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Intergenerational Story
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Evolution and Faith

Excerpted from Harmon, Amy. "A Teacher on the Front Line as Faith and Science Clash." *The New York Times*, August 24, 2008. [New York Times Article on Faith and Science](#)

‘This is the story about a biology teacher in Florida who teaches high school to a group of students who had been raised to take the biblical creation story as fact.

The teacher, Mr. Campbell, had helped to devise Florida’ new standards for teaching evolution and co-founded an organization called Florida Citizens for Science, a group that advocated better teaching of evolution in schools. He is an Anglican who attends church most Sundays.

Here is a conversation that Mr. Campbell had with his students. He bounced a tennis ball on the classroom’s hard linoleum floor as he spoke.

“Bryce,” he asked, “What is it called when natural laws are suspended – what do you call it when water changes into wine?”

“Miracle?” Bryce supplied.

Mr. Campbell nodded. The ball hit the floor again.

“Science explores nature by testing and gathering data,” he said.

JE (In science, there are not absolutes. Scientists say that something can be 95% true, but they rarely say that something is absolutely true. The fossil record, along with radiocarbon dating, is used to support the theory that natural selection caused species to evolve.)

“Science can’t tell you what’s right and wrong. It doesn’t address ethics. But it is not anti-religion. Science and religion just ask different questions.”

He grabbed the ball and held it still.

“Can anybody think of a question that science can’t answer?”

“Is there a God?” shot back a boy near the window.

“Good,” said Mr. Campbell, “Can’t test it. Can’t prove it, can’t disprove it. It’s not a question for science.”

Bryce raised his hand.

“But there is scientific proof that there is a God,” he said. “Over in Turkey, there’s a piece of wood from Noah’s ark that came out of a glacier.”

Mr. Campbell chose his words carefully.

“If I could prove, tomorrow, that that chunk of wood is not from the ark, is not even 500 years old and not even from the right kind of tree – would that damage your religious faith at all?”

Bryce thought for a moment.

“No,” he said.

The room was unusually quiet.

“Faith is not based on science, Mr. Campbell said. “And science is not based on faith.” I don’t expect you to ‘believe’ the scientific explanation of evolution that we have talked about. “

“But I do,” he added, “expect you to understand it.””