



Jay Janner / Associated Press

Barbara Cargill shows an article about Charles Darwin while debating evolution at the State Board of Education in 2009.

Science/faith divide not so wide: expert

Texas remains a hotbed of debate over religion vs. science in the public schools

By Elaine Ayala
STAFF WRITER

Kenneth Miller teaches biology at Brown University but is also a bit of a circuit preacher whose talks center on the schism between faith and science.

Texas long has been an epicenter of that tension, Miller says.

In a speech on "Darwin, God and the Cosmos" at St. Mary's University earlier this month, he described the state's reputation. Texas plays three blood sports, he said, "football, politics and textbook adoption."

On one side of the divide are those who see the Big Bang theory of the origins

of the universe, and the theory of evolution through natural selection, as central to science. On the other are those who literally interpret the Old Testament for a story of creation.

Miller, speaking at St. Mary's as both scientist and practicing Catholic, said the divide is myth, because people of faith have long believed in scientific inquiry.

Though often questioned about how he reconciles his faith and work, he answers with a straightforward declaration, "If two ideas aren't in conflict, they don't need to be reconciled."

At the University of

Notre Dame, where he was honored in 2014 with the Laetare Medal, the highest honor given a U.S. Catholic, he took it further.

"Western science has its roots in a faith that views the study of nature and its mysteries as a way to praise and understand the glory of God," he said. "It was in that tradition that Newton unwove the rainbow and revealed the laws of motion, that Father Gregor Mendel established the science of genetics, and that Father Georges Lemaître developed the theoretical foundation for cosmic expansion."

The latter was a Catholic priest who first described the physics of the big bang



Students hold their school's banner with a portrait of Copernicus in front of the coffin with northern Poland in 2010. Copernicus, whose findings were condemned by the Roman Cath

theory "before Einstein did," he said.

For Miller, faith isn't the antithesis of reason, it is its source, which is why the Catholic Church was the principal funding agency of scientific institutions.

"During the Middle Ages, the church funded science as the NIH (National Institutes of Health) and NSF (National Science Foundation) does now," he said. "In astronomy, observatories were funded by

the medieval church."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/22/world/europe/vatican-observatory-consolmagno.html>

He also pointed to Brother Guy Consolmagno, a Jesuit, a former physics professor and director of the Vatican Observatory. In a 2017 New York Times story, Consolmagno said part of his mission is to convince the world "that faith and science coexist."

Moreover, Pope Francis, trained as a chemist, has stated his support of science and asserted that evolution and the big bang theory are real.

Though his comments were viewed as remarkable, Miller called them the "least surprising thing" the pope has said. In the tradition of the Catholic faith, God doesn't have a magic wand, yet is a creator, he said.

A modern divide be-



Jerzy Mytyka / Associated Press

With the remains of astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus, in the cathedral in Frombork, Catholic Church, was reburied by Polish priests as a hero on Saturday.

an undirected process such as natural selection.”

Dover teachers refused to teach the “intelligent design” lesson, Miller said. When the superintendent attempted to enforce the board’s policy, parents filed a lawsuit and ultimately won with the help of Eugene Scott, executive director of the National Center for Science Education.

Miller said the case illustrated that people of faith embrace science: The judge was Republican and Lutheran. Three of six witnesses were people of faith, and seven of 11 plaintiffs were Christian. Two were Sunday school teachers, he said.

Back in Texas, members of the State Board of Education said Miller’s popular textbook, “Biology,” was factually incorrect, citing 20 mistakes. It hired University of Texas, Baylor University and Texas A&M University scientists to review it, who found no errors, and the book was adopted, Miller said.

“I don’t have to find room for God in the evolution process,” Miller said. “The process is part of the natural world that God made in the first place.”

“I say religion and science need each other,” he added.

Miller sees hope in changing U.S. attitudes toward science and faith, especially among the young. “We’re raising people more accepting of science,” he said.

Texas has pivoted slightly, too. In the past four or five years, the State Board of Education has removed “tentative, weaselly language” regarding evolution, he said.

“If the battle can be won in Texas,” he said, “it can be won everywhere.”

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Miller

Between religion and science emerged not from traditional Christianity but from fundamentalism,

he said, referring to books such as Andrew White’s, “A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom,” and “The Fundamentals,” by George Frederick Wright.



Scopes

Their ideas took root and procreated. The Scopes “monkey trial” in the 1920s found schoolteach-

er John Scopes guilty of violating a state law against teaching evolution. Charles Darwin’s scientific theory was on trial, too. Celebrity attorney Clarence Darrow defended both.



Scott

More recently, in 2004, Miller said, a school board in Dover, Pennsylvania, sought to

“balance” the teaching of evolution by including “intelligent design,” which holds “that certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not

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