



# National Center for Science Education

Defending the Teaching of Evolution in Public Schools

[www.ncseweb.org](http://www.ncseweb.org)

## **Guide to *Episode 7: What About God?***

For a 45–60 minute dialogue on Episode 7 of *Evolution*

By Phina Borgeson, M.Div.

“Evolution ... does not demand that we give up the idea of God. Rather it asks that we think about God in a fresh way. Such a requirement is nothing new in the history of religion, since each age faces unprecedented crises that may require dramatic shifts in any given generation’s understanding of ultimate reality. Indeed, it is generally by facing severe challenges that religious faith sustains or renews its vitality. Like other living and evolving systems, a religious faith also goes limp if no stumbling blocks at all are ever placed in its path.”

— John F. Haught, *Science and Religion: From Conflict to Conversation* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1995), 63–64.

### **Image**

Ken Ham speaks with certainty on many things. In one shot where he is speaking to the camera, he comments that if you can reject the Bible as true on matters of astronomy, geology, and biology, then it follows that the Bible is not true on matters of morality of salvation.

### **Dig**

Ham’s argument has been a sticking point for creationists for years, at least since William Jennings Bryan at the Scopes trial in 1925. The fear that if the Bible is not an authority in all matters, people will become amoral still holds sway with many religious conservatives. But there are other issues on which disparities between the scriptural accounts of creation and the discoveries of evolutionary scientists cause conflict for people. Recall the things the students from Wheaton focused on. Perhaps the most prominent is the existence of factual persons named Adam and Eve. What are some others you have observed? Take time to explore these.

### **Dialogue**

Peter Sladen, an anthropology major at Wheaton, says it’s a lose–lose situation. If you accept evolution people will accuse you of doing bad theology, and if you don’t accept it, they’ll accuse you of doing bad science. Yet the conclusion of many scientists who are believers and many theologians with an interest in science is that not to accept evolution results in bad science *and* bad theology. In other words, evolution science and theology understood as different but complimentary are definitely a win–win. In what ways do the understandings of evolution you have gained from this series challenge your thinking about faith? In what ways do they enrich it?

## Explore

1. Learn more about the history of the conflict between evolution and religion in the United States. *Summer for the Gods* by Edward J. Larson (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) takes a fresh look at the Scopes trial and the continuing life of the themes raised there.
2. Or learn more about what creationists are saying and teaching. There are a myriad of resources on the [NCSE web site](#) for exploring creationism, creation science, and intelligent design.
3. Ken Ham asserts that he doesn't interpret the bible, he just reads it. Is it possible to read texts thousands of years old, in translation, and from a different cultural context, without interpreting them? How does your faith community approach its sacred texts? How does this help or hinder dialogue with other ways of knowing, such as science?

## Act

Clare McKinney, the science teacher in Lafayette, Indiana, is surprised and disappointed, saying, “we haven't done a very good job with the nature of science if we have this many students who don't understand the difference and why [creationism] can't be addressed in a science classroom.” It is forty-four years since the Soviet launch of Sputnik ratcheted up science teaching in this country, yet many of us, and our children, know little about the ways and major themes of science. In communities of faith, even those who nominally embrace evolution and other insights of science and who benefit from technological advances, science as a way of knowing may be ignored or disparaged. How might your congregation help to change this attitude, and work to support and encourage science education? Learn what is happening in the public school science classrooms in your community. Are there attacks on the teaching of evolution? Or is the subject glossed over for fear of attacks from conservative Christians? If there are conflicts and problems, visit the [NCSE web site](#) to find out what you can do to help.

Please send comments on these guides, and any questions about ideas and resources for extending the conversation, to:

Phina Borgeson  
Faith Network Director  
National Center for Science Education  
420 40th Street, Suite 2  
Oakland, CA 94609-2509  
[borgeson@ncseweb.org](mailto:borgeson@ncseweb.org)  
[www.ncseweb.org](http://www.ncseweb.org)