

Origins Insights

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Inherit the Wind: A Historical Analysis (Part 2)

by Dr. David N. Menton
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(Continued from the February issue)

HISTORICAL COMMENT: Bryan is reported by one of his biographers, Lawrence W. Levine, to have read Darwin's *On The Origin of Species* already in 1905 — 20 years before the Scopes trial! Although Bryan's reservations about the theory of evolution were certainly influenced by his religious beliefs, he had written many well-argued articles that were critical of the scientific evidence used in his day to defend the theory of evolution. Bryan had also carried on a long correspondence on the subject of evolution with the famous evolutionist, Henry Fairfield Osborn. Certainly for a layman, Bryan's knowledge of the scientific evidence both for and against evolution was unusually sophisticated. By comparison, the trial transcript shows that Darrow gave the impression of having a very poor grasp of both the meaning and putative mechanism of evolution. Darrow appeared to rest his belief in evolution on scientific "authority," which he accepted without question.

In his book *The Great Monkey Trial*, Sprague de Camp repudiated Bryan's conservative Christianity, and missed no opportunity to criticize his scientific views; and yet, honesty compelled him to give Bryan credit for at least some of his undeniable virtues:

"As a speaker, Bryan radiated good humored sincerity. Few who heard him could help liking him... In personality he was forceful, energetic, and opinionated but genial, kindly, generous, likable and charming... He showed a praise worthy tolerance towards those who disagreed with him... Bryan was the greatest American orator of his time and perhaps any time." (de Camp, pages 36 & 37)

This is obviously not the man portrayed in the play, but de Camp's description of Bryan's character is entirely consistent with the major biographies of Bryan's life (see Levine, 1965 and Coletta, 1969). The accusations of intolerance leveled against Bryan tended to disregard the published record of his statements. For example, in 1923, Bryan wrote to Senator W. J. Singleterry urging that the Florida legislature attach no penalty to its proposed anti-evolution law, and that the law prohibit only the teaching of evolution as a fact, for *"a book which merely contains it as an hypothesis can be considered as giving information as to views held, which is very different from teaching it as a fact."* (Cornelius, R.M., "Scopes Evolution Trial", *Tenn. Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XL, Summer, 1991, page 12).

INHERIT THE WIND: The conservative Christian people of Dayton Tennessee are portrayed as ignorant, closed-minded, and discourteous. Here are just a few examples: When H. L. Mencken arrives in town, Elijah (a Bible salesman who can neither read nor write) asks Mencken, *"What are you? An evolutionist? An Infidel? A Sinner?"* (play script, page 13). The mayor of the town offers to look for a town ordinance that would prevent Clarence Darrow from entering the town (play script, pages 19,20). When Darrow finally arrives in town, a young Christian girl, screams, *"The Devil"* and then runs off in fear (play script, page 24).

HISTORICAL COMMENT: The following is an excerpt from H.L. Mencken's first dispatch sent to his newspaper, *"Nor is there any evidence of that poisonous spirit which usually shows itself when Christian men gather to defend the great doctrine of their faith... On the contrary, the Evolutionists and the Anti-Evolutionists seem to be on the best of terms, and it is hard in a group to distinguish one from the other."* (de Camp page 147)

The following is a quotation from Clarence Darrow on the seventh day of the eight day trial:
DARROW: *"I don't know as I was ever in a community in my life where my religious ideas differed as widely from the great mass as I have found them since I have been in Tennessee. Yet I came here a perfect stranger and I can say what I have said before that I have not found upon any body's part — any citizen here in this town or outside the slightest discourtesy. I have been treated better, kindlier and more hospitably than I fancied would have been the case in the north."* (trial transcript, pages 225-226)

INHERIT THE WIND: Bryan, but not Darrow, is referred to as "colonel" in the court room because only Bryan had been made an "honorary colonel" in the state militia of Tennessee. Darrow understandably resents this gross display of bias and the State reluctantly makes Darrow a "temporary honorary colonel" in a bungling effort to hide their obvious partiality to Bryan (play script, page 27).

HISTORICAL COMMENT: "Colonel" was a customary honorary title used in the courtroom and was extended to all the legal counsel in the Scopes case. It had nothing whatever to do with the military or favoritism. Both Darrow and Bryan, indeed all the lawyers in the case, were frequently referred to as "colonel" during the trial. Incidentally, unlike Darrow, Bryan really was a colonel in the U.S. Army (trial transcript, page 7, "The World's Most Famous Court Trial").

INHERIT THE WIND: Darrow objects to the announcement of an evening prayer meeting at the end of the first day of the trial. (play script page 30).

HISTORICAL COMMENT: No such announcement was ever made during the trial but Darrow and the other defense lawyers repeatedly objected to the opening of each session of the court with prayer as was customary in Tennessee and still is in our own U.S. Supreme Court (trial transcript, page 89).

INHERIT THE WIND: At the prayer meeting, we read the following account from page 39 of the play:

REV. BROWN: *"Do we believe the truth of the Word?"*

ALL: *"Yes!"*

REV. BROWN: *(Pointing a finger toward the jail.) "Do we curse the man who denies the Word?"*

ALL: *(Crescendo, each answer mightier than the one before) "Yes!"*

REV. BROWN: *"Do we cast this sinner out of our midst?"*

ALL: *"Yes!" (Each crash of sound from the crowd seems to strike Rachel physically, and shake her. The prayer meeting has passed beyond the familiar bounds into an area of orgiastic anger)*

REV. BROWN: *"Do we call down hellfire on the man who has sinned against the Word?"*

ALL: *(Roaring.) "Yes!"*

REV. BROWN: *(Deliberately shattering the rhythm, to go into a frenzied prayer, hands clasped together and lifted heavenward) "... Let him feel the terror of Thy sword! For all eternity, let his soul writhe in anguish and damnation - "*

RACHEL: *"No!" (she rushed to the platform.) "No, Father. Don't pray to destroy Bert! (Scopes) (As she falls on her knees in front of the platform.) No, no, no...!"*

REV. BROWN: *"Lord, we call down the same curse on those who ask grace for this sinner - though they be of my blood, and flesh of my flesh!"* (play script, page 39)

(To be continued next month)

How Are We Doing?

Since its inception this newsletter has focused on providing feature articles either pertaining to the Creation Science Fellowship as an organization, event and meeting announcements including the International Conference on Creationism, and Creation Science technical articles. Other items have included announcements of creation related activities around the country sponsored by other organizations as well as those in which CSF is a part.

In an attempt to stimulate educational growth and complement our bookstore a set of reading lists have been made available on our web site and readers have been encouraged to send in book reviews for possible publication. These initiatives have not been as successful as hoped.

This newsletter is for you, dear reader, and we would like to hear what information would be useful to you.

What do you like? What don't you like? How would you like to see this publication improved? What feature article topics or other items would you like to see? Would you like to see a change of format?

Please e-mail your thoughts to csficc@csfpittsburgh.org. Please put "CSF Newsletter" in the subject line. This will help us sort through the many other e-mails we receive.

The 22nd Annual Greater Pittsburgh Homeschooling Workshop and Curriculum Fair

When: Saturday, March 17th, 2007 from 8 am until 3 pm.

Where: South Hills Bible Chapel, 300 Gallery Drive, McMurray, Pa, 15317

The pre-registration deadline is March 3rd.

Pre-registration fees are: adults \$12, couples \$18 and teens over the age of 12 are \$6.

The registration fees at the door are slightly higher at \$14.00 per person and \$20.00 per couple and \$8 for teens. Pre-registration is not required, walk-ins are welcome!

The keynote speaker: Lenard Ransil, from Upon This Rock Foundation, will be speaking about Understanding Worldviews. 16 different workshops will also be offered benefiting the experienced homeschooler, the novice homeschooler or even those who are considering homeschooling their children in the future.

Book vendors: (ABeka, Christian Literary Associates, Creation Science Fellowship, Erie Diploma Program, Holcombs Know Place, Just Math Inc., Math-U-See, McCaffrey SAT Tutoring, Pa Homeschoolers, Queen Homeschool Supplies, Usborne and more) will be present so that you can determine which books, curriculums will best fit your child's educational needs.

There will be a large used **book sale**; sell or buy used books.

The **workshop** is an opportunity for anyone who is interested in homeschooling to gather information, look at various resources and to speak with experienced homeschoolers.

Questions and Registration: E-mail Nancy Shawgo nancys_30@yahoo.com or call Sue Means at 412.854.4188.

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