

Smithsonian will open evolution hall and engage in dialogue with religion: An effort to bridge the gap

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The Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History will open a new permanent exhibit on the "discovery and understanding of human origins" in March and convene a panel of experts in an effort to bridge the gap between religion and science.

With input from more than 50 scientific and educational organizations and 70 distinguished scientists and educators, the museum launched a Broader Social Impacts Committee to address the interaction between religion and science.

"There's a long history of very dynamic interaction between religious ideas and the introduction of Darwin in America," said Jim Miller, cochair of the committee.

According to Miller, who is also an official with the Presbyterian Association on Science, Technology and the Christian Faith, the evolution exhibit is "a scientific exhibit, so it's not there to make a religious point."

Still, the committee will help educate museum volunteers on how to answer questions that visitors may have and to "encourage folks to engage the material there in a constructive way."

Miller said he has observed many religious people in America who separate their religious beliefs from their understanding of the world's origins. He hopes the exhibit will provide an opportunity "for sound scientific discovery to enrich religious experience."

The 15,000-square-foot exhibition hall will offer visitors a "unique, interactive museum experience" that documents some of the major landmarks in human evolution. Its features will include a display containing more than 75 cast reproductions of skulls, an interactive human family tree illustrating 6 million years

of evolutionary evidence, and an area that addresses climate change and humans' impact on the earth.

The \$20.7 million exhibition hall will open March 17, 2010, a date that marks the museum's 100-year anniversary on the National Mall. -*Religion News Service*