

**A HISTORY OF MODERN CREATIONISM**

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In the meantime, a few words about the situation in Europe during this period are in order. Although the Moody and Torrey evangelistic meetings in England had been very fruitful, and although Spurgeon and other British pastors continued strong in the faith, nothing comparable to the American situation developed. There were a number of British scientists who continued to defend creationism, and this was especially apparent in the published papers in the Journal of the Victoria Institute. This venerable organization, though not specifically anti-evolutionist, did publish excellent creationist articles from time to time, by eminent scientists who were creationists. One of the most outstanding of these was Sir Ambrose Fleming (1849-1945), whose discoveries and developments in electronics almost entitle him to be called the father of modern electronics. He was president of the Victoria Institute for a time and published many excellent articles in its journal, including a fine critique of radiometric dating, as well as at least one important book opposing evolution.

In continental Europe, there were also a number of outstanding creationist scientists writing in this period, especially in France. These included Professor Louis Vialleton, Professor of the Faculty of Medicine at Montpellier, and Paul LeMoine, Director of the National Museum in Paris, as well as President of the Geological Society of France. In Germany, there was Albert Fleischmann, Professor of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy at the University of Erlangen. D. Carazzi, Professor of Zoology at the University of Paderua, was an important creationist in Italy. And there were many others.

But our more direct concern at this point is with the developing creation/evolution conflict in the United States. With the establishment of fundamentalism as a more or less formal system, with creationism either explicitly or implicitly at its heart, a number of more ambitious books on creation began to be produced. One that had an exceedingly broad influence was a devastating critique of the ape-man fossils that were then in vogue (Java Man, Neanderthal Man, etc.). The book was by a Roman Catholic lawyer named Alfred Waterson McCann and had the provocative title *God or Gorilla*, published in 1922. There were a number of others, some of which will be mentioned in the next chapter.

Also it was realized more and more that Darwinian philosophy had been responsible in considerable part for the German aggression that had led to the Great War, as well as the pseudo-scientific rationale for Communist atheism and the Russian revolution.

Studies had also shown that the nation's colleges were having a devastating effect on the Christian faith of students educated in the colleges. Suddenly, the nation was aroused at the dangers implicit in the indoctrination in evolution which young people were receiving in the public schools. Many states began to consider anti-evolution laws. Very few actually passed such laws, but one of those which did was Tennessee, and this soon led to the famous "Monkey Trial."

#### The Scopes Extravaganza

Never in the history of American jurisprudence was there ever such a court trial as the famous Scopes Trial, held in the Dayton, Tennessee, County Court House in July of 1925. This trial has been the theme of many books and almost innumerable articles, as well as at least one major motion picture (*Inherit The Wind*, starring Spencer Tracy as the "hero," the atheist lawyer Clarence Darrow). The current creationist revival has stimulated a new spurt of articles featuring this watershed event. The trial was covered by over 200 news reporters, writing about two million words, but much of this was highly biased reporting, specifically designed to destroy creationism and the fundamentalist revival which reached its climax in this media event. Chicago radio station WGN here produced the first national broadcast of an American trial. Sixty-five telegraph operators sent out more words to Europe and Australia than had ever before been cabled about any American event. A recent article published by the Tennessee Historical Society comments as follows:

A stranger trial there probably never was. One or more of the jury were there primarily to get a good seat, but ironically they missed many proceedings because the jury was excluded from the lengthy, technical legal discussions. . . . Scientific experts were brought hundreds of miles to testify, but their statements were not accepted as evidence. . . . The chief counsel for the defense [Darrow] was cited for contempt of court, and the leader for the prosecution [Bryan] took the witness stand. The accused never was called to testify.

. . . The proceedings were cut short by the judge partly to protect the chief prosecution and defense lawyers against threats on their safety. . . . Last in the list of trial oddities is the fact that the defense did not claim the ac-

cused was innocent of the charges, but at the end asked that the jury return a verdict of guilty.<sup>1</sup>

As a matter of fact, the defendant John T. Scopes was probably not guilty of teaching evolution at all, as he later acknowledged,<sup>2</sup> but agreed to say that he had simply in order to help set up the scenario. The whole thing had been arranged as a sort of local conspiracy to attract attention and possibly industrial developers to Dayton.<sup>3</sup>

The local conspiracy, motivated by local economics, was of course merely a convenient tool utilized by a much more serious and far-reaching group of "conspirators" in New York City. The Dayton group hatched the idea only as a result of reading an article in a Chattanooga newspaper in which the American Civil Liberties Union had offered to finance any Tennessee teacher who was willing to be tried for breaking the state's newly passed law banning the teaching of evolution. The A.C.L.U. leadership was justifiably concerned about the strong reaction that the fundamentalists were generating in the nation against the pervasive teaching of evolutionism and collectivist humanism in the schools. They saw this as a golden opportunity to destroy the fundamentalist movement through news media ridicule and were willing to pay whatever amount it might cost to accomplish this.

The A.C.L.U. contingent, and the nation's evolutionist establishment in general, were especially anxious to stop the strong Christian creationist testimony of William Jennings Bryan, who would undoubtedly be persuaded to serve as the main attorney for the creationists. Bryan was a liberal Democrat politically, former Secretary for State, three-time Democratic candidate for president, and very popular with "commoners" (he was known popularly as the "Great Commoner"). In spite of his liberal political associations, however, he was a Bible-believing Christian and had for several years been great-

<sup>1</sup>R. M. Cornelius, "Their Stage Drew all the World: A New Look at the Scopes Evolution Trial," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XL (Summer, 1961), pp. 133, 134.

<sup>2</sup>John T. Scopes and James Presley, *Center of the Storm: Memoirs of John T. Scopes* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967), p. 60.

<sup>3</sup>Warren Allen, "Backgrounds of the Scopes Trial at Dayton, Tennessee," M.A. Thesis (Univ. of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1959, pp. 55-61), as reported by Cornelius, in above reference.



Figure 4. *The Scopes Trial*

The Scopes Trial in 1925 was a classic confrontation between evolutionist and creationist, resulting in an overwhelming news-media victory for evolution. In this photograph, taken in the County Court House at Dayton, Tennessee, are shown several of the leading figures at the trial, including Assistant defense attorney Dudley Field Malone (left foreground), William Jennings Bryan (center, with bow tie), and Judge J. T. Rauston, shaking hands with Clarence Darrow (with suspenders, far right).

*Photo courtesy of Bryan College, Robinson Photo Collection.*

ly exercised about the deadly moral and spiritual influences of evolutionary teaching in the world, especially its direct connection with German militarism in the Great War, as well as its deadening spiritual effect on young people in the schools. With his oratorical brilliance, he had become probably the top spokesman for fundamentalism and creationism in the nation. He was not a scientist, however, nor was he devious, and he failed to realize he was walking into a deadly trap set by the A.C.L.U. and their lead attorney, the famous Clarence Darrow.

The story of the trial itself has been told and retold so many times that it seems redundant to repeat it again here. As anticipated and intended, the press had a field day and Bryan was made to appear ridiculous by the insulting sarcasm of Darrow. He foolishly allowed

himself to be placed on the witness stand by Darrow, after being promised that Darrow would then take the stand himself, thus allowing Bryan to question him and also to give his own final address. Darrow, however, after mercilessly ridiculing Bryan on the stand with all sorts of irrelevant Bible questions, then maneuvered quickly to get the trial terminated by the judge without giving Bryan his own opportunity to question Darrow and to give his masterly summary address.

Probably the most serious mistake made by Bryan on the stand was to insist repeatedly that he had implicit confidence in the infallibility of Scripture, but then to hedge on the geological question, relying on the day/age theory. He had been warned against this very thing by George McCready Price. Darrow, of course, made the most of it, ridiculing the idea of people claiming to believe the Bible was inspired when its meaning was so flexible that one could make it say whatever he wished!

Technically, the case was won by the creationists, but Darrow, the A.C.L.U., and especially the news media created one of the most successful "stings" in the long, long history of humanistic intrigues. Dr. Fay-Cooper Cole, who had been Anthropology Department Chairman at the University of Chicago, and who had given one of the scientific depositions for the evolutionists at the trial, said:

Where one person had been interested in evolution before the trial, scores were reading and inquiring at its close. Within a year the prohibitive bills which had been pending in other states were dropped and killed. Tennessee had been made to appear so ridiculous in the eyes of the nation that other states did not care to follow its lead.<sup>1</sup>

Further than that, of course, the creationist revival of the 1920s was all but stopped dead in its tracks. Bryan himself died in his sleep just five days after the trial ended, at the age of 65, and there is no doubt that the emotional ordeal, as well as the physical exhaustion, associated with the trial contributed to this sad—perhaps symbolic—tragedy.

While evolutionists have complained that the Scopes trial resulted

<sup>1</sup>Fay-Cooper Cole, "A Witness at the Scopes Trial," *Scientific American*, Jan. 1959, p. 130.

for some years in the dilution of evolutionary emphasis in school textbooks,<sup>2</sup> this complaint is hard to justify. There has certainly been nothing about *creation* in these books! From our point of view, they are literally saturated with evolutionary thinking, expressed either explicitly or implicitly, and this has been true ever since the trial. Except for occasional courageous Christian teachers here and there, the public educational institutions from kindergarten through graduate school have been strictly centers of evolutionist indoctrination for well over fifty years. Textbooks may not always have "evolution" listed in their indexes, but they are invariably permeated with evolutionary presuppositions and naturalistic, humanistic interpretations of all phenomena.

One of the most disappointing aspects of the Scopes trial was its intimidating effect on Christians. Multitudes of nominal Christians capitulated to theistic evolution, and even those who retained their belief in creation retreated from the arena of conflict, using the fiction that it was somehow unspiritual to be involved in such controversies and urging each other to concentrate instead on "soul-winning" and "personal Christianity," with a great emphasis also on the soon return of Christ. The schools and government and society in general were, to all intents and purposes, simply abandoned to secular humanist control, and they have been firmly under that control ever since.

This did not happen over night, of course. Even though their champion had been downed, there continued to be a flurry of activity among fundamentalists and creationists for a couple of years or so. For a while, there were many who even thought the creationists had won, despite the continuing news media campaign of ridicule and vituperation. Even Bryan himself seems to have thought this, and he arranged to have his intended summary speech—which he had been prevented from delivering at the trial—printed for distribution to the papers.

This speech was reprinted by Bryan College on the 50th anniversary of the trial, in 1975, and is indeed an excellent message,<sup>3</sup> stress-

<sup>1</sup>Judith Grabner and P. D. Miller, "Effects of the Scopes Trial," *Science*, 185, 6 Sep. 1974, pp. 832-837.

<sup>2</sup>*The Last Message of William Jennings Bryan* (Dayton, TN: William Jennings Bryan College, 1975), 32 pp.

ing the right of citizens to control their own schools, the misuse of scientific data by evolutionists, and especially the devastatingly harmful effects of evolutionary teaching. It concluded with a strong Christian testimony and exhortation. It might indeed have made a difference if it had been actually delivered *and* accurately reported, but it was soon forgotten, even by most Christians.

One good result from the trial was the establishment in Dayton of a fine Christian liberal arts college, paid for by friends of Bryan all over the nation as a memorial to him and to the great cause for which he had fought and died. Bryan College has remained true to the ideals and beliefs of its founder and is today a thriving accredited college with over 600 students,<sup>1</sup> at least 17 majors, a beautiful 100-acre campus, and over 3500 alumni.

Furthermore, the interest generated by the trial soon resulted in the publication of a number of significant anti-evolution books. The most important was a book by a physics professor at the University of Cincinnati. Although the author, Louis T. More, indicated his basic faith to be in evolution, his book was a devastating scientific critique of evolution.<sup>2</sup> Two prominent Lutheran theologians, Leander S. Keyser and Theodore Graebner, published excellent volumes,<sup>3</sup> and a truly outstanding treatise was written by the Roman Catholic Professor of Animal Zoology at Seton Hall College.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of these and a few other significant efforts, however, the Scopes trial and the continual media bombardment of ridicule afterward proved so discouraging and intimidating to the Christian world that the whole fundamentalist movement seemed to wither away, at least as far as impact on the secular world was concerned. In-trospective evangelicalism and pietistic separatism seemed henceforth to characterize most of the evangelical community.

The real poverty of the evolutionists' scientific position, however,

<sup>1</sup>R. M. Cornelius, *op. cit.*, p. 139. I myself have had the privilege of speaking at Bryan College.

<sup>2</sup>Louis T. More, *The Dogma of Evolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1925).

<sup>3</sup>Leander S. Keyser, *The Problem of Origins* (Wartburg Press, 1925); Theodore Graebner, *Essays on Evolution* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1925).

<sup>4</sup>George Barry O'Toole, *The Case Against Evolution* (New York: Macmillan Publ. Co., 1926).

could have been evident to anyone who would take the trouble to read the actual trial transcripts. The poverty of evolutionism has also been repeatedly reemphasized over the past half-century by the perpetual stream of books, articles, and other replays of the Scopes trial. It was evolution's great triumph (greater even than the famed Huxley-Wilberforce debate), and evolutionists never seem to have anything better to offer when there arises a need to defend evolution.

For instance, in 1973 I spent six weeks in New Zealand, speaking on scientific creationism in universities, schools, and churches all over that country. There was a great deal of interest and I think a real impact was made. But in city after city, either during my visit or immediately afterward, the government-controlled television channels kept showing the Scopes trial motion picture, *Inherit The Wind*, over and over.

Of course, maybe it was only a coincidence. But the picture was an old film, and there seemed no other reason for resurrecting it just at that time. At least, however, it helped focus the interest of one small nation on the creation-evolution issue, for a while.

#### The Great Darwinian Centennial Celebration

The hold of evolutionism on the educational system and the intellectual life of the nation grew stronger year by year after 1925. The rift between the fundamentalists and modernists continued in the great denominations, but the modernists and liberals continued to grow in relative power in all or most of them. In many cases, small conservative groups broke away to form new denominations, and many new evangelical schools and mission societies were formed. However, even though most of these had a nominal commitment to creationism, at least as far as the origin of man was concerned, the whole subject was largely deemphasized as too controversial and too specialized.

To a large degree, real scientific creationism seemed almost to disappear. No scientists, especially on the faculties of the great universities, seemed willing to admit to being creationists—or even evangelical Christians. Very few publications appeared advocating literal creationism or Biblical catastrophism.

Yet the evolutionists were still not satisfied. They still felt that evolutionary philosophy was not being applied as widely and thoroughly in society as they would like. The spectre of theism was still inhibiting the publishers and the legislatures, preventing the full