

Creationism support is at a new low. The reason should give us hope.

People aren't dumping faith. They're reconciling creationism and evolution in a way that suggests how we can bridge other polarizing divides, including the current health care impasse.

Fundamentalists are vowing to make a last stand for God in Dayton, Tenn., on July 14 when a new statue will be installed on the [courthouse lawn](#). Going up alongside a likeness of William Jennings Bryan is a [depiction of Clarence Darrow](#), Bryan's pro-evolution adversary in Dayton's historic [Scopes Monkey Trial](#) of 1925.

The creationist organizing the protests is threatening to bring in a militia to [thwart installation](#) of the Darrow statue, which she calls an insult to God and Christians. It will take a lot more than that, though, to stop Americans' growing acceptance of evolution and apparent shift away from the strict creationist view of the origin of the species.

New [polling data](#) show that for the first time in a long time there's a notable decline in the percentage of Americans — including Christians — who hold to the “Young Earth” creationist view that humankind was created in its present form in the past 10,000 years, evolution playing no part.

According to a [Gallup poll](#) conducted in May, the portion of the American public taking this position now stands at 38%, a new low in Gallup's periodic surveys. Fifty-seven percent accept the validity of the scientific consensus that human beings evolved from less advanced forms of life over millions of years.

Has atheism taken over so thoroughly? No, and that's why this apparent break in the [creationism-vs.-evolution stalemate](#) is significant and even instructive to those in search of creative solutions to our other

intractable public arguments.

As the poll reveals, the biggest factor in the shift is a jump in the number of Christians who are reconciling faith and evolution. They are coming to see evolution as their God's way of creating life on Earth and continuing to shape it today.

"Science doesn't have to drive people away from faith," says Deborah Haarsma, president of an organization called [BioLogos](#) that promotes harmony between science and Christian faith.

It's endlessly frustrating to secular and religious liberals, but the creationist view has held strong sway in this country in the decades since the famous Darrow-Bryan courtroom duel. Over recent decades, percentages in the upper-40s have taken the creationist position; the figure stood at 46% in [Gallup's 2012 survey](#).

Tenacious anti-evolution resistance continues to influence debates over issues including public school curricula, government support for creationist installations like the [Noah's Ark replica in Kentucky](#), and research access to national parks. A creationist researcher, for instance, claimed religious discrimination in his [successful legal fight with the U.S. Park Service](#) over its refusal to grant him access to collect rock samples. His purpose: marshaling evidence in support of the creationist belief that the Grand Canyon was created by a great global flood a relatively recent 4,300 years ago — the same flood that Noah and company are said to have ridden out on the ark.

Creationists will believe what they want to believe. But they should know the consequences. Continued fighting to promote creationism is hurting religion's credibility in an age when science and technology are perceived as reliable sources of truth and positive contributors to society. Anecdotal and polling evidence implicate [religion's anti-science reputation](#) in the drift away from church involvement — especially among [younger adults](#), nearly 40% of whom have [left organized religion](#) behind.

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Not surprising, in view of our growing secularization, the percentage of Americans taking the strict evolution view — no divine role — has grown significantly since the 1980s, from 9% to 19% in the [latest Gallup survey](#).

But the latest [movement in public opinion](#) shows one-time creationists taking refuge not in the “no-religion” zone but in “both/and” position. The percentage of people choosing the hybrid view — around 30% in 2014 — was eight points higher in Gallup’s poll.

These tea leaves tell us that more people are refusing the all-or-nothing choice between faith and science and opting instead for a third way: Acceptance of the overwhelming scientific evidence for evolution while seeing a divine role in the process. “Divine evolution” is a term some use for it.

If we were to apply this approach to other stalemated arguments and false binaries, what other possibilities might emerge? Can’t we support Black Lives Matter and police officers who serve conscientiously? Can’t we support the legal availability of abortion and strategies that would reduce its incidence? Can’t we accept the scientific consensus on climate change and acknowledge a role for free-market business innovation as part of the solution? In the ongoing tussle over health care, can't we envision a system that combines the best private and government solutions?

For now, something to appreciate: Growing public rejection of an unhelpful creationism-vs.-evolution fight that does no favors for either religion or science. As more believers are wisely accepting, you can embrace both — and both are better for it.

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