



BEYOND BELIEFS²

MILLENNIAL YOUNG ADULTS AND THEIR RESPONSES TO

CREATION

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BEYOND BELIEFS 2

Abstract

The Beyond Beliefs study undertaken by ClergyEd.com and the Religion and Biblical Languages Department at Andrews University investigated responses to the Seventh-day Adventist Creation fundamental with a sample 679 Millennial young adults. This component of the Beyond Beliefs study asked participants to select a statement that best described their belief regarding the origin of the world; to identify how strongly they felt about this belief; and if they would be bothered if life on earth came about differently or on a different time scale than what they currently believed. The findings suggest that Seventh-day Adventist Millennial young adults hold varying views relating to the origin of the world; that they claim they feel very strongly about these beliefs; however, if life on earth came about differently or on a different time scale than what they currently believe, most claim they would not lose their faith.

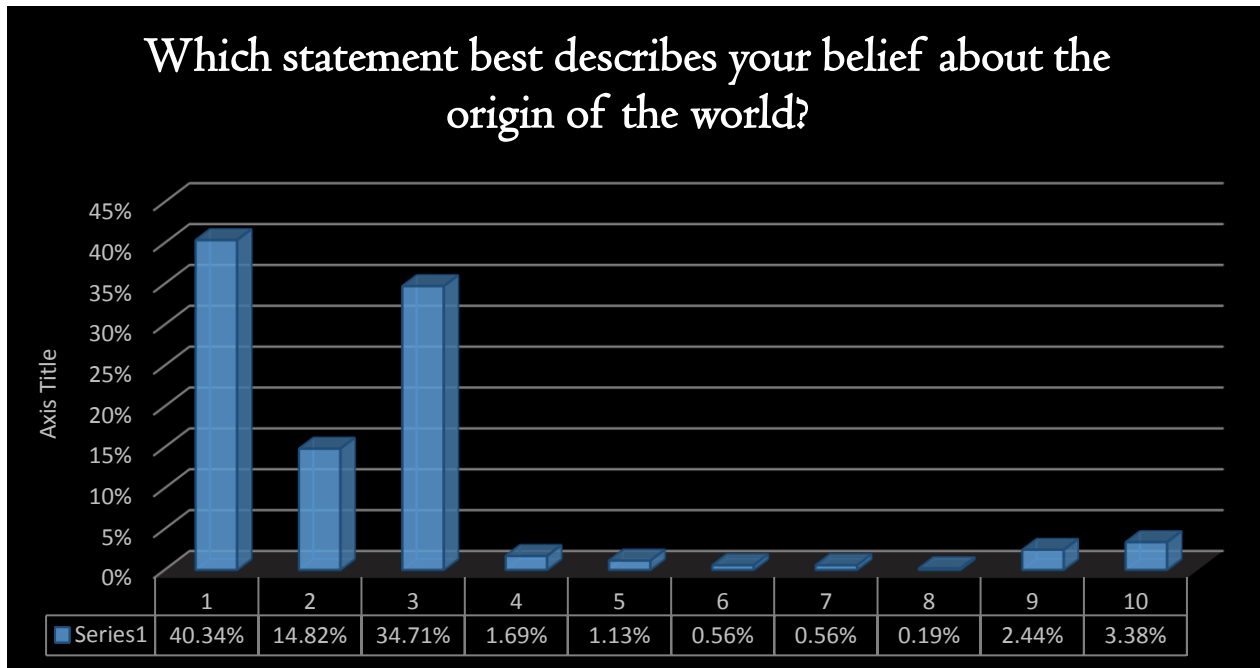


Problem

The upcoming 2015 General Conference Session for the Seventh-day Adventist church will consider updating the language of their sixth fundamental belief – Creation. In that context the Beyond Beliefs study wished to identify what views Millennial young adults held with relation to the origin of the world, how strongly they felt about that view, and if they felt their faith would be challenged if their held view was shown to be erroneous. The purpose of this investigation was not to promote a single view, but rather to report on the types of views Millennial Seventh-day Adventist young adults hold towards the origin of the world.

Millennial Origin Beliefs

Millennial young adults who participated in the Beyond Beliefs study (n=679) were asked to select a statement that best fit their personal belief about the origin of the world. The results were as follows:



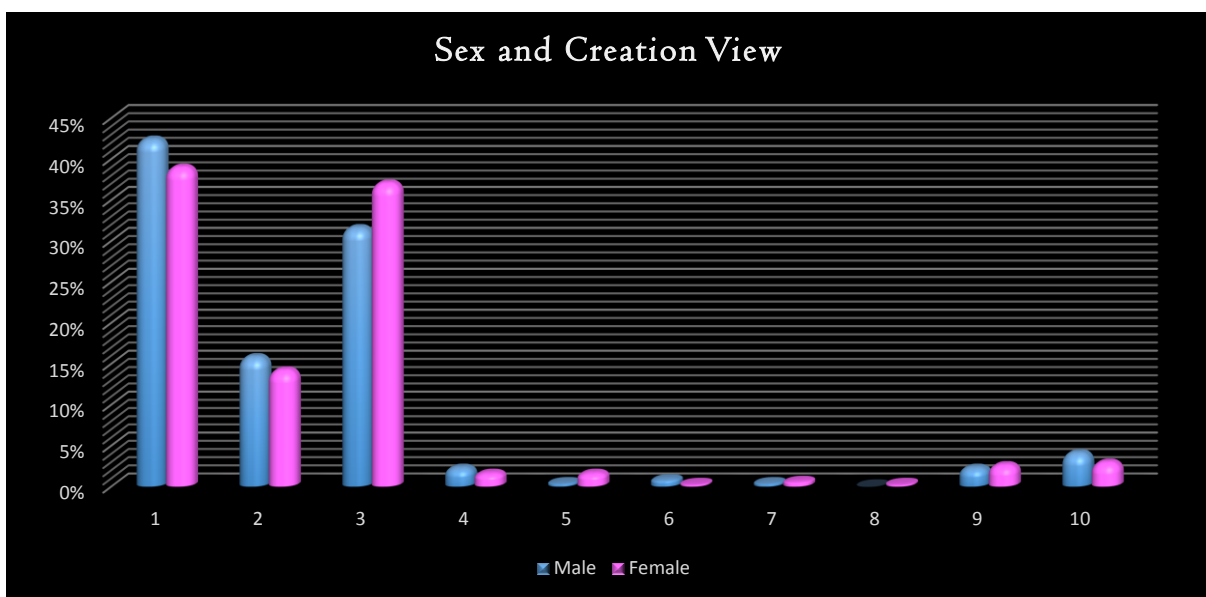
1.	I believe God created the entire universe in six literal days approximately 6,000 years ago
2.	I believe God created life on this earth in 6 literal days approximately 6,000—12,000 years ago
3.	I believe God created life on this earth in 6 literal days, but I don't know how long ago
4.	I believe God created life on this earth over a longer period of time, not 6 literal days, but over millions or even billions of years
5.	I believe God used the evolutionary process to create this world
6.	I believe the creation story is just a story written by someone to explain why the world is the way it is
7.	I don't believe a personal God created this world, but there was an intelligent designer
8.	I don't believe God created this world, and there was no intelligent designer. Life is due to natural causes
9.	I really don't care
10.	Other

The largest group (40.34%) believed that God created the entire universe in six literal days approximately 6,000 years ago. This was followed by 34.71% who believed God created life on this earth in six literal days, but did not know how long ago. The third largest group (14.82%) believed that God created life on this earth in six literal days, approximately 6,000 – 12,000 years ago. A combined 4.31% believed in an evolutionary process.

From this finding, it can be seen that a single uniform belief is not endorsed by a majority of Millennial young adults. Rather, they predominantly (89.87%) fall into one of three origin beliefs. It is interesting to note that all of these three major groups believe in a literal six day creation. What was created and when it was created seems to be the determining difference between the prominent three groups.

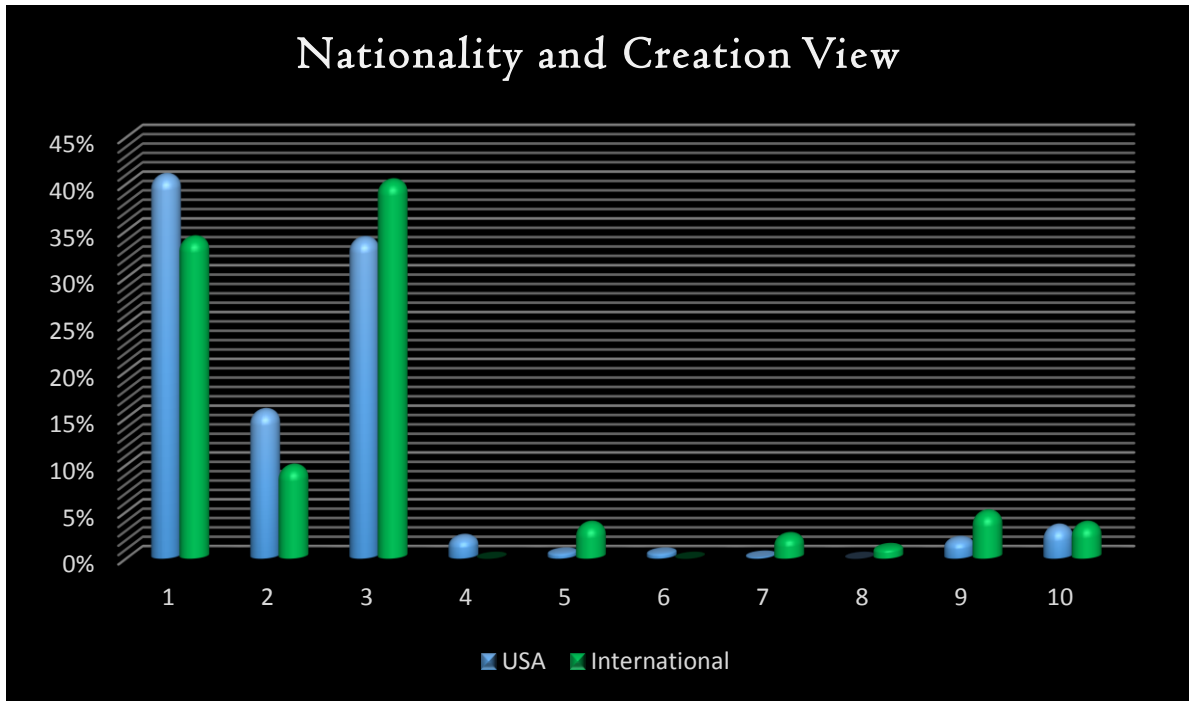
Origin Beliefs and Sex, Nationality, Ethnicity, and Adventist Education

The Beyond Beliefs study took a closer look at creation beliefs with regard to sex, nationality, ethnicity, and Adventist Education. With regard to sex, the following male and female differences were identified:

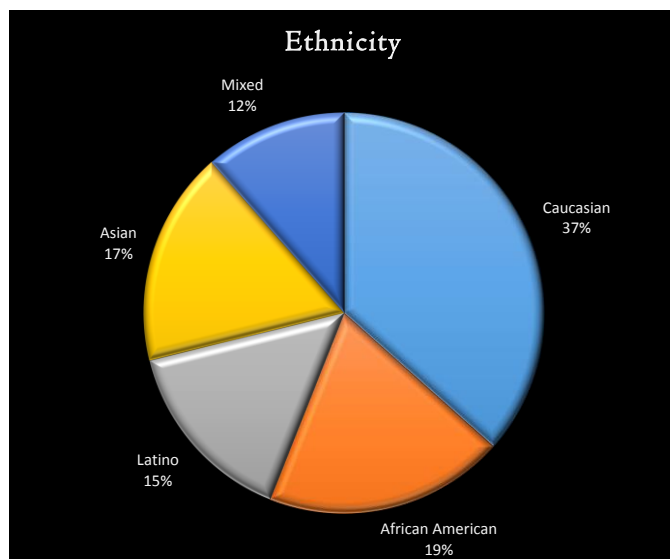


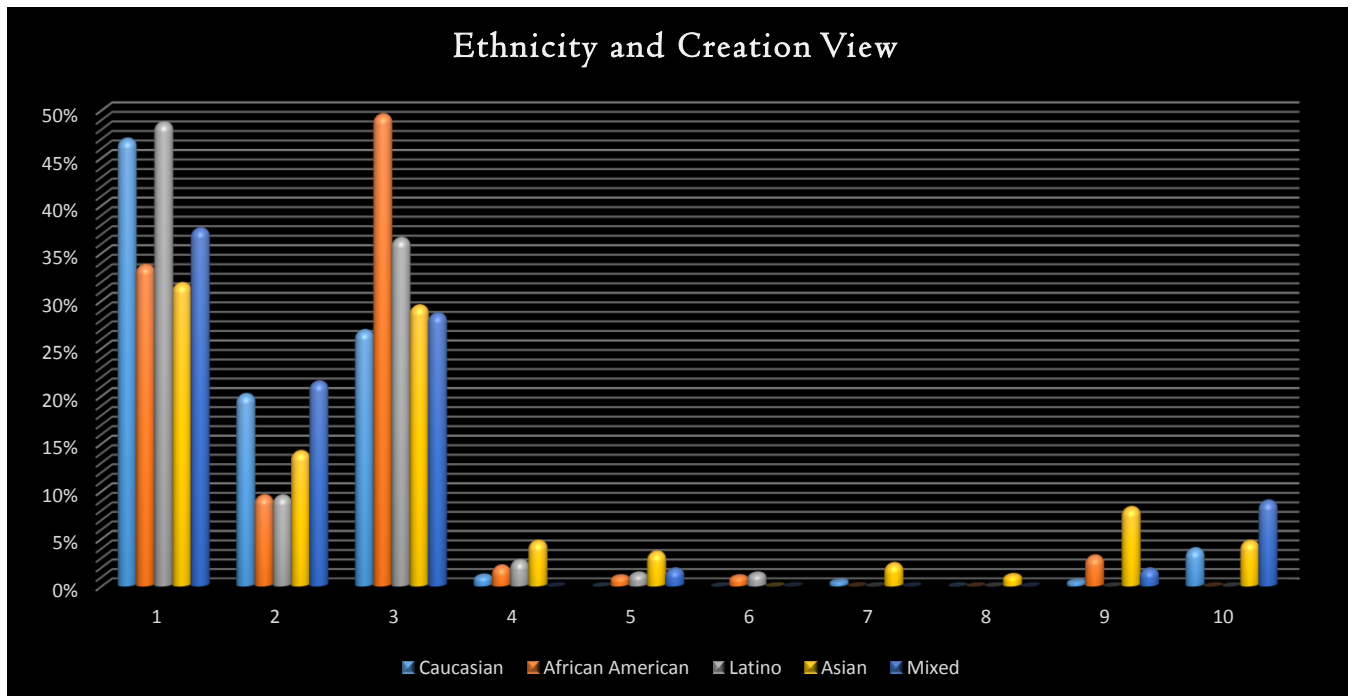
As can be seen in the graph, there are only slight differences between the sexes, suggesting that being male or female does not play a significant role in a person's belief regarding the origin of the world.

A similar result was identified with relation to nationality (US participants and international participants) where little difference between groups was observed. It must be noted that approximately 16% of participants were citizens of other countries. With a larger sample, however, a different result may emerge.



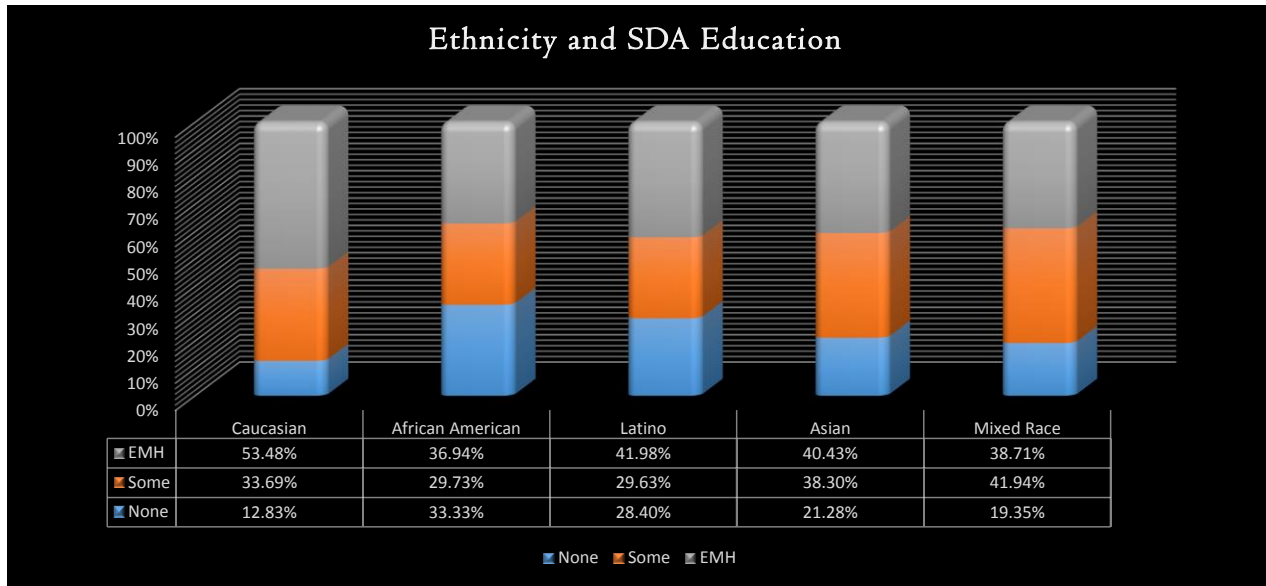
Ethnicity with regard to origin of the world beliefs was also investigated and did, however, identify preferential beliefs by some ethnicities. This may be due to differing origin beliefs being emphasized in certain churches and ethnic groups. The results are as follows:



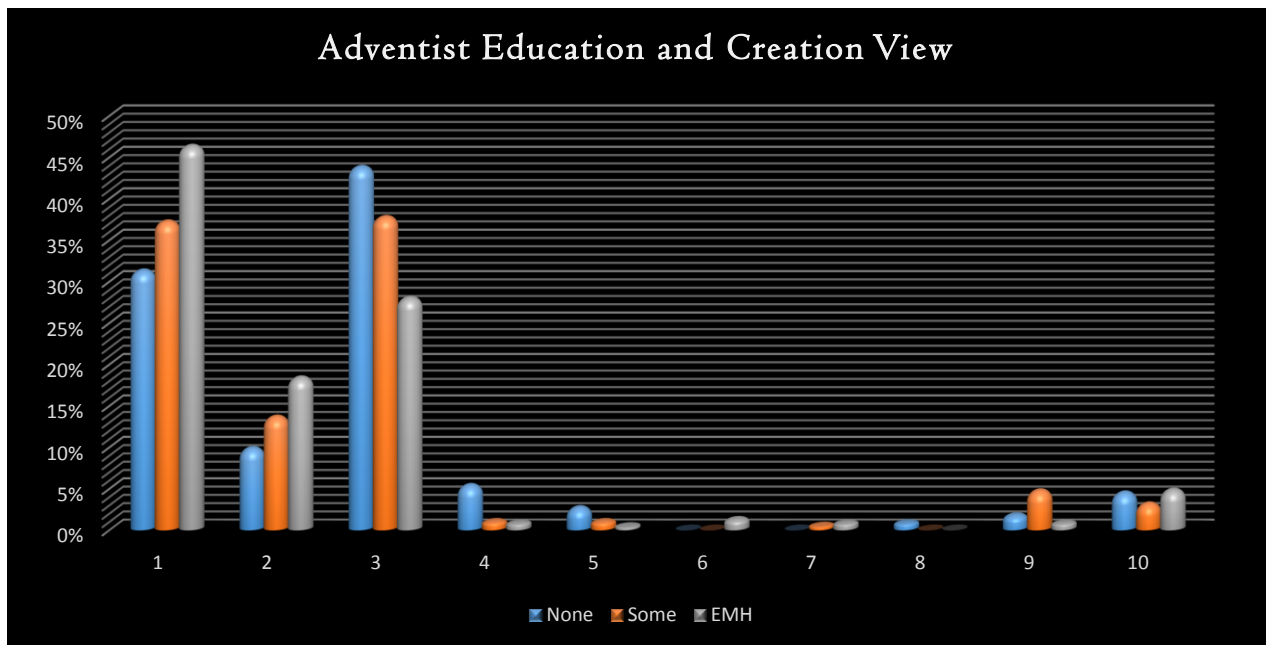


The most popular view (the whole universe was created during the six day creation week approximately 6,000 years ago) is more strongly held by Caucasians and Latinos, while the view that life on earth was created during a six day creation week without knowing when, seems to be a belief more strongly held by African Americans. Ethnicity with relation to origin beliefs warrants further investigation and will be explored in later investigations of the Beyond Beliefs study. More research is certainly warranted to identify what factors may be influencing this difference.

One factor that could be influencing it is the extent of participation in Adventist education. The chart below indicates that African Americans participate in primary/secondary Adventist education to a lesser degree than Caucasians. However, Latinos participate in Adventist education to a similar extent as African Americans yet hold similar origin beliefs as Caucasians. The difference between Latino and African American outcomes may indicate that participation in churches operated by Regional Conferences, and not just ethnicity or limited participation in Adventist education, may be influencing creation views.

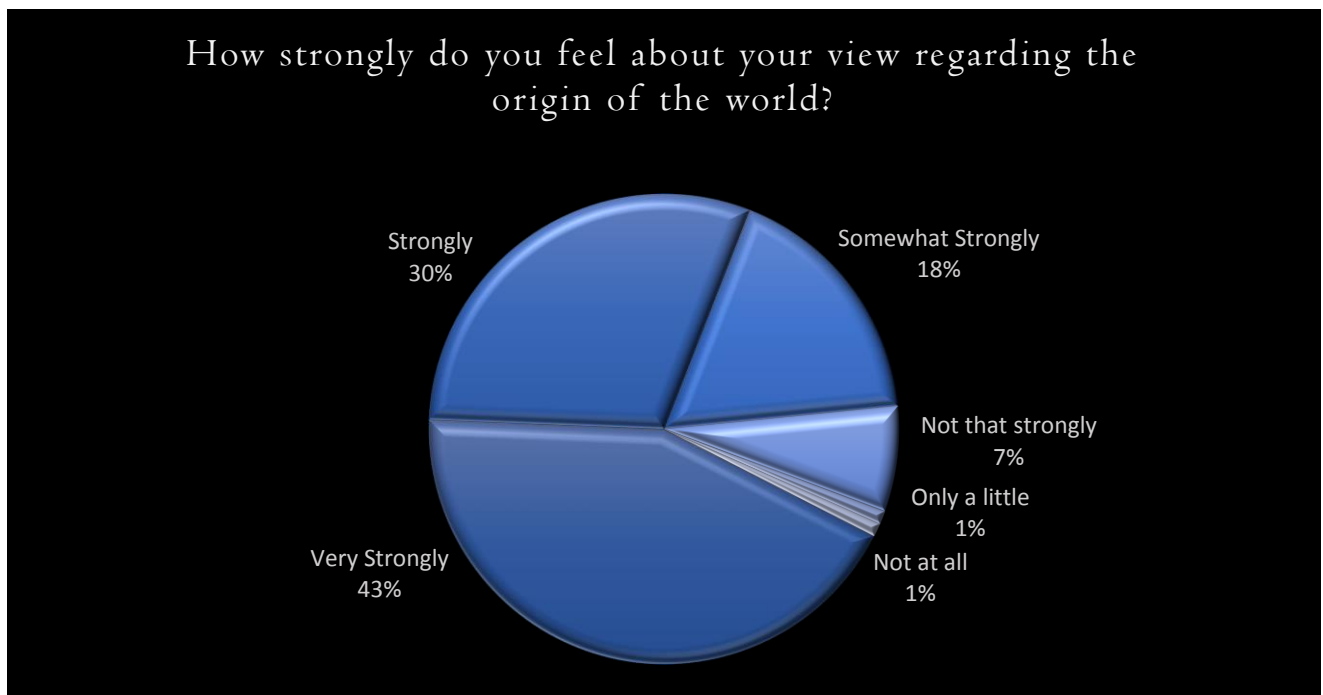


The following graph depicts Adventist education and creation beliefs. As can be seen, a belief in a six literal day creation that took place 6,000 years ago seems more prevalent among those who undertook Elementary, Middle, and High School at an Adventist school. The belief in a six literal day creation at an unknown point in time is more strongly held by those who did not attend Adventist schooling at a primary and secondary level. Further investigation with relation to Adventist education and creation views is warranted as participation in Adventist education may be the factor that strongly influences an individual's origin belief.



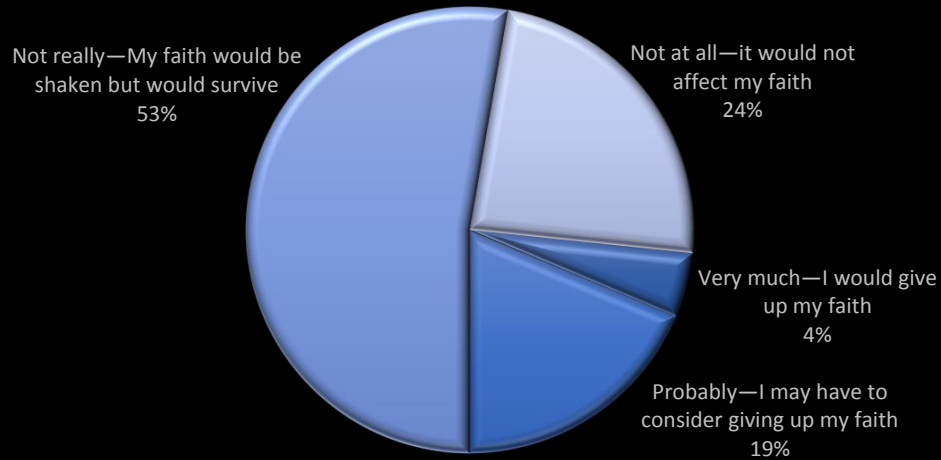
How Strong is their Origin Belief?

The Beyond Beliefs study also asked participants to select how strongly they felt about their origin belief. There were 91% of participants who fell within the strongly range, which one could surmise would result in Millennial young adults losing their faith should their origin belief be shown to be erroneous or it took place on a different time scale.



However, the results of the Beyond Beliefs survey found the opposite.

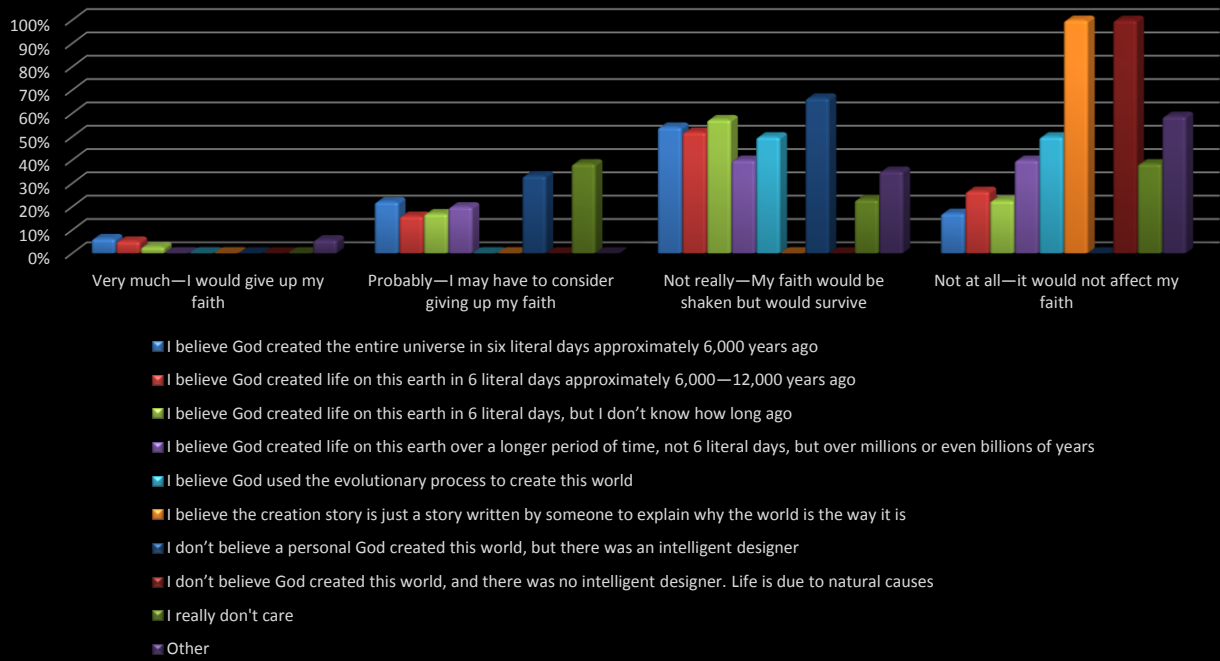
Would it bother you if life on earth came about differently or on a different time scale to what you currently believe?



Only 4% of participants stated that they would lose their faith. The majority (53%) claimed their faith would be shaken, but it would survive and 24% claimed their faith would not be shaken at all. It must be noted that this is a hypothetical question – how it would really affect their faith in a real world situation is still unknown, even to young adults themselves.

The following chart demonstrates belief statements that participants could choose from and compares it to how strongly they claimed they felt about their belief. Most beliefs are represented in all four categories suggesting no one belief will result in a Millennial young adult abandoning their faith should science or theology disciplines demonstrate that their origin belief is erroneous.

Would it bother you if life on earth came about differently or on a different time scale to what you currently believe?



Seventh-day Adventist Millennial young adults seem to endorse the origin belief as presented in the Genesis creation account that the world was created during a single literal week. However, there seems to be some confusion regarding what was created during that week (i.e. the universe or just life on earth) and also when this event took place. Even though most participants felt strongly about their specific origin belief, most young adults reported that if their personal belief was demonstrated to be wrong, they claimed they would ultimately not lose their faith.