

# Reconciling Evolution & Religion

A draft module created by a team from Benedictine University.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Learning Outcomes:

- Students will understand the range of Catholic viewpoints on evolution.
- Students will critically reflect on their own viewpoints of faith and evolution and the sources of those viewpoints.
- Students will learn how to engage in respectful dialogue.

Type of Courses: This module can be adapted to a variety of curricular courses in Biology, Philosophy, and Religious Studies and co-curricular programming. Examples include Abrahamic Traditions, a co-curricular BenTalk, Campus Ministry programming, Catholic Life Learning Community, Environmental Literature, Evolution, History and Philosophy of Science, Nature Writing, Great Ideas Seminar, Interdisciplinary Seminar (IDS), and more.

Suggested Location in the Curriculum: In the case of BIOL 4394: Nature Writing, this module will be used in conjunction with the assigned reading “Conclusion & Recapitulation” chapter of *On Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin. This is usually assigned midway through the term.

Estimated Time: 60-90 minutes

### Cultural Barriers to be Considered:

- Catholic students are likely to be unacquainted with Catholic scholarship and official Church documents supporting the compatibility of science and religion and the legitimacy of evolution.
- Our student population is culturally and religiously diverse, including significant Muslim, Hindu, and Humanist populations. Many may have never been exposed to religious defenses of evolution. Many students may accept the evolution of the planet and life forms but may reject the notion of human evolution.
- Anti-evolution and homeschooling trends in U.S. culture may support assumptions regarding the conflict between religion and evolution.

### Establishing Respect in the Classroom:

- Review the “Dialogue Decalogue” by Dr. Leonard Swidler
- Set up safe and brave space classroom contract at the beginning

## OUTLINE OF RECONCILIATION ACTIVITY

### Advanced Preparation for Instructor:

- Meet with Deans of the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Science about the creation and integration of this module
- Call for instructors to participate

- Meet for discussion 3-4 times before launch. Discuss readings and pedagogical strategies for teaching the module.
- Read texts in Sources section (see below).

Supplies Needed:

- Reading
- Dialogue Decalogue handouts

Pre-Class Assignment(s):

- Reading Assignment: Chapter in *Evolution: A Very Short Introduction*, Brian & Deborah Charlesworth and Chapter in *The Seven Big Myths About the Catholic Church*, Christopher Kaczor
- Watch “Theory of Evolution: How Did Darwin Come Up with It?” YouTube video
- Journaling Prompt: How would you describe your view of the relationship between evolution and religion? What sources or experiences shaped that view?
- Optional: Find out what your own faith tradition’s relationship or view on evolution is

Procedure:

1. Set up guidelines for the discussion using the Dialogue Decalogue and classroom contract for safe and brave space.
2. Perceived conflict of evolution and religion
3. Journal sharing
  - a. Pair or small group first
  - b. Open to large group
4. Brief explanation of evolution and religion (you may need more or less detail here based on the course)
  - a. Explanation and clarification of the process of evolution
  - b. Explanation of the nature of religion
5. Case Study: Catholic relationship with evolution
  - a. Science and the Catholic intellectual tradition
  - b. Catholic responses to Darwin in the nineteenth century
  - c. Official statements twentieth to twenty-first centuries
    - i. Second Vatican Council
  - d. Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Francis’s green Catholicism
  - e. Current thoughts on the issue
6. Processing
  - a. First: one minute of journaling
  - b. Second: go back to small group and share journal. Then:
    - i. Have you had any new ideas sparked by this discussion?
    - ii. What new things have you learned about the Catholic tradition, if any?
    - iii. Where else have you seen religion and science conflict?
    - iv. How can our understanding of evolution enhance to interfaith dialogue?
    - v. Why does all of this matter?

## 7. Explain writing assignment

Post-Class Assignments: Formalize your journaling into an essay about your view of the relationship between evolution and religion in light of the class discussion. Be sure to cite any sources you include.

### Resources for Students and Instructors:

*Evolution: A Very Short Introduction*, Brian & Deborah Charlesworth

*The Seven Big Myths About the Catholic Church*, Christopher Kaczor (Chapter 1 “The Church Opposes Science: The Myth of Catholic Irrationality”)

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*

*Christianity and Evolution*, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

*Laudato Si*

“Theory of Evolution: How Did Darwin Come Up with It?” BBCNews YouTube Channel

“20 Min Introduction to Biological Evolution”