

Can religion and evolution co-exist?

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International Darwin Day has come and gone. Feb. 12 marked the 207th anniversary of the birth of naturalist Charles Darwin, a day celebrated by some as Darwin Day.

Back in 2008, I reported on two churches in Berks County that were marking something called Evolution Weekend. One Berks pastor, who no longer is serving in the area, expressed the opinion that one can be a believer in religion and still have an understanding of science that accepts evolution.

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An article on www.pewresearch.org is titled "Five Facts about the Evolution Debate." The article caught my eye because at least two of the facts cite research from the Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Study, which I wrote about in this column in November.

In the November column, I questioned how William Penn, who established the colony of Pennsylvania with full freedom of religion after a land grant in 1681, would react to the study's findings of an increasingly secular Pennsylvania.

At the end of the column, I mentioned the wealth of other information available in the religious landscape study, including categories that measured views on evolution.

So, here is a follow-up on those views of evolution that I only alluded to in November.

The first fact about the evolution debate in the article is that only a minority of Americans fully accept evolution through natural selection. According to the religious landscape study, 62 percent of adults say humans evolved over time. But, only 33 percent express the belief that they evolved solely through natural processes. Thirty-four percent of Americans reject evolution entirely and say humans have existed in their present form since the beginning of time.

Fact 2: While 98 percent of scientists connected to the American Association for Advancement of Science say they believe humans evolved over time, only 66 percent of adults perceive that scientists generally agree about evolution, according to 2014 data from a Pew Research Center survey on science and society.

Fact 3: A series of court decisions have prohibited the teaching of creationism or intelligent design in public schools. In 2005, U.S. District Justice John E. Jones III, a Schuylkill County native, ruled against allowing public schools to teach intelligent design.

Fact 4: Of all major religious groups in the U.S., evangelical Protestants are most likely to reject evolution. According to the religious landscape study, 57 percent of evangelicals say humans have always existed in their present form.

Fact 5: Compared with the U.S., even larger percentages of people in many other countries reject evolution. In Latin America, 4 in 10 or more residents of several countries say humans always existed in their present form. This is true even though official teachings of Catholicism, the majority religion in the area, do not reject evolution.