

Gap between faith, science can be bridged, study says

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(ABP) An MIT study published Feb. 12 in honor of naturalist Charles Darwin's 204th birthday suggests the gap between faith and scientific beliefs is not as large as most people think, and that part of the controversy might be defused by people learning more about their own religious doctrine and the science it endorses.

While Gallup has reported that 46 percent of Americans believe that God created humans in their present form less than 10,000 years ago, the MIT Survey on Science, Religion and Origins found that just 11 percent belong to religions that openly reject evolution or the Big Bang theory.



MIT physicist Max
Tegmark.

MIT physicist Max Tegmark said [in a Huffington Post blog](#) that the main divide over human origins isn't between science and religion but rather between "a small fundamentalist minority and mainstream religious communities who embrace science."

[The study](#) divided U.S. faith communities into 101 categories ranked by membership size and any officially stated position on the science of human origins. It contrasted Catholics, who comprise about 24 percent of the U.S. population — whose dogma finds “no conflict between evolution and the doctrine of faith” — with evangelical Protestants like the Southern Baptist Convention, representing just over 6 percent of the population — which is on record in [a 1982 resolution](#) favoring the teaching of scientific creationism in public schools and stating that students are being “indoctrinated in evolution-science.”

Summarizing publicly available material, the MIT study found that 62 percent of Americans are aligned with a faith group that sees no conflict between faith and science. Just 11 percent belong to faith communities that openly reject origins science, and 30 percent belong to faith communities that haven’t released enough public information to fit into one of the categories.

Dividing lines

The study identified four dividing lines in arguments used by faith communities on both sides of the debate. Groups finding conflict tend to believe Scripture should be interpreted literally and that Scripture must take ultimate authority over scientific inquiry. They believe Christians have a duty to oppose the teaching of evolution as scientific fact, and find the idea that humans evolved from lower animals as incompatible with the Bible’s teaching.

Faith groups finding no conflict tend to view the Bible’s creation stories as poetic or metaphorical rather than scientific explanations. They discover scientific knowledge about God’s creation in nature and say the Bible isn’t intended as a book of science. They regard science and religion as complementary instead of mutually exclusive, and see evolution as symbolic of human advance and redemption from the Edenic fall.

Failure of science education

Tegmark said the study suggests the so-called belief gap “may have less to do with intellectual disputes and more to do with an epic failure of science education.”

Tegmark said the problem with that develops when watching [a video](#) on the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory [website](#) of a supernova explosion in the Centaurus A Galaxy about 10 million light-years away. If you believe the earth is only about 6,000 years old, he said, that means you are watching something that never happened, because light from the explosion needs 10 million years to reach Earth.

Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., acknowledges that the universe “[looks old,](#)” but he cites [a “theological necessity”](#) for a young earth in order to establish a historical Adam and Eve.

Mohler says it’s hard to take literally the Bible’s claim that sin and death entered the human race through Adam’s fall if Adam and Eve were just two Neolithic farmers who evolved from already-existing hominids over millions of years.