

Faculti Summary

<https://faculti.net/inquiry-not-science-as-the-source-of-secularization-in-higher-education/>

The speaker discusses their motivation to dispel public myths, particularly regarding the assumed conflict between religion and science. They highlight that while religion traditionally uses sacred texts to make fact claims and science relies on observation, this dichotomy may not be as clear-cut as often portrayed.

Historically, many believe there is a significant conflict between religion and science, especially concerning topics like evolution, as exemplified by the Galileo and Darwin controversies. However, contemporary scholars argue that the real conflict lies in moral issues rather than factual disagreements. For instance, the Scopes Monkey Trial exemplifies how concerns about moral implications—rather than factual claims—underlied the legal challenges to teaching evolution.

The speaker's study investigates whether studying science leads to a decline in religious beliefs among college students. Previous research indicates that scientists tend to be less religious than the general population, but learning science does not necessarily lead to secularization. Instead, inquiry-based majors (e.g., social sciences and humanities) are more strongly correlated with a decline in religious adherence.

Using a large dataset of student surveys, the study identifies that about 11.3% of students lose their faith during college, with inquiry majors (like women's studies and anthropology) leading to the highest rates of secularization. Interestingly, traditional natural science majors, such as biology, do not have the same effect. It appears that the mindset developed through questioning underlying assumptions is what contributes most to students' secularization, rather than specific scientific knowledge.

Finally, the research suggests that misunderstandings between the public and scientists stem more from moral disagreements than factual disputes. To foster constructive dialogue, both groups should better understand the nature of their conflicts, focusing on values and beliefs rather than solely on facts.