

Science and Religion*

Previously, I have written an article in the faith and values section (April 14, 2012) and a letter to the Star editor (Dec.9, 2012) saying mainly that, although religion has an important place in life, it is not in the science classroom. Hence Science teachers should not be required to teach creationism and intelligent design in the science classes.

Because both religion and science play important roles in our lives, it raises important questions: Is there a basic conflict between them or can they coexist?

Recently I came across a survey by some MIT and Boston University scientists (Eugena Lee, Max Tegmark and Meia Tegmark) with surprising results. I would like to draw attention of the readers of this section to this survey (<http://space.mit.edu/home/tegmark/survey.html>).

The authors present an extensive survey of how 101 different US faith communities view origins science, particularly evolution and Big Bang cosmology. Here are the main points:

They find a striking gap between people's personal beliefs and the official views of the faiths to which they belong. Whereas 2012 Gallup poll reports that 46% of the Americans believe that God created humans in their present form less than 10,000 years ago, the authors of this survey find that "only 11% belong to religions openly rejecting evolution. This shows that the main divide in the origins debate is not between science and religion, but between a small fundamentalist minority and mainstream religious communities who embrace science. The fact that the gap between personal and official beliefs is so large suggests that part of the controversy might be defused by people learning more about their own religious doctrine and the science it endorses, thereby bridging this belief gap." In addition, this survey found no support whatsoever for Young-Earth Creationism outside of the three Abrahamic religions.

The following are official statements of the major churches and other organized religions from the article:

Roman Catholic: "There is no conflict between evolution and the doctrine of faith. It is important to set proper limits to understanding of scripture, excluding any unreasonable interpretations."

Methodist: "Evolution is not inconsistent with the religious doctrine of creation. It is not about whether God created the world, but about how. We recognize science as a legitimate interpretation of God's natural world"

Presbyterian: "There is no contradiction between an evolutionary theory of human origins and the doctrine of God as a creator".

Jewish Orthodox: "Evolutionary theory, properly understood, is not incompatible with a belief in a divine creator, nor with the first two chapters of Genesis".

Hindu: "Hindus were evolutionists long before Darwin."

From an essay in the journal of Reformed Church in America: "It's merely hypocritical for believers to live as beneficiaries of all that science makes possible but then scorn that same science in case we fear it will cause us to rethink some long-held idea we've had about the age of the earth. Since Christians have long celebrated "the book of nature" as a means to learning more about God, it is time to see contemporary science as a potential partner in finding ever-more detailed reasons for which to give praise to our endlessly inventive Creator God."

There are numerous other quotes and data in the article. For details, please refer to the article. These results make one hope that, it is just a matter of time before most of the followers of world religions would accept the evolutionary model, just as most religious people have accepted the fact that the earth goes around the sun rather than the other way.

In the disputes between religion and science, scientists are also not blameless either. Some scientists may have given a false impression to the general public that all scientists are atheists. In the words of the authors of the survey "Science and religion ask different questions about the world. Many individual scientists are deeply religious. They see scientific investigation and religious faith as complementary components of a well-rounded life." As Einstein said "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."

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