



James C. Peterson

The Science and Theology of Creation and Sin

This is the first issue of *PSCF* since I took part in the International Summit on Human Gene Editing. The National Academy of Sciences of the USA, the National Academy of Medicine of the USA, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and the Royal Society of the UK jointly gathered the scientists directly involved (and some advisors) to share the latest developments, and to consider the best societal use, of the newest gene-editing techniques. Every once in a while there is a trigger that accelerates discovery and development in a particular field. CRISPR-Cas9 appears to be such a technology for understanding, and precisely changing, the genes that are central to life. There will be much from CRISPR-Cas9 for us to learn and think through in the coming years.

The development of CRISPR-Cas9 is an example of how fast the sciences keep moving. The sciences, and theology too, are, of course, both human constructs. Hence, from a limited perspective, they try to understand our world. Science focuses on our material universe; theology, on God and what God has revealed. All one has to do is to look at the night sky and what we can see of hundreds of billions of other galaxies, to start to sense how little we know of what is. It is a privilege and a delight to make each step toward better understanding. Many of those steps in the sciences do not tell us much about theology, and there are points of theology that do not further our science.

But a Christian will probably expect that, as these two approaches develop, they will sometimes interact. They are, after all, ultimately studying different aspects of one reality. They can both take wrong turns and both can be improved over time, coming closer to recognizing what God has done and is doing. To the degree that a science or a theological reading approximate what actually is the case, they should cohere with each other. Where they interact, then, is an opportunity to understand more completely. They can trigger questions, challenges, insights, or support for each other.

At the start of this issue of *PSCF*, Sy Garte describes considerable ferment throughout the development of life and throughout the current study of it. He writes,

To the standard paradigm of slow accumulation of random point mutations as the major mechanism of biological variation must now be added new data and concepts of symbiosis, gene duplication, horizontal gene transfer, retrotransposition, epigenetic control networks, niche construction, stress-directed mutations, and large-scale reengineering of the genome in response to environmental stimuli.

Garte argues that we should recognize these further inputs in an “extended evolutionary synthesis,” and that such should open us to realize that it is not just random events that develop life. God might not only have started a planned unfolding of life, what Howard Van Till called in this journal a “fully gifted creation.” God might well intervene among or through these many newly recognized inputs, along the way.

Our second article listens to the evidence that we human beings are at our core inherently cultured beings. Benno van den Toren notes that this experience of culture is not optional for human beings. It has always been central to our survival and who we are. He sees recognizing this characteristic of our origin and ongoing nature as potentially insightful for understanding how sin originated and spread.

David Wilcox next lays out in detail some of the newest discoveries and theories from population genetics and paleoanthropology toward a model of human development that recognizes human beings as uniquely made in God’s image, yet becoming sinners. Denis Lamoureux follows by offering a hermeneutical approach to the origin of sin described in scripture that seeks to honor the revealing authority of scripture without adding fidelity to ancient science that is referenced, but not the point.

All four authors are looking for how our best current understanding of the sciences and theology might

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together reveal more than they do apart. That is a worthy goal at the heart of this journal, to bring into dialogue the best of the sciences and Christian theology. See how well the authors do, and please do pitch in your perspectives as the conversation continues in future issues. ☼

James C. Peterson, *editor*

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"For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality." –1 Cor. 15:53



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PLENARY SPEAKERS



JUSTIN BARRETT
Professor of Developmental Science and Psychology, Fuller Graduate School of Psychology



AUDREY BOWDEN
Assistant Professor of Electrical Engineering and Director of the Biomedical Optics Group, Stanford University



EDWARD DAVIS
Professor of the History of Science, Messiah College



WILLIAM NEWSOME
Professor of Neurobiology, Stanford University



ROGER WIENS
Los Alamos National Laboratory, Principal Investigator for the ChemCam Instrument, Mars Curiosity Rover

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