

WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN AND THE SCOPES TRIAL: A FUNDAMENTALIST PERSPECTIVE

by
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During the last few years of the life of William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925), when the Fundamentalist–Modernist controversy was at its height, few men linked science with creationism (or Adamism as some evolutionists called it¹). Very little scientific formulae and geological evidence for creationism were available in Bryan’s day.² His critics suggest that, even if the facts were available, he would not have used them. His final and sufficient defense for divine creation was Genesis; God’s answer was enough. Evolutionists were critical of fundamentalists for their “unscientific” approach to the biological origin and development of species, while the latter, under the leadership of Bryan, adamantly maintained that any system which contradicts the biblical account of creation cannot be true. Although the Bible, they said, is not a textbook on science, it nevertheless speaks authoritatively on any subject it addresses because it is divinely inspired and can be clearly understood.³ Whenever it makes statements bearing on scientific questions

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¹L. Sprague DeCamp, *The Great Monkey Trial* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), p. 493.

²During the trial, Bryan did cite self-taught geologist and Seventh Day Adventist George McCready Price (1870–1963) as an opponent of evolution. The most systematic and comprehensive of Price’s two dozen anti-evolution books was *The New Geology* (1923), written shortly before the trial. Price made many valid assertions that have now been accepted by creation scientists, but evolutionary geologists refused to take him seriously because of his lack of scientific credentials (Ronald L. Numbers, “Creationism in 20th-Century America,” *Science* 218 [November 1982]: 539–40).

³Bryan believed in the Protestant hermeneutic of the perspicuity of Scripture, that most biblical statements are plain, self-interpreting, and self-authenticating. The Bible was clear about divine creation. This truth is not only perspicuous but it is immutable, and any so-called scientific view that attempted to circumvent or distort it was condemned by fundamentalists. Bryan’s anti-evolution arguments rested on what he considered the popular belief in America that a literally interpreted Bible was the final authority

(such as the origin of man), it is absolutely trustworthy. To contradict it is to impugn the character of God and undermine Christian doctrine. Bryan, therefore, refused to call evolution a science or even a theory but only a hypothesis.⁴ This refusal, rooted deeply in a firm commitment to a literal interpretation of Scripture and a personal faith in Jesus Christ, led the Great Commoner into confrontation with evolution proponents, culminating in the famous Scopes trial of July 10–21, 1925.⁵

Much of what has been written about Bryan's fundamentalism and his involvement in the trial is superficial, tainted by invective and ridicule of the man's character and intelligence. The sensational atmosphere connected with the trial coupled with adverse press coverage has tended to give a distorted rather than an accurate view of Bryan,⁶ the classic

and "court of appeal" on any issue (Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, "Introduction," and George M. Marsden, "Everyone One's Own Interpreter? The Bible, Science, and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll [New York: Oxford University Press, 1982], pp. 4–5, 9, 80–81). Marsden argues that science and biblical authority were compatible until the assumption of the "Baconian ideal" that made the sciences "neutral and freed from religious review at their starting points. Faith in the Bible was not in principle antagonistic to scientific inquiry. If, however, it was made to rest so heavily on the latest scientific findings it was always liable to disruption.... For nineteenth-century Americans this vulnerability became startlingly apparent with the coming of Darwinism—science without the tacit Christian premises of design and purpose." The result was that the preeminent place of biblical authority in academia lost out to autonomous intellectual inquiry apart from revelation (see *ibid.*, p. 94). Bryan believed there was yet, in early twentieth century America, a popular consensus of reliance on biblical authority sufficient to counter scientific speculation.

⁴W. J. Bryan, *Seven Questions in Dispute* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1924), pp. 153–54. Bryan states this in his opening speech at the Scopes trial as well. Fundamentalists saw no contradiction between true verifiable science and the Bible. "Religion and science are not in conflict with each other," Curtis Lee Laws wrote ("Science and Religion," *Watchman-Examiner* 13 [July 23, 1925]: 941). Since evolution was not factual, but conjecture, it could not be science. See A. C. Dixon, "The Whole Christ and the Whole Bible for the Whole World" and L. W. Munhall, "The Bible and Science," in *Scriptural Inspiration Versus Scientific Imagination: Messages Delivered at the Great Christian Fundamentals Conference at Los Angeles, California* (Los Angeles: Biola Book Room, 1922), pp. 103–07, 121–29. Both Dixon and Munhall believed that the Bible was scientific since the works of God as stated in scripture are observable and verifiable. Munhall said what most fundamentalists avowed: "The Bible is not a text-book for the schools, upon the physical sciences; but, it has not a little to say about the works of God, and what it does say, is said accurately and well, and can always be relied upon" (p. 122).

⁵See C. Allyn Russell, "William Jennings Bryan: Statesman–Fundamentalist," in *Modern American Protestantism and Its World: Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, ed. Martin E. Marty (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1993), pp. 78–79.

⁶For a detailed description of the phenomenal publicity associated with Dayton and the trial, see Edward J. Larson, *Summer of the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 87–110.

misrepresentation being the play and movie, *Inherit the Wind*.⁷ Paul Waggoner points out that cynical analyses of the trial and Bryan by liberal commentators are guilty of caricaturing not only Bryan, but of fundamentalism as a whole. That is, they defined the movement by what they considered the “Dayton debacle” instead of interpreting the trial by a fair assessment of fundamentalism.⁸ Beginning in the 1960s, however, historians began a more realistic appraisal of Bryan and the trial. The first significant revisionist study was made by Lawrence Levine, who challenged nearly every stereotype, every liberal caricature, and found them wanting.⁹ Other biographers, following Levine’s lead, have handled Bryan and the trial responsibly by placing the Great Commoner and his views in the larger contexts of (1) his humanitarian contributions as a Christian statesman¹⁰ and (2) his place in fundamentalism’s crusade against evolution as malevolent to American society.

Not many fundamentalists have written on Bryan and the trial.¹¹

⁷Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, *Inherit the Wind* (New York: Random House, 1955). The movie came out in 1960.

⁸Paul M. Waggoner, “The Historiography of the Scopes Trial: A Critical Re-evaluation,” *Trinity Journal* 5 (Autumn 1984): 164, esp. n. 3, and 166. Ernest Sandeen wrote, “No stereotype of the Fundamentalist dies harder than the picture provided by the Scopes trial” (*The Roots of American Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* [reprint of 1970 ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978], p. xv).

⁹Lawrence Levine, *Defender of the Faith, William Jennings Bryan: The Last Decade, 1915–1925* (New York: Oxford, 1965). Cf. Waggoner, “Historiography of the Scopes Trial,” pp. 168–69. Waggoner describes Levine’s treatment as “simply suggestive, other times overly cautious, but often simply brilliant.” Other writers disarming the old stereotypes are Ferenc Szasz in several essays and his monograph, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America 1880–1930* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1982), pp. 92–125; Paola E. Coletta in his comprehensive three volume work *William Jennings Bryan*, especially volume 3: *Political Puritan, 1915–1925* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969); and Willard H. Smith, who gives probably the most sympathetic treatment, in his *Social and Religious Thought of William Jennings Bryan* (Lawrence, KS: Cornado Press, 1975).

¹⁰According to Coletta, it was Bryan’s evangelical Christianity that drove his social progressivism: “His [Bryan’s] uniqueness lay in his double dedication, first to his God, second to the ideal of imbuing America’s domestic and foreign relations with Christian ethics and morality. In each case he was a humanitarian” (cited in Robert D. Linder, “Fifty Years After Scopes: Lessons to Learn, A Heritage to Reclaim,” *Christianity Today* 19 [July 18, 1975]: 9). It was in his role as humanitarian that Bryan defended personal property rights and promoted world peace. As secretary of state (1913–1915) under Wilson, he negotiated arbitration treaties with thirty nations. As a moral reformer, he stood against alcohol and promoted women’s suffrage. Bryan believed that “the humblest citizen in all the land, when clad in the armor of a righteous cause, is stronger than all the hosts of error” (cited in *ibid.*, p. 10).

¹¹George Dollar does not treat the Scopes trial at all and mentions Bryan only briefly (*A History of Fundamentalism in America* [Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University

The few who have addressed these subjects have perpetuated the consensus view that “the fundamentalist movement was brought to an abrupt halt in 1925 at the Scopes Trial,”¹² due in large part to Bryan’s supposed incompetent testimony which ostensibly humiliated the fundamentalists. However, this writer believes that this estimate is inaccurate. Fundamentalism did not wane; on the contrary, it experienced unprecedented growth partly *because* of Bryan’s part in the trial, not in spite of it. Moreover, Bryan is worthy of vindication (1) when we measure his involvement in the trial by his consistent orthodoxy and his insistence upon the preservation of historic biblical Christianity as a moral force in America against a conspiracy of modernism he believed threatened it, and (2) when we consider that many of his warnings against evolution as detrimental to the moral fabric of society have been corroborated.¹³

Interpretation of important issues is subject to prejudice. The participation of Bryan in the Scopes trial is no exception. And because the trial involved such opposing views of far-reaching consequence, retaining an unbiased opinion is virtually impossible. One only has to sample the myriad accounts of the event and its principals to understand this. The trial was a battle between two great conflicting ideologies: the one conceiving an epistemology derived from unchanging absolutes and faith in a supernatural creator God as revealed in the Bible; the other, envisioning a universe of naturalistic origin and development and characterized by religious agnosticism.¹⁴ The parties representing these beliefs were the fundamentalists on the one hand, centering hope in their champion Bryan, and the modernists, on the other, looking to Clarence Darrow who, in the name of academic freedom, would marshal the attack against fundamental Christianity. Each hated intensely what the other stood for. The Scopes trial, therefore, was a contest between two

Press, 1973], p. 309).

¹²Jerry Falwell, ed. with Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson, *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon* (New York: Doubleday Galilee, 1981), pp. 75–76. David Beale commends Bryan for his defense of Christianity, but writes that the Scopes trial was only a Pyrrhic victory for fundamentalism, and Bryan’s death shortly after was a bad omen for the movement (*In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850* [Greenville, SC: Unusual Publications, 1986], pp. 220–22).

¹³See Allen Birchler, “The Anti-Evolutionary Beliefs of William Jennings Bryan,” *Nebraska History* 54 (April 1973): 545–59. The “conspiracy view,” held by most fundamentalist leaders of the 1920s, including Bryan, proposed that modernists were plotting the overthrow of conservative Christianity in favor of materialistic and agnostic philosophies. For further comments on this phenomenon, see Smith, *Social and Religious Thought*, p. 188; Levine, *Defender of the Faith*, pp. 268, 347; and Stewart Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1931), p. 308.

¹⁴DeCamp, *Monkey Trial*, p. 490.

opposing world views.¹⁵ After examining the facts connected to the trial, this writer believes that neither Bryan nor the fundamentalist movement proved to be a failure as a result of it. Nor was Bryan an embarrassment to the movement; on the contrary, there is every reason to believe that he added new vitality to it even after his death.

BRYAN, FUNDAMENTALIST CRUSADER

While adherents claim that fundamentalism is generally a reaffirmation of historical New Testament Christianity, it actually surfaced as a movement in the latter part of the nineteenth century, via Bible and prophetic conferences, as a protest against German rationalism (reflected in the higher critical theories of the Bible) and evolution.¹⁶ Representatives of these schools of thought believed that Christianity should be reinterpreted according to recent “scientific” findings. This reinterpretation required that “out-dated” orthodox affirmations would have to be abandoned, followed by a relaxation of creedal requirements in denominational institutions and churches. This was the “modern” approach to Christianity; it meant the accommodation of orthodox doctrine to cultural and scientific change. A new generation of stalwart opponents rose up to contest this modernistic view, men who believed, like President James M. Gray of Moody Bible Institute, that modernism is really “a revolt against the God of Christianity.”¹⁷ In a similar vein, fundamentalist leader William B. Riley called modernism the greatest menace of the twentieth century because it is a flagrant denial of divine revelation.¹⁸ The reason for fundamentalists’ heated rhetoric against evolution was its twofold threat to both the biblical account of creation and to a civilized society. To fundamentalists, evolution was essentially and consequentially evil. It was diametrically opposed to the scriptural

¹⁵Warren Allem, “Backgrounds of the Scopes Trial at Dayton, Tennessee” (M.A. thesis, University of Tennessee, 1959), p. 40. This author does a commendable job of placing the issues of the trial in the broader context of the Fundamentalist–Modernist controversy. See also, Walter D. Buchanan, “The Significance of the Scopes Trial: From the Standpoint of Fundamentalism,” *Current History* 23 (September 1925): 883–89.

¹⁶C. Allyn Russell, *Voices of American Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 15–17; George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 3, 5, 17–21.

¹⁷James M. Gray, “Modernism a Foe of Good Government,” *Moody Monthly* 24 (July 1924): 545.

¹⁸William B. Riley, *The Menace of Modernism* (New York: Alliance Publishing, 1917), p. 2. Baptist leader A. C. Dixon made a nearly identical comment: “The modernism which is based upon evolution is the greatest menace in the world today” (“Dixon’s Comments on Dr. Love’s Letter,” *Western Recorder* 99 [January 3, 1924]: 8).

record of direct creation and thus its acceptance meant contradicting God's Word. Additionally, it produced a plethora of social and moral evils. Applied to society, the evolutionary dictum of "survival of the fittest" was militaristic and sinister. Most early fundamentalists believed it was Germany's application of this philosophy via Nietzsche that produced World War I.¹⁹ Other implications of evolution were equally detrimental. The Bible teaches that man is immediately created by God in *his image*. If man was a descendant of an ape, he could not be a creature made in the image of God, but of a beast; at the heart of evolution, then, is an anthropological and theological perversion. If man fell because of sin, then sin is an intrusion into the human race and must be expelled by divine redemption. To the evolutionist, however, sin against a holy God is only a myth, an illusion, and therefore an atonement for it is unnecessary. Such teaching, fundamentalists preached, will undermine the Bible as the church's authority and destroy the moral foundations of civilized society.²⁰ Even more seriously, fundamentalists, taking their cue from Princeton theologian Charles Hodge, identified Darwinism as atheism. Hodge argued that Darwinism was atheistic not only because it is utterly inconsistent with the Scriptures, but Darwin's teaching of natural selection and corresponding denial of design in nature is virtually the denial

¹⁹Nietzsche carried Darwinism to its logical conclusion and denied the existence of God, denounced Christianity as the doctrine of the degenerate, and democracy as the refuge of the weakling; he overthrew all standards of morality and eulogized war as necessary to man's development" (Bryan, *Seven Questions*, p. 146). Confirming the link between Darwin and WWI were two influential works: Vernon Kellogg's *Headquarters Nights* (1917) and Benjamin Kidd's *Science of Power* (1918). For a description of how these related to the anti-evolution crusade, see Numbers, "Creationism in 20th-Century America," pp. 538-39. Interestingly, Darrow, in another "trial of the century"—the Leopold-Loeb case (1924)—pleaded mercy for the defendants whose murderous actions, he said, were due to misguided social Darwinist thinking. Ironically, since that trial, "Bryan had used Darrow's arguments about the psychological impact of the defendants' study of Nietzsche as a prime example of the need to stop teaching evolution" (Larson, *Summer of the Gods*, p. 100; cf. Mary Shiela McMahon, "King Tut and the Scopes Trial," in *Transforming Faith: The Sacred and Secular in Modern American History*, ed. M. L. Bradbury and James B. Gilbert [New York: Greenwood Press, 1989], pp. 89-90). For an incisive description of how Nietzsche's nihilism has invaded evangelicalism, see R. Albert Mohler, "Contending for Truth in an Age of Anti-Truth" in *Here We Stand: A Call from Confessing Evangelicals*, ed. James Montgomery Boice and Benjamin E. Sasse (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), pp. 59-76.

²⁰Louis Gasper's definition of fundamentalism logically suggests this antipathy toward evolution: fundamentalism is "that movement which arose in opposition to liberalism, reemphasizing the inerrancy of the Scriptures, separation [from ungodliness] and Biblical miracles, especially the Virgin Birth, the physical Resurrection of Christ and the Substitutionary atonement (*The Fundamentalist Movement* [The Hague: Mouton, 1963], p. 13).

of God.²¹ Such denial is not only blasphemous, Bryan claimed, but is tantamount to a practical removal of God from society, and this would inevitably result in barbarism and brutality.

In order to organize for combat and initiate strategies for defeating evolution, fundamentalists formed the World's Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA) in 1919. Its agenda included a definite plan to purge schools, seminaries, and pulpits of liberals and heretics. The "heresy" of evolution was at the top of the list. In 1924, William Jennings Bryan made an appearance at the WCFA convention in Minneapolis. Gasper states that "this event raised the enthusiasm of the Fundamentalists to a new high. They now had a nationally known and popular figure to lead them in their crusade."²² It was this Christian statesman who, two years before the meeting, brought fundamentalism to national attention through his relentless attacks on evolution.²³

But why did Bryan, the silver-tongued politician, enter the ranks for the fundamentalist crusade, and in his twilight years at that? His wife, Mary Baird Bryan, tells us why in her husband's memoirs: "His soul arose in righteous indignation when he found from the many letters he received from parents all over the country that state schools were being used to undermine the religious faith of their children." Later she added that, "whenever Mr. Bryan took a stand upon any subject, the matter at once became an issue. People began to fall in line. The vigor and force of the man seemed to compel attention."²⁴ To the accusations of Bryan's

²¹Charles Hodge, *What Is Darwinism? And Other Writings on Science and Religion*, ed. Mark A. Noll and David N. Livingstone (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), pp. 138, 155–57. Refusing to accept Darwin's random natural selection process, but admitting to what they considered compelling geological and paleontological evidence in favor of evolution, some conservatives suggested that evolution was God's method of creation, without necessarily discounting divine intervention. They believed that a Christian could therefore believe in the Bible and also believe in evolution. Some noteworthy examples are Benjamin B. Warfield, A. H. Strong, and James Orr. Bryan, however, refused to make such a concession, believing that any type of evolution is inimical to faith. "He saw the issue as a clear choice between godless materialistic Darwinian evolution or belief in a literal Bible and special creation. No other alternative existed" (L. Gordon Tait, "Evolution: Wishart, Wooster, and William Jennings Bryan," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 62 [Winter 1984]: 311).

²²Gasper, *Fundamentalist Movement*, p. 14.

²³Russell, *Voices*, p. 162; Ferenc Szasz, "The Scopes Trial in Perspective," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 30 (March 1971): 291.

²⁴William Jennings Bryan and Mary Baird Bryan, *Memoirs of W. J. Bryan* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1925), pp. 459, 480. Supporting this view is Norman F. Furniss's citation of James Leuba's landmark study of college students' loss of faith as the chief cause of the Great Commoner's entrance into the controversy (*The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918–1931* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954], p. 17). Levine states the similar purpose of strengthening the values and faith of the common people

enemies that he was motivated to enter the anti-evolution fray because of personal ambition, demagoguery, and even senility(!), Levine responds that positing some kind of selfish compensation for his political frustrations cannot account for the activities of his final years.

Bryan's entry into the fundamentalist crusade was neither sudden nor surprising. Bryan was raised with the common fundamentalist belief that all religious verities rested upon an infallible Bible, and if this were shaken nothing else could stand. He had objected to the theory of evolution as early as 1904, and while his later objections were more developed and specific, they were substantially the same as his earlier statements. What had changed was not Bryan's conception of evolution but his toleration of it. By 1921 he had become convinced that the evolutionary thesis was no longer a potential but an immediate threat.²⁵

In his lectures and writings we find Bryan opposing evolution for several reasons. His two most famous speeches, "The Menace of Darwinism" (1921) and "The Origin of Man" (1922), and the book, *In His Image* (1922), listed them, including ones he would draw upon during the Scopes trial. In addition to standard fundamentalist arguments against evolution already mentioned, he added that evolution is only a guess at best and, more importantly, it was eliminating man's accountability to God. He declared,

The hypothesis that links man to the lower forms of life and makes him a lineal descendent of the brute—is obscuring and weakening all the virtues that rest upon the religious tie between God and man.... [There] is no mention of religion, the only basis for morality; not a suggestion of a sense of responsibility to God—nothing but cold, clammy materialism! Darwinism transforms the Bible into a story book and reduces Christ to man's level. It gives him an ape for an ancestor.²⁶

Because Bryan believed that the philosophy of evolution was

(*Defender of the Faith*, p. 272). Russell gives a less complimentary view that Bryan was governed by the selfish motive of fulfilling a psychological need after bitter political defeats (*Voices*, p. 182).

²⁵Levine, *Defender of the Faith*, p. 266. The year 1904 marked the publication of Bryan's famous "Prince of Peace" lecture wherein he objected to Darwinism "until more conclusive proof is produced." At a celebration of the Nebraska Centennial in Lincoln (March 19, 1960), William Jennings Bryan, Jr., stated that political expediency never controlled his father. "He loved his friends and gave consideration to their views, but he was adamant against any suggestion that for personal or political advantage, he soft pedal here or be silent there. He never counted the odds against him for he would cheerfully accept defeat rather than surrender a principle" (cited in Franklin Modisett, ed., *The Credo of the Commoner, William Jennings Bryan* [Los Angeles: Occidental College, 1968], p. 127).

²⁶W. J. Bryan, *In His Image* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1922), p. 112.

contributing to the dissolution of morals in the nation's youth, he directed his offensive against the teaching of evolution in the public schools.²⁷ As a populist Democrat, he advocated the right of free speech: it is "guaranteed in this country and should never be weakened." But this freedom entails personal responsibility. "The moment one takes on a representative character, he becomes obligated to represent faithfully...those who have commissioned him." The majority rules—in this case, the taxpayers—and no minority opinion that contradicts or undermines their wishes should be tolerated. He never tired of repeating, "The hand that writes the pay check rules the school."²⁸

In various settings prior to the Scopes trial, Bryan was only partly successful in combating evolution. During the Presbyterian General Assembly at Indianapolis in 1923, he introduced a resolution demanding "that his church refuse to support schools that permitted the teaching of evolution 'as a proven fact.'" He cried amidst the opposition's uproar, "I am trying to save the Christian Church from those who are trying to destroy her faith."²⁹ Although the resolution did not pass, Bryan was effective in persuading the Assembly to reaffirm the five fundamental articles of faith which had been made a test of denominational orthodoxy in 1910. Fundamentalists assured themselves that, indirectly, points one and five supported divine creation as described in the Bible.³⁰ Through Bryan's influence, the Oklahoma legislature passed an anti-evolutionary textbook bill in March, 1923, and two months later his own adopted state of Florida approved a resolution he wrote forbidding the teaching of evolution as fact. Since government schools cannot teach religion, he argued, neither should they be permitted to allow religion to be attacked in the class room.³¹ After addressing the North Carolina legislature, Bryan was hopeful that a similar bill would pass this body; it failed by one vote. These partial victories were one reason why Bryan welcomed the publicity of the Scopes trial. He was sure that a decision to uphold an anti-evolutionary bill in Tennessee would provide the catalyst necessary to prompt other states to enact similar legislation.

The Bryan papers between 1923 and 1925 deal extensively with the

²⁷Ibid., pp. 123–35.

²⁸Bryan, *Seven Questions*, pp. 152, 154. The reference is to tax-paying parents who should have the final say about what their children are being taught in the public school.

²⁹Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan. Vol. 3: Political Puritan, 1915–1925*, p. 223; Tait, "Evolution: Wishart, Wooster, and William Jennings Bryan," pp. 314–17.

³⁰The first doctrine in the five-point declaration was the inerrancy of the original manuscripts of Scripture and the fifth was the reality of miracles as recorded in the Scriptures.

³¹Bryan, *Memoirs*, p. 460.

subject of evolution, especially in the correspondence with other fundamentalists. These, along with other evidence, point to the fact that the Commoner was recognized by them as a national leader of their movement. He was continually being asked to speak at fundamentalist gatherings and to take an active part in their organizations. Curtis Lee Laws, editor of the Baptist periodical *Watchman-Examiner*, wrote that “the newspapers, because of his prominence, made him the leader of interdenominational fundamentalism.”³² W. B. Riley commented after Bryan’s death that he “was, while he lived, the great outstanding man of our movement, and that was particularly true of the last three years of his life.”³³ Presbyterian fundamentalists Mark Matthews and Clarence E. Macartney strongly supported him; in addition to Riley, the Baptists John Roach Straton and J. Frank Norris recognized his leadership role. Straton, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in New York City, took up the same battle and preached the same things against evolution as Bryan.³⁴ Norris extolled Bryan frequently in his paper *The Searchlight*. The Fort Worth pastor’s invitation to Bryan to speak in his church drew a crowd of over six thousand. In a letter to Norris dated December 20, 1923, Bryan accepted the request and stated, “I am sure we will have a great meeting at Fort Worth. I am going to take as my subject, ‘Is the Bible True?’ and will discuss evolution under this heading because the objection to evolution is that it is undermining faith in God, the Bible, and Christ.”³⁵ Norris responded in his usual hyperbolic flare that what Martin Luther was to the Reformation, William Jennings Bryan was to fundamentalism.³⁶ Bryan was frequently on the platform of the WCFA and was offered the presidency of the organization at its Memphis meeting only two months before the trial.³⁷

But was Bryan really a fundamentalist? Most of his biographers agree that his brand of fundamentalism was unique: he was more conciliatory with those opposing him, he was not a premillennialist, and he advocated a form of the social gospel which he called “applied

³²Editorial, “William Jennings Bryan,” *Watchman-Examiner* 13 (August 6, 1925): 1005.

³³Riley, “Bryan, The Great Commoner and Christian,” *Christian Fundamentals in School and Church* 7 (October–December 1925): 5.

³⁴John Roach Straton, *The Famous New York Fundamentalist Modernist Debates* (New York: George H. Doran, 1924–25).

³⁵J. Frank Norris, editorial in *The Searchlight* 8 (January 11, 1924): 1.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷W. B. Riley Sermon, Bryan papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Christianity.”³⁸ Nevertheless, he did not hesitate to identify with the movement, particularly in the advocacy of its essential doctrines. And he was more than willing to take up the fundamentalist attack against the common enemy of evolution. It appears that most fundamentalists were eager to have him do so.³⁹ Since Bryan was not a theologian, nor a pastor, and certainly not a scientist, one may legitimately ask if he was the logical choice to represent fundamentalism’s cause before, not only a Tennessee jury, but an American public. Probably so. He had legal training (although he had not practiced court room law for thirty years); he was well-known nationally as the acknowledged interdenominational spokesman for fundamentalism; and he was immensely popular with most Tennesseans.⁴⁰ Finally, he had distinguished himself as a knowledgeable critic of evolution. It is true that his polemics were not scientifically informed, but he was well-acquainted with the hypotheses of Darwinism and he knew them to be antithetical to the Bible. This was his primary reference and authority for any subject, including origins: “If we accept the Bible as true we have no difficulty in determining the origin of man.”⁴¹ Yet Bryan did not rely solely on scriptural “proof texts.” Theologian William Hordern, far from sympathetic with fundamentalism, nonetheless states that its leaders “have never rested their case against evolution upon blind acceptance of biblical questions. In William Jennings Bryan’s *In His Image*, one finds a rational criticism of evolution.... In fact, science has come to accept some of the points made

³⁸No doubt it was the agrarian populist mentality that influenced Bryan’s view of religion. For example, he seemed to have an unbounded confidence in the civil righteousness of the American people. To him, most folks were basically good, God-fearing, and hard-working. He wrote to creationists, “Forget, if need be, the high-brows both in the political and college world, and carry this cause to the people. They are the final and efficiently corrective power” (editorial in the *Christian Fundamentalist* 2 [1929]: 13). This idealism would not have conformed to his denomination’s creed regarding man’s total depravity, however. But such a theological incongruity evidently did not pose a problem for him. This is very important to realize in the context of the Scopes trial. Bryan sincerely believed that he represented the “moral majority” of Americana when he spoke for the State of Tennessee as prosecuting attorney. “How could the taxpayers be morally wrong” was a question that probably never entered his mind. He represented the “people;” Darrow represented a minority “special interest group” trying to undermine American morality.

³⁹Cf. Smith, *Social and Religious Thought*, p. 181; Russell, *Voices*, p. 171; and Levine, *Defender of the Faith*, p. 251.

⁴⁰Although Dayton itself was predominantly Republican, Bryan carried the State of Tennessee in each of his three presidential bids. See Ferenc M. Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders: The Roles of William Bell Riley, John Roach Straton, and William Jennings Bryan in the Fundamentalist–Modernist Controversy” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 1969), p. 242; and Furniss, *Fundamentalist Controversy*, p. 6.

⁴¹Bryan, *In His Image*, p. 88.

by Bryan.”⁴²

A few Bryan supporters thought it best that he not get involved in the trial. Methodists, some of whom were on the fringe of fundamentalism, such as southern bishop Warren A. Candler, thought Bryan better off to stay away.

The issues were far too grave to rely upon such a spectacle.... It was clearly foolish to stake everything on a trial court which lacked the authority and ability to rule on the veracity of the theory of evolution, yet, when reported in the press, might convey to readers the impression that it could reach such a determination.⁴³

So Candler turned down Bryan’s request for assistance; nevertheless, Bryan believed the cause worthy of national attention in such a forum—a practice perfectly consistent with his manner of bringing all issues before the public. He wrote a friend on the eve of the trial, “[It] will be a success in proportion as it enables the public to understand the two sides and the reasons on both sides. Every question has to be settled at last by the public and the sooner it is understood the sooner it can be settled.”⁴⁴ He is quoted in the *New York Times* as saying, “From this time forth the Christians will understand the character of the struggle also. In an open fight the truth will triumph.”⁴⁵ It is clear that Bryan saw in the Scopes trial not merely the adjudication of a Tennessee law, but the opportunity to defend a righteous cause before a populace he believed would rally behind him once the issues were made clear.

BRYAN, TRIAL PROSECUTOR AND WITNESS

When Dayton city attorney Sue K. Hicks wrote Bryan on May 14, 1925, “We will consider it a great honor to have you with us in this prosecution,” Bryan readily accepted.⁴⁶ Upon hearing this, famous Chicago lawyer and agnostic Clarence Darrow agreed to become part of the defense counsel under the sponsorship of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).⁴⁷ The WCFA countered by quickly wiring Bryan to

⁴²William Hordern, *A Layman’s Guide to Protestant Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 70.

⁴³Mark K. Bauman, “John T. Scopes, Leopold and Loeb, and Bishop Warren A. Candler,” *Methodist History* 16 (February 1978): 92–100.

⁴⁴Bryan to Ed Howe, June 30, 1925, Grace Bryan Hargraves MSS, Bryan papers.

⁴⁵*New York Times* editorial, July 8, 1925.

⁴⁶Bryan, *Memoirs*, p. 483.

⁴⁷Initially, the ACLU did not want Darrow. In early strategy meetings most of their leaders claimed that the agnostic was “too radical, a headline hunter, [and with him

guarantee their support of him by passing a resolution which read in part,

We propose to employ one of the most capable of living attorneys to appear in the courts in behalf of our Association and in the interests of both Christianity and American civilization, demanding a proper consideration of this test case....We name as our attorney for this Trial William Jennings Bryan and pledge him whatever support is needful to secure equity and justice.⁴⁸

A simple court case now took on the aura of a battle, indeed, a “duel to the death,” according to Bryan.⁴⁹ What were the issues at stake that would give this trial such notoriety? To the defense it was the matter of academic freedom in the light of modern science. To Bryan it was the right of the people, speaking through their legislature, to control the schools which they create and support.⁵⁰ Ironically, both sides advocated human rights: one group, minority rights, specifically, the right of an instructor to teach what he wants; the other, the right of the majority to determine what their children would be taught. But to the fundamentalists it went beyond rights. According to Riley, “the battle...was no ‘war of words,’ it was no ‘little scrap over the subject of freedom,’ it was no dispute between scientists on the one side and the theologians on the other; it was a contention of falsehood against truth, of faith vs. atheism, of Christianity vs. brutality.”⁵¹

Letters and telegrams of support for Bryan came pouring in. The mayors of both New York and Chicago assured the Commoner of their sympathy for his crusade to protect the “plastic minds of the young” from the “seeds of doubt.”⁵² Norris wrote from Fort Worth, “I repeat what I said to you in Memphis; you are now in the greatest work of your life and giving 10,000 times more service to the cause of righteousness

there] the trial would become a circus.” Interestingly, the man who lobbied strongest for Darrow was Scopes himself: “It was going to be a down-in-the-mud fight, and I felt that situation demanded an Indian fighter rather than someone who graduated from the proper military academy” (cited in Larson, *Summer For The Gods*, p. 102).

⁴⁸W. B. Riley, “The World’s Christian Fundamentals Association and the Scopes Trial,” *Christian Fundamentals in School and Church* 7 (July, August, September 1925): 35.

⁴⁹Levine, *Defender of the Faith*, p. 339.

⁵⁰See Levine, p. 331, and Ray Ginger, *Six Days or Forever? Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 90.

⁵¹W. B. Riley sermon, Bryan papers.

⁵²Cited in Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., ed., *Controversy in the Twenties: Fundamentalism, Modernism, and Evolution* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), p. 37.

than a dozen presidents.”⁵³ Yet Bryan stood virtually alone. Where were the other fundamentalist leaders? Bryan had written to them requesting their presence. He wired Straton in New York, asking if he could come and testify; Straton wired back that he would be delighted to come, but for some reason never arrived.⁵⁴ Bryan wanted to have Norris (who did provide a court stenographer), J. C. Masee, pastor of Tremont Temple in Boston, and W. B. Riley, but these men planned to be in Seattle to fight liberalism at the Northern Baptist Convention.⁵⁵ Princeton conservative J. Gresham Machen politely refused. James M. Gray of Moody Bible Institute declined because of “summer conference work which will keep me on the go until September.”⁵⁶ Bryan wrote the sensational Presbyterian evangelist Billy Sunday, “I am wondering if you will...come if we need you.”⁵⁷ Sunday replied, “Thank God for W. J. B. Sorry I cannot be there,” and sent a number of anti-evolution statements for use by the prosecution.⁵⁸ The only fundamentalist of any note to come was Southern Baptist evangelist T. T. Martin. One can only speculate as to why the others left Bryan to handle the case without them. Allyn C. Russell offered the absurdity that they “probably felt unable to defend their position,” when Riley and Straton had been effectively debating evolutionists for some time.⁵⁹ It is more likely that either they did not comprehend the gravity of the case or else they felt that their duties were equally important and Bryan was up to the task. It is unfortunate, however, that they did not come; it may account in part for the insistence of Bryan during the trial that no expert testimony be allowed by the defense, since he had none for the prosecution.

Much of the trial analysis by some two hundred reporters and journalists centered on the carnival-like atmosphere of Dayton⁶⁰ and, in that

⁵³Cited in Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders,” p. 254.

⁵⁴Ginger, *Six Days or Forever?* p. 101.

⁵⁵Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders,” p. 246, and Russell, *Voices* p. 184.

⁵⁶Statements found in correspondence with Bryan, Bryan papers.

⁵⁷Billy Sunday papers, microfilm copies at Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Indiana.

⁵⁸Cited in M. R. Werner, *Bryan* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1929), p. 318.

⁵⁹Russell, *Voices*, p. 263, n. 93; for a discussion of Riley’s and Straton’s evolution debates, see pp. 93–95, and pp. 66–75 respectively.

⁶⁰One of the defense lawyers, Arthur Garfield Hayes, described Dayton as a “revivalist circus. Thither swarmed ballyhoo artists, hot dog venders, lemonade merchants, preachers, professional atheists, college students, Greenwich Village radicals, out-of-town coal miners, I.W.W.’s, Single Taxers, ‘libertarians,’ revivalists of all shades and sects, hinterland ‘soothsayers,’ Holy Rollers, an army of newspaper men, scientists, editors and

context, interpreted many of Bryan's statements in terms of effect rather than actual content as to consistency of position and perception of basic issues. According to early Bryan biographer J. C. Long, most of the reporters were so biased against Bryan and fundamentalism that their editorials were an unofficial witness for Darrow and the defense. They made it appear as though Bryan and his "outworn" principles were on trial, instead of Scopes.⁶¹ Warren Allem quotes from an editorial in the *New Republic* that journalists

have schemed and labored to present the court proceedings to American opinion in the guise of a melodrama in which William J. Bryan, the Attorney General of Tennessee, and Judge Raulston are portrayed as reprobates who are conspiring to convict and punish an innocent man, and deprive the jury and the American people of the evidence in the case. What they have actually succeeded in doing is to cheapen not only the trial but the issue by subordinating both of them to the exigencies of theatrical newspaper publicity.⁶²

It is this impression of the trial and of Bryan in particular that has endured in the minds of many. Regrettably, however, fundamentalists have evidently not researched the trial very carefully to find out what Bryan actually said, and have settled for not dealing with the trial at all (as in the case of George Dollar, noted earlier) or have merely cited the standard prejudicial sources. Bryan probably should never have agreed to be examined by Darrow. Many of the questions were ridiculous and designed to intimidate. However, upon close examination of Bryan's statements in both the prosecution speeches and the responses to Darrow, one can determine that (1) nearly all of them were perfectly consistent with beliefs he had articulated all during his three-year crusade against evolution. (2) They were legally factual and rationally arguable in a court of law, and more importantly, (3) where they addressed religion, his remarks were in total accord with the consensus of current conservative Protestant scholarship. Let us note some examples.⁶³

During the first few days of the trial, Bryan said nothing. When, on the fourth day, defense attorney Dudley Malone quoted Bryan out of

lawyers" (*Let Freedom Ring* [New York: Da Capo Press, 1972], pp. 26–27).

⁶¹J. C. Long, *Bryan, the Great Commoner* (New York: D. Appleton, 1928), p. 381. See also, the comments of paleontologist Henry Fairfield Osborn, whose hastily written book just prior to Dayton excoriated the religiously "fanatical" and scientifically "stone-deaf" Bryan as "the man on trial" (cited in Larson, *Summer For The Gods*, p. 113).

⁶²Allem, "Backgrounds," p. 30.

⁶³All quoted testimony is taken from the court transcript: William Hilleary and Oren Metzger, editors, *World's Most Famous Court Trial: Tennessee Evolution Case* (reprint of 1925 ed., Dayton, TN: Rhea County Historical Society, 1978).

context, suggesting that he had earlier favored evolution, he broke silence: "At the proper time I shall be able to show that my position [on evolution] differs not at all from my position in those days." Did he fulfill that promise on the following day when delivering his main speech of the trial? After briefly reflecting on the earlier accusations by the prosecution against him, Bryan declared that the Tennessee law was clear and absolutely sufficient and that the court needed no out-of-state expert to tell it what the statute meant. He restated the issued at hand: "The question is can a minority in this state come in and compel a teacher to teach that the Bible is not true and make the parents of these children pay the expenses..."—a position he had held all along, indeed, his principal objection to the teaching of evolution in the schools. He rebuked Darwinism, stating that it cannot be supported by the Bible, and that the Bible itself is a sufficient expert witness against it. Then, after defending the fundamental doctrines of Christianity which were being attacked by evolution, Bryan moved for the exclusion of any "expert" testimony by the defense. It was obvious that Bryan was suggesting that anything in opposition to the Bible should be thrown out of court, since there was no higher authority than Scripture. He was pitting the Bible against evolution. It would be difficult to find anything in his remarks that was not consistent with earlier writings on the subject of evolution and his general representation of the fundamentalist crusade against it. In fact, an actual review of the court transcript reveals that Bryan was often exuberant, humorous, discerning, and focused during the trial. It also indicates that he was familiar with Darwin, and understood evolutionary teachings even better than Darrow. It is not true that Bryan and his beliefs were crushed at Dayton.⁶⁴

The crucial test of the credibility of Bryan's position came on the seventh day of the trial, Monday, July 20: the cross-examination of Bryan by Darrow. This episode most writers on the subject consider to be a disaster, both for Bryan and for the cause of fundamentalism. Just three years earlier he had written, "I know of no reason why the Christian should take upon himself the difficult task of answering all questions and give to the atheist the easy task of asking them."⁶⁵ Yet he believed that in the context of an open forum and representing the fundamentalist position, it would be a greater inconsistency not to bring the issues before the public and he said so frequently during his testimony. One should also consider that Bryan's insistence that Darrow examine

⁶⁴Carol Iannone, "The Truth About *Inherit the Wind*," *First Things* 70 (Fall 1997): 30.

⁶⁵Bryan, *In His Image*, pp. 13–14.

him was based on (1) his desire to defend the Bible against agnosticism⁶⁶ and, most notably, (2) the promise by Judge Raulston that Bryan would be allowed to question Darrow. This is clearly apparent in the court transcript, a fact that Bryan's critics have overlooked:

Bryan: "If your honor please, I insist that Mr. Darrow can be put on the stand..."

The Court: "Call anybody you desire. Ask them any questions you wish."

And later in the cross-examination:

Bryan: "I want him [Darrow] to have all the latitude he wants, for I am going to have some latitude when he gets through."

If the judge had not made this concession, it is doubtful that Bryan would ever have agreed to take the stand.⁶⁷ However, once Bryan was there, he should have remembered an old adage that he himself had repeated: any fool could ask questions which the wisest person in the world could not answer. Since many of Darrow's questions were foolish, Bryan would have been better off, perhaps, in not answering them, but he should not be branded an ignoramus for doing so.⁶⁸ To Bryan's credit was his constant reference to the Bible. Where it spoke, he spoke; where it was silent, he confessed ignorance. Some of the questions and responses were:

Darrow: "But do you believe He made them—that He made such a fish and that it was big enough to swallow Jonah?"

Bryan: "Yes, sir. Let me add: one miracle is just as easy to believe as another."

Darrow: "Just as hard?"

Bryan: "It is hard to believe for you, but easy for me. A miracle is a thing performed beyond what man can perform. When you get beyond what man can do, you get within the realm of miracles; and it is just as easy to believe the miracle of Jonah as any other miracle in the Bible."

⁶⁶Bryan's confident response in allowing himself to be cross-examined came out more than once during the trial: "The reason I am answering is not for the benefit of the superior court. It is to keep these gentlemen from saying I was afraid to meet them and let them question me, and I want the Christian world to know that any atheist, agnostic, unbeliever, can question me any time as to my belief in God, and I will answer him" (*World's Most Famous Court Trial*, p. 165).

⁶⁷Bryan had actually prepared a list of questions he would ask Darrow. These may be found in DeCamp, *Monkey Trial*, pp. 430–31.

⁶⁸Smith, *Social and Religious Thought*, pp. 198–99.

Darrow: "Perfectly easy to believe that Jonah swallowed the whale?"

Bryan: "If the Bible said so; the Bible doesn't make as extreme statements as evolutionists do."

Darrow: "Do you believe Joshua made the sun stand still?"

Bryan: "I believe what the Bible says. I suppose you mean that the earth stood still."

Darrow: "I don't know. I am talking about the Bible now."

Bryan: "I accept the Bible absolutely."

Other questions concerned the flood, the exact age of the earth, and existence of ancient civilizations and their philosophies, all of which were designed to make Bryan appear woefully stupid. Darrow's purpose, he admitted later, was to discredit fundamentalism,⁶⁹ and to force Bryan into admitting that the Bible cannot be literally interpreted.⁷⁰ The two most damaging questions, many believe, were:

"Do you think the earth was made in six days?" and
 "Did you ever discover where Cain got his wife?"

While Bryan's answer to the former question was a serious compromise of literalism, it was in harmony with what several conservative theologians had been teaching: "Not six days of twenty-four hours."⁷¹ Even W. B. Riley agreed that the days could be indefinite periods of time.⁷²

⁶⁹Clarence S. Darrow, *The Story of My Life* (reprint of 1932 ed., New York: Scribners, 1960), p. 249.

⁷⁰Literalism for fundamentalists did not mean that every passage of Scripture should be interpreted literally but that the basic hermeneutical approach was the literal mode—the common sense of the passage, Bryan would say. Bryan had a clear understanding of a literal hermeneutic as indicated by his response to an earlier question by Darrow: "You claim that everything in the Bible should be literally interpreted?" Bryan: "I believe everything in the Bible should be accepted as it is given there: some of the Bible is given illustratively. For instance, 'Ye are the salt of the earth.' I would not insist that man was actually salt, or that he had flesh of salt, but it is used in the sense of salt as saving God's people" (*World's Most Famous Court Trial*, p. 147).

⁷¹See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1940), 1:571; William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 4 vols. (reprint of 1889 ed., Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1979), 1:476; A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* 3 vols. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1907), 2:395.

⁷²Editorial in *Christian Fundamentals in School and Church* 6 (October–December 1925): 40. See also, Waggoner, "Historiography," p. 166, note 42, where he states that "Bryan...never believed in a literal six-day creation to begin with," and quotes Bryan at length to refute the liberal criticism that most fundamentalists believed in a young earth, i.e., created circa fifth century B.C. Another way of accounting for fossils was to posit an indeterminate amount of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. Such a view was so

However, Bryan's impression that they were lengthy periods was "not an attempt to argue...against anybody who wanted to believe in literal days."⁷³ Bryan's reply of ignorance to the second question would not be unusual for a layman; for Bryan and probably for most Christians it simply was not a matter of concern.⁷⁴ The issue was certainly not vital to fundamentalism.

When an eye-witness of the trial, H. J. Shelton, was asked if Bryan did an adequate job of defending the fundamentalist position, he replied,

Bryan did hold his own, so to speak, against the probing questions of Darrow, who did bring up some of the age-old biblical questions having no pat answer. Darrow tried in every way to confuse Bryan by twisting questions...but...Darrow, who was badgering him, [asked]...what this narrator considers many foolish questions that could only be answered in the way that Bryan did respond. The prosecution [Tennessee Attorney General A. T. Stewart] did object many times to Darrow's line of questioning.⁷⁵

common among fundamentalist leaders as to be almost axiomatic. A. C. Dixon declared, "Now I turn to the Bible and find that between the first and second verses of the first chapter in Genesis, there is enough long ages of deposit in the perfect order of 'the heaven and *the earth*' which God created. And since 'was' may be translated '*became*,' so as to make it read, 'the earth *became* waste and void,' there is an intimation that a great upheaval took place at that remote time.... It was animal life which perished, the traces of which remain as fossils" (*Scriptural Inspiration Versus Scientific Imagination*, pp. 104-05). A twofold benefit of modern creation science, with its emphasis on a universal catastrophic flood, is (1) to provide strong evidence that the earth is actually relatively young and (2) that it is unnecessary to posit an indefinite period of time or "gap" between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 to account for fossils. See the determinative study of John C. Whitcomb, Jr. and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961), especially, pp. 92-94; basic to all other arguments is their belief in Bryan's own premise: the verbal inerrancy and absolute authority of Scripture (p. xx). For a refutation of the gap and day age theories respectively, see Weston W. Fields, *Unformed and Unfilled: The Gap Theory* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976); and Gerhard Hasel, "The 'Days' of Creation in Genesis 1," *Origins* 21 [1994]: 5-38.

⁷³Bryan may have had George McCready Price in mind when making this statement. Price advocated a single recent creation of six literal days and a worldwide deluge to account for fossils. He regarded the day-age theory as "the devil's counterfeit" (*The Story of Fossils* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1954], p. 39).

⁷⁴The standard biblicist answer to the question is that Cain married his sister. Bryan may not have wanted to answer this way and place himself in the predicament of having to justify incest. For a very plausible moral and genetical response to this issue, see Ken Ham, Andrew Snelling, and Carl Wieland, *The Answers Book* (El Cajon, CA: Master Books, 1991), pp. 177-83.

⁷⁵A taped interview of H. J. Shelton by a professor of Shinn of Statesville, NC, sent to the writer (January 1982).

What Bryan was seeking to accomplish on the stand he made perfectly clear: "I am simply trying to protect the Word of God against the greatest atheist or agnostic in the United States. [*Prolonged applause.*] I want the papers to know I am not afraid to get on the stand in front of him and let him do his worst."⁷⁶ If Bryan's answers made him appear foolish, Darrow's questions and methods of interrogation hardly made him appear any better,⁷⁷ but not in the estimation of the liberal press, who flayed Bryan. Russell Owen of the *New York Sun* wrote that Bryan "knew nothing...which one might expect a man...to be familiar with."⁷⁸ Joseph Wood Krutch of the *Nation* reported that "under cross-examination the defeated champion provided even [a] sorer spectacle as he retreated further...into boastful ignorance."⁷⁹ Such comments are simply a purulent distortion of the facts.

The intense, and what must have been an exhausting, examination concluded in a shouting match between Bryan and Darrow:

Bryan: "The only purpose Mr. Darrow has is to slur at the Bible."

Darrow: "I am exempting you on your fool ideas that no intelligent Christian on earth believes."

According to Jerry Tompkins, Bryan lost the confidence of many people.⁸⁰ Undoubtedly, he did with the liberal media, but he did not lose credibility with fundamentalists, as editors of the *Fundamentalist Phenomenon* suggest.⁸¹ In fact, according to Furniss, many who attended the trial later condemned Darrow for his behavior, charging that he "cheaped legal procedure and damaged the liberals' side in the controversy with methods calculated to attract publicity."⁸² Evidently Darrow's tactics backfired, according to Winterton C. Curtis. Curtis, a scientist who provided testimony for the defense, related years after the trial that

⁷⁶*World's Most Famous Court Trial*, p. 164.

⁷⁷Smith, *Social and Religious Thought*, p. 199.

⁷⁸Cited in *Current History Magazine* 22 (September 1925): 882.

⁷⁹Cited in Gatewood, *Controversy*, p. 365; for other accounts, see Long, *Bryan*, p. 381. Years later Krutch had still not changed his mind about the trial. To him, "the Bible-belt zealots [including Bryan] were exhibiting themselves as hilarious boobs" ("The Monkey Trial," *Commentary* 43 [May 1967]: 83).

⁸⁰Jerry R. Tompkins, ed., *D-Days at Dayton* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), p. 28.

⁸¹Falwell, *Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, p. 86; see also, Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan*, p. 267.

⁸²Furniss, *Fundamentalist Controversy*, p. 91.

Judge Raulston stopped Bryan's testimony and expunged it, not only because it lacked relevance to the trial, but because popular resentment against Darrow had become so strong that law enforcement officials met secretly with the judge and cautioned against any further examination. "This thing must be stopped. We cannot be responsible for what may happen if it goes on. Someone is likely to get hurt." That "someone" was Darrow. So the judge put an end to any further testimony from either Bryan or Darrow.⁸³ This decision, along with Stewart's request to stop the questioning and end the trial, would also help explain why Raulston would not permit Bryan to cross-examine Darrow the next day, a reversal of his earlier promise.

Several fundamentalist leaders defended Bryan. Walter D. Buchanan, pastor of the Broadway Presbyterian Church in New York City, referred to the Great Commoner as "one valiant Knight of God," and called the Dayton trial, "a sad revelation" because "the opposition to the simple faith of our fathers was brought out more boldly...than ever before."⁸⁴ Riley took Darrow to task for his "captious and conscienceless" questions: "Imagine a self-respecting attorney putting to such a gentleman as Mr. Bryan the satirical questions...."⁸⁵

The trial must have taken a heavy toll on Bryan. He was not a well man to begin with. After the lengthy and intense interchange with Darrow, he learned that he would not be allowed to question him in court. This had to be a great disappointment to him, and perhaps contributed to his death five days after the trial. Yet during those final days he was a bustle of activity: speaking to large groups of people nearly every day, traveling over two hundred miles, issuing statements to the press, and finally, editing what he considered "the mountain peak of my life's efforts," the last speech he had intended to give in court.⁸⁶ It was a composite of all the earlier arguments he had given against evolution. He wrote Norris what the Texas preacher considered his last letter:

Well, we won our case. It woke up the community if I can judge from letters and telegrams. Am just having my speech (prepared but not delivered) put into pamphlet form. Will send you a copy. I think it is the

⁸³Smith, *Social and Religious Thought*, pp. 200–01.

⁸⁴Buchanan, "Significance of the Scopes Trial," p. 889.

⁸⁵Riley, "World's Christian Fundamentals Association and the Scopes Trial," *Christian Fundamentals in School and Church* 7 (October–December 1925): 40. In reviewing fundamentalist literature and in conversing with fundamentalists of the 1920s, David Rausch concluded that "they did not feel a loss of morale or status" (*Zionism Within Early American Fundamentalism 1878–1918* [New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1979], p. 343, n. 8; see also, pp. 319–20).

⁸⁶Furniss, *Fundamentalist Controversy*, p. 90.

strongest indictment of evolution I have made. Much obliged to you for your part in getting me into the case. Much obliged too for [L. H.] Evridge [licensed court stenographer sent by Norris to cover the trial]. He is a delightful [man] and very efficient. I wish you would let me correct my part in the trial before you publish it. Sorry you were not there.

Yours, Bryan⁸⁷

No doubt Bryan was sorry that several of his fundamentalist friends were “not there.” Their presence would not only have strengthened the state’s position, but bolstered his confidence. From the fundamentalist viewpoint, however, there is every indication that Bryan did give a sincere and responsible “acquittal” of himself at the Scopes trial.

EFFECTS OF BRYAN’S TESTIMONY ON FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE ANTI-EVOLUTION CRUSADE

For the last several decades fundamentalists have generally acquiesced to the biased liberal interpretation of the Scopes trial by conceding to Bryan a Pyrrhic victory; that is, he won the immediate skirmish in upholding the Tennessee law against evolution, but lost the battle for fundamentalism in the public’s eye with the news media’s negative portrayal of him. Many commentators, both liberals and conservatives, have suggested that the trial was a turning point in fundamentalist fortunes, a “historical watershed; worse still, a rout, fundamentalism’s ‘Waterloo.’”⁸⁸ However, careful examination of the facts indicate that this stereotype is undeserving of both Bryan and the fundamentalist movement. In his masterful evaluation of the trial, Paul Waggoner documents the fact that during the first few years following Dayton (1925–1931), “critical observers did not regard the Scopes trial as a turning point in the fundamentalist controversy.”⁸⁹ It was not until what he calls the “second phase,” running from 1931 to about 1965, that the critical view, or “new consensus” view as he calls it, came into vogue. This view was precipitated by Frederick Allen’s satire of the 1920s in which he climaxes the work by virtually lampooning Bryan, and refers to the trial as a travesty of intellectualism.

It was a savage encounter, and a tragic one for the ex-Secretary of State...he died scarcely a week later. And he was being covered with humiliation. The sort of religious faith which he represented could not take the witness stand and face reason as a prosecutor.... Theoretically, Fundamentalism has won,

⁸⁷Handwritten, no date. Located in Bryan papers.

⁸⁸Waggoner, “Historiography,” p. 155.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 156.

for the law stood. Yet really Fundamentalism has lost. Legislators might go on passing antievolution laws...but civilized opinion everywhere had regarded the Dayton trial with amazement and amusement, and the slow drift away from Fundamentalism certainly continued.⁹⁰

Waggoner remarks that “it was not so much the passage of time as it was the popularity of Allen that enshrined Dayton, Tennessee, as the bottomless pit into which fundamentalism stumbled in the summer of 1925.”⁹¹ It is this warped image of the trial and Bryan that a number of writers have parroted and have thus perpetuated the negative image indelibly imprinted on the minds of those willing to uncritically accept it.⁹²

The trial and even the death of Bryan, far from defeating fundamentalism and its anti-evolutionary crusade, only served to advance them.⁹³ Fundamentalists considered Bryan a martyr who died in defense of their cause.⁹⁴ According to Chattanooga reporter George Fort Milton,

⁹⁰Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920's* (reprint of 1931 ed., New York: Harper and Row, 1957), pp. 205–6.

⁹¹Waggoner, “Historiography,” p. 164.

⁹²Most notably, those who followed Allen’s interpretation were: Gaius Glen Atkins, *Religion in Our Times* (New York: Round Table Press, 1932); Mark Sullivan, *Our Times: The United States, 1900–1925 The Twenties*, 6 vols. (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1935), 6:568, 644–5; and a popular history textbook in the 1940s and 50s, William W. Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (2nd ed., New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), p. 572. Sweet concludes that the Scopes trial was “fundamentalism’s last stand.” Paul Waggoner verifies the impact Frederick Lewis Allen had on altering the perception of the Scopes trial and further traces how various books, beginning in the 1930s, played a role in shaping interpretations of the event in “A Historiographical Essay on the Scopes Trial,” an appendix in “New Light on the Scopes Trial” (M.A. thesis, Columbia University, 1957), pp. 158–70, esp. pp. 161–64. Decades later the Allen interpretation persisted in works such as, William Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914–1932* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 217–25; Ray Ginger, *Six Days or Forever?*, pp. 211–12; and, of course, the play and movie *Inherit the Wind*. Interestingly, Waggoner assembles some impressive evidence for the view that *Inherit the Wind* was motivated more by the political McCarthyism of the 1950s than the religious implications of the Scopes trial (cf. “Historiography,” pp. 167–68).

⁹³Willard Gatewood writes, “To assert, as the liberal *Christian Century* [“Vanishing Fundamentalism,” 43 (June 24, 1926): 797–99] did, that fundamentalism was a ‘vanishing’ phenomenon was as naive as the widely held view that anti-evolution sentiment somehow dissipated in the wake of the Scopes trial” (“From Scopes to Creation Science: The Decline and Revival of the Evolution Controversy,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 83 [Autumn 1984]: 366).

⁹⁴Henry Mencken had quipped, “Heave an egg out a Pullman and you will hit a Fundamentalist almost anywhere in the United States.” Roderick Nash comments that, when Bryan’s funeral train made its way slowly from the South to Washington, D.C., hundreds of thousands lined the tracks to pay their respects. “Mencken’s egg would have hit many a fundamentalist” (*The Nervous Generation: American Thought, 1917–1930*

his death was “from an ordeal of faith.”⁹⁵ To one French observer, Bryan would have become a martyr even if he had not died. Darrow’s ridicule gave the Great Commoner a “halo in the eyes of millions.”⁹⁶ With the absence of his dynamic leadership and prestige, the fundamentalist movement lost a powerful spokesman but in no wise did this discourage the fundamentalists.⁹⁷ In fact, early press reports on the trial served as an impetus for their continued campaign against evolution. Waggoner states that a number of journals saw the Dayton trial as a critical fundamentalist triumph. The *Nation* and the *New Republic*, both liberal periodicals, expressed alarm over the “success at Dayton”...[which] “has surprised even [fundamentalists] by its completeness.”⁹⁸ The outcome was a certain “victory for the fundamentalists.”⁹⁹ Even H. L. Mencken, perhaps the most caustic critic of the trial and of fundamentalism in general, warned that “the evil that men do lives after them. Bryan, in his malice, started something that it will not be easy to stop.”¹⁰⁰ Mencken was right about at least one thing: the trial was not easy to stop, nor did it stop, fundamentalism.¹⁰¹ On the contrary, it re-energized the anti-evolution campaign by referring to Bryan’s arguments and the Tennessee case as models for it.¹⁰² This was especially true in the South, where Bryan’s name was highly venerated. Renewed

[Chicago: Rand McNally, 1970], pp. 148–49).

⁹⁵Cited in Ginger, *Six Days or Forever?* p. 193.

⁹⁶Cited in Gatewood, *Controversy in the Twenties*, p. 427.

⁹⁷Gasper states that, after the trial and the leadership of Bryan, “fundamentalists had lost their ardor,” and fundamentalist “leaders have stated that during this period [the 1930s] despair rather than hope engulfed them.” However, Gasper fails to offer any substantial evidence for this opinion (*Fundamentalist Movement*, pp. 18, 40).

⁹⁸Editorial, “Dayton and After,” *Nation* 121 (1925): 153–56. Miriam Allen de Ford wrote that fundamentalist opposition to the theory of evolution [is] more alive and more dangerous than ever” (“After Dayton: A Fundamentalist Survey,” *Nation* 122 [June 2, 1926]: 604). See also, Donald F. Brod, “The Scopes Trial: A Look at Press Coverage After Forty Years,” *Journalism Quarterly* 42 (1965): 219–26.

⁹⁹Nels Anderson, “The Shooting Parson of Texas,” *New Republic* 48 (September 1, 1926): 37.

¹⁰⁰Editorial in the *American Mercury* 6 (October 1925): 160.

¹⁰¹Four years after the trial the landmark sociological study of “Middletown” by Robert and Helen Lynd lent support to the contention that “the mass of the American people are Fundamentalists” (*Middletown: A Study of Contemporary American Culture* [New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1929], pp. 315–31, cited in Gatewood, *Controversy in the Twenties*, p. 37).

¹⁰²Waggoner, “Historiography,” pp. 156–58.

agitation focused on state legislatures and school boards, and it was not until 1930 that the crusade was supplanted by other concerns.

After Bryan's sudden death, the question of succession arose. He had intimated in a letter to his son that the younger's participation in the trial "will give you a standing no one else can have. Every attack from our opponents draws the orthodox Christians more closely to me and you will share in the benefits."¹⁰³ Curtis Lee Laws of the *Watchman-Examiner*, one of the few fundamentalist spokesmen who reacted negatively to the trial, wrote that it "ought never to have been made an issue of fundamentalism," and two weeks later: "...the leadership of the fundamentalists is a pretty hard job."¹⁰⁴ W. B. Riley noted that "it will take a number of us [fundamentalist leaders] and that at our best, to fill the place vacated by the fall of this magnificent thinker and leader."¹⁰⁵ WCFA representatives Norris and Riley, along with John Roach Straton and evangelist Mordecai Ham, endeavored to fill the gap by giving innumerable speeches against evolution across the country.

Organizations such as the Bible Crusaders lobbied tirelessly in state assemblies under the direction of T. T. Martin.¹⁰⁶ Their efforts produced anti-evolution legislation in Mississippi (1926) and Arkansas (1928). The Scopes trial proved that an anti-evolution law could be passed and upheld, and pressure on several state assemblies built until 1927, when thirteen states had such bills introduced.¹⁰⁷ In several areas the agitation over evolution was sufficient to cleanse the schools of the "Darwinian heresy" without enacting a specific statute.¹⁰⁸ In Louisiana, for instance, that state's superintendent of schools, in response to Southern Baptist pressure, forbade the teaching of evolution in tax-supported schools.¹⁰⁹ Following the lead of Cameron Morrison, governor of North Carolina, Texas Governor Miriam Ferguson, as head of the state

¹⁰³Cited in Szasz, "Three Fundamentalist Leaders," p. 255.

¹⁰⁴Editorials in the *Watchman-Examiner* 13 (August 20, 1925): 1071, and (September 3, 1925): 1131.

¹⁰⁵"Bryan, The Great Commoner and Christian," *Christian Fundamentals in School and Church* 7 (October–December 1925): 6.

¹⁰⁶For examples of Martin's labors and speeches, see Ginger, *Six Days*, p. 212; and Gatewood, *Controversy in the Twenties*, p. 237.

¹⁰⁷Szasz, "Three Fundamentalist Leaders," p. 253; DeCamp, *Monkey Trial*, p. 473. Between 1921 and 1929 thirty-seven anti-evolution bills were introduced into twenty state legislatures (cited in Smith, *Social and Religious Thought*, p. 193).

¹⁰⁸Gatewood, *Controversy in the Twenties*, p. 289.

¹⁰⁹For details, see Wallace Hebert, "Louisiana Baptists and the Scopes Trial," *Louisiana Studies* 7 (Winter 1968): 329–46.

textbook commission, disallowed the use of biology texts mentioning evolution. The California Board of Education was empowered in 1926 to require teachers “to show due respect and consideration [when teaching science] for the fundamental principles of religion, as presented in the Bible.”¹¹⁰ As late as 1947, the board of education in Wall, South Dakota, eliminated from schools “all books or pages of books which contain...atheistic evolution.”¹¹¹ Two public school science teachers wrote a detailed article in 1974 showing that

as a result [of the Scopes trial], the teaching of evolution in the high schools—as judged by the content of the average high school biology textbooks—*declined* [their emphasis].... The impact of the Scopes trial on high school biology textbooks was enormous. It is easy to identify a text published in the decade following 1925. Merely look up the word “evolution” in the index or the glossary; you almost certainly will not find it.¹¹²

The struggle for anti-evolution legislation in such states as North Carolina (by T. T. Martin), Maine (by Baptist minister Ben C. Buber), and Minnesota (by W. B. Riley) met with failure,¹¹³ but not before Riley and his associates had talked before audiences in two hundred Minnesota towns. He affirmed that nine tenths of the people in the state were in favor of anti-evolution laws, yet a bill was defeated in the state assembly.¹¹⁴ If Riley was correct, this is an instance where the decision of a few ranking officials outweighed the wishes of the majority, certainly not the first occurrence in America’s history!

Writing for the American Historical Association, Howard K. Beale summarized the results of a 1933 questionnaire sent to a cross-sampling of public school teachers throughout the country. He reported that birth control, the non-existence of God, and evolution were subjects not permitted to be discussed in many classrooms. More to the point, he stated that between one third and one half of the teachers polled were afraid

¹¹⁰Cited in W. W. Campbell, “Evolution in Education in California,” *Science* 56 (April 3, 1925): 367–68.

¹¹¹Cited in Gatewood, “From Scopes to Creation Science,” p. 366.

¹¹²Judith V. Grabiner and Peter D. Miller, “Effects of the Scopes Trial: Was It a Victory for Evolutionists?” *Science* 185 (1974): 832, 833.

¹¹³For details of the Maine effort, see Gatewood, *Controversy in the Twenties*, p. 311; for North Carolina, by the same author in “Politics and Piety in North Carolina: The Fundamentalist Crusade at High Tide, 1925–1927,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 47 (July 1965): 279–90.

¹¹⁴Ferenc Szasz implies that a University of Minnesota petition helped kill the bill in 1927. See “William B. Riley and the Fight Against Teaching of Evolution in Minnesota,” *Minnesota History* 46 (Spring 1969): 201–16.

“to express acceptance of the theory of evolution.”¹¹⁵ It is evident from this response that public and supervisory pressure was sufficiently exerted to prevent the teaching of evolution in many public school classrooms.

One major gain of the fundamentalist crusade was the passage of laws in many states endorsing Bible reading in public schools.¹¹⁶ By 1931, thirty-five states either required or permitted Bible reading in their schools.¹¹⁷ This writer can remember attending an Indianapolis public elementary school in the early 1950s where released-time Bible classes at a local church were mandatory. Incentive for such activity can be attributed to the efforts of fundamentalists like Philadelphia pastor Clarence Macartney who spoke to a national meeting of public school superintendents in 1927. He advocated that the schools provide “definite instructions as to the existence of the moral nature of man” in opposition of Darwinian naturalism.¹¹⁸

Shortly after the Scopes trial, Swedish fundamentalist Paul W. Rood of Turlock, California, while referring to Bryan as “the Modern Elijah,” inaugurated the Bryan Bible League. Nearly a thousand signatures were obtained to oppose “the teaching of evolution in tax supported schools....”¹¹⁹ This organization, however, was short-lived, much like many local counterparts throughout the country. Spurred on by Bryan’s testimony, individual fundamentalist leaders continued their opposition. For them the central issue in the Scopes trial was what Bryan said it was—whether tax-paying parents “shall be made to support...evolution in the schools, while Christianity is ruled out....”¹²⁰ Yet five years after the trial the anti-evolution crusade had lost momentum. The subject was not even mentioned in the 1930 WCFA meeting. The silence should not be interpreted as lack of concern, however, but observance of more

¹¹⁵Howard K. Beale, *A History of Freedom of Teaching in American Schools* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), pp. 238, 241. Gatewood adds “that half of all American high school biology teachers shied away from teaching evolution as late as 1942. [attesting] to the enduring impact of the anti-evolution crusade” (“From Scopes to Creation Science,” p. 366).

¹¹⁶For an example of this in North Dakota, see Gatewood, *Controversy in the Twenties*, p. 316.

¹¹⁷Gatewood, “From Scopes to Creation Science,” p. 366.

¹¹⁸Harvey Maitland Watts, “Shall We Force Religion into the Schools? II—Which God and Why Schools?” *Forum* 77 (1927): 811–17.

¹¹⁹W. B. Riley, “The World’s Christian Fundamentals Association and the Scopes Trial,” *Christian Fundamentals in School and Church* 7 (October–December 1925): 48.

¹²⁰John Roach Straton, “The Most Sinister Movement in the United States,” *American Fundamentalist* 2 (December 26, 1925): 8–9.

pressing issues, such as Prohibition and the Depression. Fundamentalists renewed their attacks on the “wets” when the question of repealing the Eighteenth Amendment arose. Attention was also turned to the alleviation of human suffering. Care of the depressed and the displaced superseded court and classroom struggles.¹²¹ In a wrecked economy many were more concerned with simple survival rather than “survival of the fittest.”

Also, a new era of fundamentalism emerged. With the admitted failure to rescue the major denominations from modernism, fundamentalists from both the northern Presbyterians and Baptists began to separate and form their respective groups. In 1929, J. Gresham Machen left Princeton to begin Westminster Theological Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches was organized in 1932 as a sectarian body of fundamentalists to combat liberalism from outside the Northern Baptist Convention. This new direction, from nonconformity to separatism, coupled with the loss of fundamentalism’s early champions like Bryan and Straton (d. 1929), contributed to the decline of the anti-evolutionist crusade which Bryan had defended in the Scopes trial. However, such losses did not curtail fundamentalism’s overall progress. Joel A. Carpenter has proven conclusively that

institutional growth in the 1930s of the most vocal and visible evangelicals, the fundamentalists, challenges the widespread notion that popular Protestantism experienced a major decline during that decade. What really transpired was the beginning of a shift of the Protestant mainstream from the older denominations toward the evangelicals.¹²²

In other words, what really happened was the numerical and influential diminution of the mainline denominations and the corresponding growth of separatistic fundamentalist Christianity. Carpenter’s caveat that fundamentalist leaders “had made themselves look foolish in the anti-evolution crusade,” however, is not entirely accurate. It is true that

¹²¹Furniss, *Fundamentalist Controversy*, pp. 178–798.

¹²²Joel A. Carpenter, “Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism, 1929–1942,” in *Modern American Protestantism and Its World: Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, ed. Martin E. Marty (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1993), pp. 57–58, 66–68. See also, Carpenter’s “Revive Us Again: Alienation, Hope, and the Resurgence of Fundamentalism, 1930–1950,” in *Transforming Faith*, pp. 105–25. Carpenter’s views have been further developed in his book, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); see chapter one, wherein he writes, “Loss of the respect of intellectual elites does not necessarily mean loss of popular support, and it may actually enhance a group’s appeal in some circles” (p. 15). Evidence indicates that popular support for fundamentalism after the Scopes trial was stronger than ever.

fundamentalists appeared foolish in the eyes of liberal theologians and a cynical press, but they had been biased against fundamentalism long before the Scopes trial. The trial and the anti-evolutionist efforts by fundamentalist leaders only served to further discredit the movement in the eyes of those already opposed to it; but the widespread popular growth of fundamentalism after the trial proves that it was not at all jeopardized, but strengthened. Examples of growth abound. By 1930, there were over fifty Bible schools, and many of these expanded their programs from a two to a three-year program, thus allowing for greater specialization in pastoral studies, missions, Christian education, and music.¹²³ Fundamentalist schools and churches created publishing concerns, produced informative magazines, and ventured into radio broadcasting. Fundamentalists desiring a liberal arts education could have the choice of going to a fundamentalist college such as Wheaton¹²⁴ near Chicago or Bob Jones College in Florida. As a memorial to Bryan and in answer to his wish for a Christian school to be established in the scenic hill country surrounding Dayton, Bryan College was established in 1930. A growing number of summer Bible conferences and Christian camps began springing up after that year. Perhaps the most noticeable and dramatic change was in the area of missions. While liberal denominational mission enterprise waned, mission budgets decreased, and office staffs dwindled, fundamentalist mission programs accelerated. According to findings of the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry of 1932, "fundamentalist-backed missions grew stronger, [were] better financed, and [were] more evangelistically aggressive and more successful in recruiting volunteers than ever before."¹²⁵

Although it is impossible to determine accurately the long term effects of Bryan's involvement in the trial, we need to be reminded that his legacy is significant. He seems generally to be the "forgotten

¹²³William C. Ringenberg, *The Christian College: A History of Protestant Higher Education in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 167. Virginia Lieson Brereton reports that, even during the Depression when many institutions had to cut back, Bible schools continued to be founded. At least twenty-nine new schools appeared during the thirties, compared to seventeen during the previous decade (*Training God's Army: The American Bible School, 1880-1940* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990], p. 84).

¹²⁴Wheaton College was founded in 1857 as a Bible school. Under J. Oliver Buswell, president from 1926 to 1940, the school became a liberal arts college (Carpenter, "Fundamentalist Institutions," pp. 61-62).

¹²⁵Cited in Carpenter, "Fundamentalist Institutions," p. 65. Cf. Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity*, chapter twenty-five, entitled "Fundamentalism's Transdenominational Vitality in the 1930s and 1940s," in which he lists numerous examples of fundamentalism's growth under such headings as Bible Conferences, Bible College Outreach, Radio Ministries, Missionary Agencies, and Publishing Houses (pp. 251-57).

fundamentalist” among those who currently claim that title. One reason may not only be the negativism associated with the Scopes trial, but Bryan’s irregular type of fundamentalism. It can be argued that there is a legitimacy to the neglect in that fundamentalism decisively opposes many of Bryan’s interests, e.g., a more active centralized government, social progressiveness, and moral idealism—all liberal planks.¹²⁶ Practically speaking, fundamentalists believe that big government is too intrusive, that society is non-redemptive [we must win lost individuals to the gospel out of society], and that good morals only make sin “more respectable.” But, aside from the differences, Bryan is relevant to current fundamentalism. His importance lies not in the accomplishment of his political ambitions nor in his goal to force evolution from the public schools; ultimately, he failed in both cases. What he has left us is the reminder of our responsibility to courageously defend what is biblically orthodox and constitutionally just. For instance, his argument of the parents’ right to educate their children is reflected in the contemporary Christian day school and home school movements, which have proliferated remarkably since the Scopes trial and especially in the last twenty years. And there is little doubt that most Christian private schools of one kind or another have started over a pastoral and parental reaction to secularism and the resulting breakdown of morals in the public education sector, spawned in part by modern education’s endorsement of evolution.

What Bryan has also left us is the most important legacy of all: his unswerving advocacy of an infallible Bible as the final answer to the question of evolution versus creation. While most current fundamentalists interpret the length of creation and the age of the cosmos differently than Bryan, they are in agreement with him that Scripture is the decisive and most effective answer to Darwinism. And so it should be. Propositional verities revealed in the Bible are more effective in answering God’s critics than an apologetics for creation which rest on scientific evidences. Such a response will not give credibility to the believer before a cynical Christ-denying world, but it will give him confidence that his arguments

¹²⁶Mark A. Noll makes Bryan’s evangelical-political activism so distinct from the sectarian fundamentalism that emerged after Bryan that he places them in two “ages”—“The Age of Bryan: and “The Age of Fundamentalism.” The major difference, to Noll, is that post-Bryan fundamentalism, with its emphasis on dispensational premillennialism, is pessimistic about cultural progress. The focus is on personal evangelism and piety, not the optimistic socially redemptive themes of Bryan. Noll considers the resulting evangelical neglect of political engagement a “disaster,” and new evangelical political activism a welcome change in “The Age of Beginnings” [circa. 1941] (“The Scandal of Evangelical Political Reflection,” in *Being Christian Today: An American Conversation*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus and George Weigel [Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1992], pp. 72–83).

are sourced in the final answer of origins—God's Word. Thus his biblical answer of creation against evolution is God's answer. This is infinitely more important than a secular world's credibility rating. Nor should fundamentalists be content with a strategy that seeks "equal time" for creationism in classrooms.¹²⁷ This concedes an unwarranted respectability to evolution and compromises absolute truth. Bryan was right in giving no quarter to a demonic philosophy diametrically opposed to goodness and godliness. Evolution is scientifically invalid, but more importantly, it is theologically unacceptable.

CONCLUSION

One reporter who covered the Scopes trial doubted that, as a result of it, "the faith of a single Fundamentalist was shaken, or that a believer in evolution was won over to the acceptance of the literal interpretation of the Bible."¹²⁸ Battle lines were already drawn between the evolutionists and the fundamentalists long before the trial. As Waggoner states, "Most of the news reports [about the trial] were simply the convinced reaching the already convinced."¹²⁹ If Dayton itself is any indicator of these generalizations, then they certainly have merit. George Rappelyea, the local chemist and self-confessed agnostic who orchestrated the scheme to have Scopes indicted to begin with, wrote the ACLU from New Orleans: "I couldn't stay in Dayton after the trial. I would have been as lonely as the ark of truth on Mt. Sinai." Dayton druggist Fred E. Robinson, reflecting on the trial twenty-five years later, said that folks in the town were "more deeply religious than ever before."¹³⁰

It appears that, in spite of the enormous amount of bad publicity about the trial, fundamentalism was far from being destroyed by Bryan's participation in it. Not only did fundamentalist leaders continue Bryan's cause, but many of their churches grew numerically after the Dayton

¹²⁷This was the approach of Nell Seagraves and Jean Sumrall, two San Diego housewives who founded the Creation Research Center in 1970. Beginning in 1962 before the California State Board of Education, they demanded that school textbooks "teach creationism along with evolution as an equally viable theory" (cited in Gatewood, "From Scopes to Creation Science," p. 375). This is also the strategy of the Creation Research Society which appears to have given primacy to scientific rather than religious objections to evolution (ibid., p. 381).

¹²⁸Russell D. Owen, "The Significance of the Scopes Trial," *Current History Magazine* 22 (September 1925): 875.

¹²⁹"Historiography," p. 158. See also, Coletta (*Political Puritan*, p. 278) who writes, "Rather than changing minds, the trial solidified convictions already held."

¹³⁰Cited in Ginger, *Six Days or Forever?* p. 216.

affair.¹³¹ The so-called “stigma” of Bryanism, therefore, did not prevent people from being led into assemblies pastored by men who were avowedly Bryanist in sentiment.

There is no question that the anti-evolutionists eventually lost the battle to achieve their aims in both school and court. The Tennessee anti-evolution law has been repealed, as has such legislation in all other states where it had been enacted. In 1968, under Chief Justice Earl Warren, the Supreme Court acquiesced to the ACLU’s view of free speech in the classroom by overturning an Arkansas law prohibiting the instruction of evolution in public schools. Nine years later, in *Edwards v. Aguillard*, the Court further secularized public education by throwing out Louisiana’s “Creationism Act.” The Court affirmed that “the Act is facially invalid as violative of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, because it lacks a clear secular purpose.”¹³² Secularization also meant the elimination of sanctioned religious activities. The results have been disastrous to the moral fabric of this nation. Critics of Bryan must now consider if he were not a prophet rather than an obscurantist. To him evolution was symptomatic of the greater disease of modernism which, left unchecked, would produce infidelity and immorality among the youth of America. It must now be wondered not *if*, but *how much*, the “enlightened” educational system of America, which has promulgated evolutionary theories and rejected biblical literalism, has contributed to the advancement of futile secular humanism and the moral dissolution of its students. Bryan said that the teaching of evolution would produce brutishness in our youth and a society bankrupt of godliness and morality.¹³³ He warned prophetically that “if evolution wins, Christianity goes. Not suddenly, of course, but gradually, for the two cannot stand together.”¹³⁴ One hardly needs to cite statistics to prove

¹³¹David Rausch mentions that, four years after the trial, Arno C. Gaebelein was speaking at Mark A. Matthews’ First Presbyterian Church in Seattle, growing to become the largest Presbyterian church in the world, with a membership of over 9,000. Neither of these fundamentalist leaders was demoralized by the Scopes trial, but continued to speak against evolution. Gaebelein was pleasantly surprised that his anti-evolution remarks in Matthews’s church made headlines in the next day’s *Post Intelligence*. The subject was still alive and creating much interest in the papers and was filling the pews of fundamentalist churches by interested hearers (Rausch, *Zionism Within Early American Fundamentalism*, pp. 318–21).

¹³²*Edwards v. Aguillard*, 482 U.S. 578 (1987).

¹³³Cf. N. I. Seagraves, *The Creation Report* (San Diego: Creation Science Research Center, 1977), p. 17. Seagraves cites a direct correlation between acceptance of evolution and the breakdown of morals in society. Evolution fostered “the moral decay of spiritual values which contributes to the destruction of mental health and...the prevalence of divorce, abortion, and rampant venereal disease.”

¹³⁴Cited in Brod, “The Scopes Trial,” p. 222.

the validity of his claim against American state schools where guns and condoms have replaced prayer and the Bible, and against a western culture, where postmodern relativism appears to reign. The teaching of humanistic evolution has left in its wake a cultural climate void of absolutes in a society where questions of truth and falsehood are matters of moral indifference.

The Scopes trial was only a brief episode in the life of William Jennings Bryan, but it is the gross distortion of that event which has left its image of the man on American minds. Darrow and the dramatists and reporters who have taken their cue from him have cheated posterity of knowledge of Bryan, the champion of social justice, moral decency, and life-changing principles founded on Scripture. Bryan's own words from his famous speech "The Prince of Peace" give us an epitaph that best exemplifies that man:

The human measure of a human life is its income; the divine measure of a life is its outgo, its overflow— its contribution to the welfare of all.... If every word spoken in behalf of truth has its influence and every deed done for the right weighs in the final account, it is immaterial to the Christian whether his eyes behold victory or whether he died in the midst of conflict.¹³⁵

Bryan was a Christian statesman and leading fundamentalist who strengthened the movement "in the midst of conflict" by defending an absolutely authoritative Bible at the Scopes trial. It is this man we should remember and his uncompromising scriptural principles we should uphold.

¹³⁵Cited in "Thunder in the Pulpit," *Fundamentalist Journal* 6 (June 1987): 58.