

Same World, Different Worldviews

A Choicework
Discussion Starter
from Public Agenda

How Can Evangelical Christians and Scientists Minimize Conflict and Improve Relations?



**Same World, Different Worldviews:
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Scientists Minimize Conflict and
Improve Relations?**

A version of this guide is available online
at [http://publicagenda.org/page/
same-world-different-worldviews](http://publicagenda.org/page/same-world-different-worldviews)

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Same World, Different Worldviews

How Can Evangelical Christians and Scientists Minimize Conflict and Improve Relations?

Science and religion are sometimes cast as adversaries—competing forces with opposing goals. The scientific and evangelical Christian communities represent perhaps the most fraught example of the conflict between science and religion in the United States. Helping these two groups better relate to one another will not only strengthen our nation but may also point a path forward for relations between science and religion in general. This discussion guide is meant to help people from these contrasting points of view do exactly that.

Scientists and evangelicals have found themselves in disagreement on a range of major issues, and often members of both communities voice significant misgivings about the other. While some evangelicals may be skeptical of scientific theories and worry about the impacts science may have on their communities, some scientists feel that evangelical Christianity hinders the growth of scientific literacy and argue that religion should stay out of public discourse. Nonetheless, there are signs that this popular narrative of conflict masks important commonalities.

Consider the following:

- Roughly three quarters (74 percent) of scientists profess to some religious affiliation. 42 percent identify as Protestant, including 17 percent who identify as evangelical Protestant.¹
- 42 percent of scientists and 48 percent of evangelicals say the relationship between science and religion is one of “collaboration,” in which “each can be used to help support the other.”²
- 81 percent of evangelicals and 84 percent of people with no religious affiliation say science has a “mostly positive” effect on society.³

Are these two communities really as separate as they sometimes seem? And, looking forward, what sort of relationship should they strive for—or accept?

The following pages contain three different approaches, each aiming to minimize conflict and improve relations between the evangelical and scientific communities. What are the benefits and challenges of each? Are there other approaches that are not covered that we should consider? And what do you think is the best approach for your community?

¹ Ecklund, Elaine, and Christopher Scheitle, “Religious Communities, Science, Scientists, and Perceptions: A Comprehensive Study.” Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, February 2014. [http://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/content_files/RU_AAASPresentationNotes_2014_0219%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/content_files/RU_AAASPresentationNotes_2014_0219%20(1).pdf)

² Ibid.

³ Masci, David, “Public Opinion on Religion and Science in the United States.” Pew Research. Modified November 5, 2009. <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/11/05/public-opinion-on-religion-and-science-in-the-united-states/>

APPROACH A

BUILD COMMON GROUND: EXPLORE SHARED VALUES AND PROMOTE UNDERSTANDING

If we look beyond the debates that often define the relationship between the scientific and evangelical communities, there are individuals who share common values, such as service, compassion and perseverance. To expand evangelical communities' appreciation for science and scientists' appreciation for religion, evangelical and scientific leaders should explore these shared values and encourage members of both communities to recognize them. We can best improve relations by uncovering and affirming the shared values that guide individuals from both communities in their day-to-day lives.

This approach might include actions such as:

- Organizing, in a variety of settings, talks and sermons by scientific and religious leaders that explore common values. Evangelical scientists, for instance, might speak at their churches, universities or in other scientific or religious contexts, about the role of religion and science in their lives.
- Organizing ongoing dialogue—not debate—between members of both communities to explore scientific and philosophical topics and uncover values they share despite their differing views on some issues.

Someone who likes this approach might say...

- The basis of all relationships is rapport. A crucial first step in bringing our communities together is breaking down barriers and recognizing shared values.

Someone who does not like this approach might say...

- Discussions and lectures won't get us very far. Only by actually working together—pursuing common action on shared goals—will we forge lasting bonds.
- Common personal values cannot overcome our communities' deep, passionate and very valid disagreements, and those disagreements will always define our relationship.

APPROACH B

INCREASE COLLABORATION: WORK TOGETHER TO CONFRONT COMMON CONCERNS

The evangelical and scientific communities are both interested in a range of topics that are ripe for not only dialogue but also joint action. Every day, individuals from these communities—as coworkers, friends and neighbors—discuss and work together on topics like health, education, poverty, environmental stewardship and human rights. We can break down barriers between the evangelical and scientific communities if we pursue this same type of collaboration on a larger scale—especially involving churches, universities, and other evangelical or scientific organizations. We can best improve relations by actually working together on our common concerns.

This approach might include actions such as:

- Bringing together members of scientific and evangelical organizations to discuss solutions to pressing social, economic and environmental problems in a structured and respectful way.
- Launching collaborative projects that draw on members of both communities to tackle issues of common concern.

Someone who likes this approach might say...

- On a practical level, the disagreements between these two communities do not matter. Both have a common concern for the wellbeing of others. Working together, evangelical and scientific communities can advance the pace of change and bring real progress to the people who need it most.

Someone who does not like this approach might say...

- Effective collaboration will not be possible if these two communities continue to misunderstand and disrespect each other. Mutual understanding of common values may be the most we can hope for—at least, it is the first step.
- The two communities are governed by irreconcilably different authorities and methods. Any collaboration on a community-wide level would inevitably become a struggle.

APPROACH C

SIMPLIFY RELATIONS: ENSURE CIVILITY AND MINIMIZE CONFRONTATION

The evangelical and scientific communities do not, generally speaking, see eye to eye, and on many issues they probably never will. The two groups lack a common worldview, but that is not necessarily a bad thing. As long as these communities remain civil towards one another, there's no need for deep mutual understanding or active collaboration. As they say, "Good fences make good neighbors." We can best improve relations by simplifying them so that they remain civil while each community pursues its own ends.

This approach might include actions such as:

- Bringing together leaders to establish norms of civility for public disagreement and debate. Leaders can then model and promote those behaviors among their communities.
- Encouraging both communities to continue down their paths and share their perspectives openly in the marketplace of ideas. Individuals can consider the ideas of each community as they see fit.

Someone who likes this approach might say...

- Working together will not improve society any more than the separate efforts of each community. Working separately, we can still utilize each other's ideas, but we won't get in each other's way, and we won't have to explain ourselves.

Someone who does not like this approach might say...

- Mutual understanding and engagement are not merely options. In a multicultural society, it is essential that diverse religions and cultures figure out how to live and work together. To create a better future, we must foster understanding between disparate communities.
- The evangelical and scientific communities are expending needless energy butting heads. The potential for improving the well-being of our communities, our country and our world will increase when we instead learn to complement each other and work together.

A REVIEW OF THE CHOICES IN BRIEF

APPROACH A

**Build Common Ground:
Explore shared values and
promote understanding**

This approach might include actions such as:

- Organizing, in a variety of settings, talks and sermons by scientific and religious leaders that explore common values. Evangelical scientists, for instance, might speak at their churches, universities or in other scientific or religious contexts, about the role of religion and science in their lives.
- Organizing ongoing dialogue—not debate—between members of both communities to explore scientific and philosophical topics and uncover values they share despite their differing views on some issues.

APPROACH B

**Increase Collaboration:
Work together to confront
common concerns**

This approach might include actions such as:

- Bringing together members of scientific and evangelical organizations to discuss solutions to pressing social, economic and environmental problems in a structured and respectful way.
- Launching collaborative projects that draw on members of both communities to tackle issues of common concern.

APPROACH C

**Simplify Relations:
Ensure civility and minimize
confrontation**

This approach might include actions such as:

- Bringing together leaders to establish norms of civility for public disagreement and debate. Leaders can then model and promote those behaviors among their communities.
- Encouraging both communities to continue down their paths and share their perspectives openly in the marketplace of ideas. Individuals can consider the ideas of each community as they see fit.

USING THIS GUIDE IN COMMUNITY CONVERSATION, DISCUSSION GROUP OR CLASSROOM SETTING

After a discussion of the choices, it can be helpful to first summarize the conversation and then bridge to action-oriented deliberations, as follows:

Summarizing a Choicework Conversation

These questions are a good way to summarize a Choicework conversation, prior to considering more action-oriented questions.

1. In our conversation so far, have we discovered any common ground? What do we agree on or have in common?
2. What were our important areas of disagreement, the issues we may have to keep talking about in the future?
3. What are the questions and concerns that need more attention? Are there things we need more information about?

Bridging Dialogue to Action

These questions can help you move from dialogue about the issue at hand to actions that can help address the issue.

1. How can we work together to make a difference in our community on the issues we discussed today? This is a brainstorming phase of the discussion.
2. Among the action ideas we've discussed, how should we prioritize them?
3. How should we follow up on today's conversation? Are there individual steps we can take? Are there things we can do collectively?

ABOUT CHOICEWORK DISCUSSION STARTERS

Public Agenda's Choicework Discussion Starters support dialogue and deliberation on a wide variety of issues. They have been used in thousands of community conversations, discussion groups and classrooms and by journalists, researchers, policymakers, community leaders and individuals looking to better understand and discuss solutions to a variety of public and community issues.

Each guide is organized around several alternative ways of thinking about an issue, each with its own set of values, priorities, pros, cons and trade-offs. The different perspectives are drawn both from how the public thinks about an issue and from what experts and leaders say about it in policy debates. Users of the guides should be encouraged to put additional ideas on the table or consider combining elements from different choices in unique ways. They are designed as a starting point for constructive dialogue and problem solving.



Public Agenda is a nonprofit organization that helps diverse leaders and citizens navigate divisive, complex issues. Through nonpartisan research and engagement, it provides people with the insights and support they need to arrive at workable solutions on critical issues, regardless of their differences. Since 1975, Public Agenda has helped foster progress on school reform, teacher effectiveness, achievement gaps, parent and community engagement, and other K-12 education issues.

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The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) established the Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion (DoSER) in 1995 to facilitate communication between scientific and religious communities. The program builds on AAAS's long-standing commitment to relate scientific knowledge and technological development to the purposes and concerns of society-at-large. This discussion starter was made possible with support from the Perceptions Project of AAAS DoSER. The Perceptions Project receives support from the John Templeton Foundation. The opinions expressed in this booklet do not necessarily reflect the views of AAAS or the John Templeton Foundation.

For more information, visit www.aaas.org/DoSER