

Reconciling Evolution

Brigham Young University
www.recoevo.byu.edu

With much of the United States population being religious, how we as educators approach teaching evolution can be beneficial to bringing more knowledge and understanding to the students in our classrooms. For educators teaching science and evolution to populations with high student religiosity, the Reconciling Evolution website at Brigham Young University (recoevo.byu.edu) has many resources that can help alleviate the perceived conflict students may feel learning about evolution. Although the website has a strong emphasis on a single Christian belief (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints), the authors of the website have done a great job including resources (lesson guides, curricular material, and videos) from other religious sects and denominations such as Judaism, Baptists, Non-denominational, and Non-sectarian, just to name a few. These resources broadly talk about religion and evolution for all denominations. This website has teaching material, resources, and tools that will benefit educators, students, and curious individuals from any age group and worldview.

The website is formatted with drop-down tabs on the top of the webpage, which help navigate through the website. By clicking on the “About Us” tab, the visitor can learn more about the authors and contributors of the website, along with research papers, research presentations, YouTube videos, and podcasts explicitly talking about the intersection between religion and evolution. They are not all necessarily from the authors, but come from different sources and people. For example, the RecoEvo website has an embedded YouTube video, *Evolution and God – Can you believe in both?* In this video, two scientists discuss how science and religion differ from one another and claim that you can be both religious and a

scientist at the same time. The content in this section would be helpful for anyone who is generally interested and may want to understand evolution and religion better.

The most helpful section of the website is the “Resources” tab. Here, educators can view curricular materials (e.g., PowerPoint slides, Instructor Guides) developed by biologists, religious educators, and community religious leaders. The instructor guides are meant for teaching evolution to religious students in a biology or theology class from different religious perspectives. For example, if an educator teaches biology in a strong Pentecostal population, the Pentecostal instructor guide, “A Pentecostal Perspective,” gives a list of activities, outcomes, and reading that could help teachers and students from this specific background learn about the science of evolution. The instructor guide also gives a brief background of the potential cultural barriers to consider when teaching evolution to students of different populations. These instructor guides may also improve teacher/parent interactions when parents might be concerned that their children are learning about evolution. By using the resources on the website, the teacher will have additional background knowledge on specific religious beliefs to better inform their discussions about evolution with parents.

Other resources in this section include a video that follows a made-up student, Carlton Smith, as he goes throughout his day. This video, although hypothetical, is based on actual experiences shared by students interacting with and learning about evolution. This video can be used as an in-class resource that teachers could share to help ease students’ minds in learning about evolution. There are also videos where scientists and religious individuals share their beliefs and thoughts about connecting the hard science of evolution and the beliefs of religion. These reconciliation videos could be a helpful resource for high school and college students, teachers, and parents.

The tools section has tools for educators in junior high and high school wondering about the perceived conflict religious students may feel when learning about evolution. “RecoEvo for Secondary Educators” is a free course that walks educators through religious history and scientific thought. This free course aims to help educators learn how to reduce the perceived conflict students feel learning about evolution. There is also a survey instrument, “pFEAR survey,” that educators can give to their students to help educators better know what influences their students’ worldviews and whether they perceive a conflict between science and religion. The survey may influence whether resources from the RecoEvo website are needed.

A significant gap between students and educators can be seen when approaching human evolution, as many students seem to struggle with this topic the most. The RecoEvo website has a whole section dedicated to human evolution, including videos describing evolution, the scientific method, and the basics of human evolution. Not only does it have basic information, but it also has more in-depth videos about how scientists obtained evidence and why that evidence is essential to understanding human evolution. These videos include famous paleoanthropologists (i.e., Dr. Lee Berger, Dr. John Hawkes, and Dr. Richard Potts) who describe their research in different localities, such as in the museum or the field. The videos do an excellent job of tying in religion, along with the words and evidence from the scientists describing their research. These videos would benefit anyone looking for information about human evolution and wondering how to reconcile it with evolution.

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