

Faith Digest: Religious identity tracks science skepticism

May 9, 2014

A new survey by The Associated Press found religious identity—particularly among evangelical Protestants—offers one of the sharpest indicators of skepticism toward key issues in science such as the Big Bang theory, evolution and global warming. About half (51 percent) of adults in the United States overall have little or no confidence the universe began 13.9 billion years ago with a Big Bang, compared to 77 percent among people who identify as evangelical or born-again. About four in 10 Americans overall (42 percent) doubt life on Earth—including human beings—evolved through a process of natural selection, compared to 76 percent of evangelicals. More than one-third overall (37 percent), compared to 58 percent of evangelicals, doubt the Earth’s temperature is rising “mostly because of man-made heat-trapping greenhouse gases,” and 36 percent overall, compared to 56 percent of evangelicals, doubt the Earth is 4.5 billion years old. On the flip side, most people are pretty sure the “universe is so complex, there must be a Supreme Being guiding its creation”—54 percent of all Americans and 87 percent of evangelicals. The survey of 1,012 adults, conducted March 20-24, has a margin of error of 3.4 percentage points.

Vatican urges release of kidnapped Nigerian girls. The Vatican issued an urgent appeal for the release of more than 200 Nigerian schoolgirls kidnapped by the Islamist militant group Boko Haram.  Boko Haram is responsible for more than 4,000 deaths in 2014. (RNS Photo courtesy of AK Rockefeller via Flickr)The abduction of the young girls three weeks ago was the latest instance of the “horrible forms of violence” for which the militant Islamic group has become known in Nigeria, said the Vatican’s

chief spokesman, Federico Lombardi. “The denial of any kind of respect for life and for the dignity of human beings, even the most innocent, vulnerable and defenseless, calls for the strongest condemnation,” Lombardi said. Heavily armed militants abducted the girls from a boarding school in the northern town of Chibok, provoking condemnation from around the world. Eleven other girls reportedly were kidnapped from a second school. The kidnappings and subsequent threat by Boko Haram’s leader to “sell” the schoolgirls have overshadowed a meeting of the World Economic Forum that opened in the Nigerian city of Abuja. The United States, England and France dispatched teams of experts to Nigeria in a bid to help rescue the girls.

Christians see new Kenyan polygamy law as bad for families.

Prominent Christian ministers in Kenya fear a new marriage law signed by President Uhuru Kenyatta will tear families apart and weaken the church and the nation. The law legalizes polygamy, allowing men to marry multiple wives in a country where they previously were permitted to have one. Parliament passed the measure in March, after an amendment was added that allows a man to take another wife without informing his existing wife. Christian leaders said the law would dilute the principle of holy matrimony. They had united to urge Kenyatta to reject the law, but with the signing this week, the clerics expressed their frustration. “If polygamy is allowed, it will open the floodgates for all sorts of separations and divorces. That will surely hurt the family institution and the country at large will suffer,” said David Gathanju, moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. Under the new law there are five types of marriages in Kenya—Christian, Islamic, Hindu, monogamous and polygamous. Kenya is predominantly Christian, with Muslims making up about 11 percent of its population, mostly along the Somali border, its coastal region, and in cities such as Mombasa. The law sets a minimum age of marriage at 18. It also allows wives a 50 percent share of the property acquired during the union, among other benefits.