in the public square. His dream was an integrated world, where we would live as family, even though we might disagree on the most important of things. The work of integration brought unlikely people into dialogue, people who would otherwise be enemies, such as Atwater and Ellis:

> Atwater was a single, poor, black parent who led Operation Breakthrough, which tried to improve local black neighborhoods. Ellis was an equally poor but white parent who was proud to be Exalted Cyclops of the local Ku Klux Klan. They could not have started further apart. At first, Ellis brought a gun and henchmen to town meetings in black neighborhoods. Atwater once lurched toward Ellis with a knife and had to be held back by her friends…When each listened to the other's reasons, they realized that they shared the same basic values. Both loved their children and wanted decent lives for their communities. As Ellis later put it: 'I used to think that Ann Atwater was the meanest black woman I'd ever seen in my life … But, you know, her and I got together one day for an hour or two and talked. And she is trying to help her people like I'm trying to help my people.' After realizing their common ground, they were able to work together to integrate Durham schools peacefully. In large part, they succeeded.\



The advice the article gives is wise: (1) reach out, (2) listen, (3) be patient, and (4) make good arguments. I add, (5) be kind, remembering the woman who left the Westboro Baptist Church. Follow the discussion on the forum, and help us figure out how to build values like this into our culture. We are looking for common ground. Help us find our way. As for me, I'm looking forward to seeing the movie when it comes out, and encourage everyone to read the book on Atwater and Ellis. Would it not be good for a spirit like this to rise again in our moment?

Peacemaking in Human Origins

We are doing the best we can in our moment, seeking common ground where it might be found. The first part of this grant is centered on just one example, *The Genealogical Adam and Eve.*

> Adam and Eve are at the center of the conflict between science and theology. **We aim to explore the range of scenarios in which they can be understood alongside evolutionary science.** As part of this larger goal, we recently proposed *The Genealogical Adam* . Entirely

> consistent with the genetic evidence, Adam and Eve, genealogical ancestors of us all, could have been de novo created in the Middle East, as recently as 6,000 years ago. The only way evolutionary science presses on this story is by indicating there were people outside the garden. This possibility becomes visible with a humble exposition of genetic science, clarifying what it does and does not say about our ancestry.
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> In the first part of this project, we will develop *The Genealogical Adam* proposal into a book. **We will bring a group of scholars together to workshop the manuscript, submitting it for publication as a book.** This book will open one new way forward, where some might find common ground with evolutionary science.
>
> JTF Public Summary

Over 35 scholars, from across the spectrum, will be gathering for two workshop in St. Louis, on January 20-21 and the other on February 3-4. This puts us on target to publish the book November 2019, before the Evangelical Theological Society meeting. The confirmed participants include theologians, philosophers, exegetes, and both confessing and secular scientists. Established, overlooked, and new voices are included in community we are gathering here. A wide range of views on just about everything is visible; our community is not contingent on agreement. A headlined goal will be to refine my book manuscript, taking input from a large range of scholars. A piggybacked goal is to convene and form an uncommon community of scholars behind *Peaceful Science's* efforts.

Peaceful Science has always been about more than a single view or a single person. We are certainly more than one view on Adam. These meetings are the first time we will be gathering a small portion of our large, growing, and deep network, considering one of many ways to understand Adam. This group of 35 is not even the majority of the scholars with whom we are in community. If you are a scholar, and want to join us, let us know. We might be able to make space for you to join us.

Finding A New Voice

> In the second part of this project, we will develop a long-term plan for *Peaceful Science*. We see an opportunity to restructure the conversation on origins, to be more inclusive and grounded in science. We hope to build common ground around the grand questions themselves, and an honest account of mainstream science.
>
> JTF Public Summary

We are also planning a new way forward for us all. The John Templeton Foundation gave us funds to work with A. James Heynen, a consultant with deep experience in creating, planning, and launching non-profits. In the lead up to this grant, Heynen and I have already begun working together, finding both a great working relationship and a set of common values. A couple weeks ago, he spent some time in St. Louis with me and a candidate we are considering as an executive director for *Peaceful Science*.

I must say, I am excited. For the last several years, momentum has been picking up in a growing network of people. All of us are looking for a better ways forward, in one way or another. As our community has grown, largely invisible to one another, opportunities have grown and the ride has become more chaotic. After resisting the idea of starting a new effort, I can now see how launching *Peaceful Science* might bring order to the chaos, serving all of us in finding that better way forward.

Our consultant, A. James Heynen, spent a day with me in STL this December. I am looking forward to seeing how our new voice grows into something that serves everyone, including my friends in other camps.

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