

Microscopes, Telescopes, Spectroscopes, and poor little Scopes:  
The Monkey Trial in California, 1925

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A capstone project submitted for  
Graduation with University Honors

June 4, 2020

University Honors  
University of California, Riverside

APPROVED

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### Abstract

I researched the Scopes Trial of July 1925 in the eyes of California newspapers. The Scopes Trial looked at the question of teaching evolution in schools. In this particular case it was about teaching evolution in the very pro-creationism south. I believe it would be interesting to look at the response of Californians to this trial by looking at newspapers from the time that the trial took place. The specific question I will be asking by looking at the topic is "What did Californians think about the Scopes trial and the idea of teaching evolution in schools?"

I will be analyzing newspapers from various publications in the 1920s in order to gain information about the topic and the view of Californians. I believe that in looking through old publications from July of 1925 people will be able to see the mindset of the general population of California at a time of great controversy regarding religious beliefs and scientific theories. This may also be able to provide us with information about California atmosphere of beliefs as a state and whether it follows more scientific or religious observances. Once the work is completed we can know what the viewpoint of creationism versus evolution was in California at the time of the Scopes Trial taking place.

## **Introduction**

Few legal cases in the Twentieth Century can match the importance and level of controversy the Scopes “Monkey” Trial was able to muster around the United States. The case- filled with arguments of passion, science, faith, and morals- was the high point for the contest between science and faith. It was a case where famed lawyers such as Dudley Field Malone and the best defense attorney of the time, Clarence Darrow stood in a courtroom with three time democratic presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan. It was a case where a small town of a couple thousand people that nobody had ever heard of attracted massive crowds of reporters, lawyers who looked to represent either side, and business people who hoped to make some quick money. It was a case where a high school teacher was being charged for breaking a Tennessee law that prohibited the teaching of evolution in schools.

The case was so nationally recognized that the legal battle that happened in Dayton, Tennessee struck a nerve one way or the other with Californians thousands of miles away from the legal battlegrounds of the Scopes Trial. Newspapers were printing new articles everyday of the week with updates and speeches from Dayton, trying to keep their readers informed on the biggest battle between science and faith of the century. Some papers raised Scopes on a pedestal and hailed him as a hero to the scientific community and as a protector to the freedoms we are given under the Constitution. Meanwhile other papers accused Scopes of turning their children from religion and faith in God, which would cause the next generation to have a lack of morals. Californians from all over the state had an opinion that they were willing to share and did so in a public forum by submitting letters to the editors of the larger newspapers in the state such as the Los Angeles Times. The letters range from supporting Scopes all the way to accusing Scopes of taking away the morals of children. At the end of this paper you will know who John T. Scopes

was, how and why the Scopes Trial started, what the Tennessee law entailed, how California newspapers were reporting the trial, and the responses these papers got from their readers who were closely watching the proceedings of the trial with baited breath as was the rest of the country.

### **The Butler Act**

The 1925 Tennessee law that John T. Scopes violated was made for the sole purpose of preventing the teaching of human evolution in public schools throughout the state. This meant that biology classes throughout the state could teach the theory of evolution surrounding all kinds of organisms but teachers were not allowed to connect human beings with any form of evolution. Humans could not be shown to have evolved from single-celled organisms in the schools of Tennessee. Humans could not have been shown to have a common ancestor with other living organisms in the schools of Tennessee. Humans could not be shown to have evolved from monkeys in the schools of Tennessee. An entire section of the teaching of biology was forcibly and suddenly removed from the teaching curriculum of schools all over the state. Teachers had to suddenly reform lesson plans because the government decided that children should not know about a theory that could explain the growth of life over time. The law was pushed through the legislative process to protect religious beliefs in the state from being harmed by a theory that had been more and more widely accepted by the scientific community since it was proposed by Charles Darwin. While the theory of evolution was becoming more and more widely accepted in the social circles of the scientific community, the “High tides of Christian Fundamentalism

threatened to engulf the nation,”<sup>1</sup> as put by John Scopes himself. The flames of Fundamentalism were constantly fanned by the speeches of the “Great Commoner,” William Jennings Bryan.

The man that lead the prosecution against Scopes was of course one of the biggest proponents of anti-evolution bills across the country. Bryan thought of the theory of evolution and those who believed in it as the mortal enemies of Christianity and said “When the Christians of the nation understand the demoralizing influence of this godless doctrine, they will refuse to allow it to be taught at public expense.”<sup>2</sup> In this Bryan made known his goal of forcing the very thought of evolution out of schools and away from future generations whom the theory would surely corrupt and create immoral citizens. Bryan did not simply stop by calling evolution the enemy of Christianity, but he went even further calling for Christians to attack those who were against the Bible, believers in evolution, and stated “The only thing that Christians need to do now is to bring the enemies of the Bible in the open and compel them to meet the issue as it is.”<sup>3</sup> the Great Commoner had led the charge of the Fundamentalist movement to the doorstep of the Tennessee house of representatives where the original version of the controversial anti-evolution bill was passed on January 28, 1925 by a vote of 71-5. Just under two months later, on March 21, 1925 the same bill passed in the state senate by a vote of 24-6.<sup>4</sup> There were no loud protests. There were no influential figures who spoke out against the bill. There was only silence and the giddy cheers of the Fundamentalist crusaders who dragged another state below the high tides of Christian Fundamentalism. The newly created anti-evolution bill, known as the Butler Act, read as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> John T. Scopes and James Presley, *Center of the Storm: Memoirs of John T. Scopes* (Canada: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967) 45.

<sup>2</sup> Scopes and Presley, *Center of the Storm*, 51.

<sup>3</sup> Scopes and Presley, *Center of the Storm*, 51.

<sup>4</sup> Scopes and Presley, *Center of the Storm*, 51-52.

That it shall be unlawful for any teacher in any of the Universities, Normals and all other public schools of the State which are supported in whole or in part by the public school funds of the State, to teach any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals. That any teacher found guilty of the violation of this Act shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction, shall be fined not less than One Hundred (\$100.00) Dollars nor more than Five Hundred (\$500.00) Dollars for each offense.<sup>5</sup>

It had serious consequences just a few months later.

### **Scopes Before the Trial**

The biggest battle between science and faith in America was put into motion by several factors- a surge in Christian Fundamentalism, the upbringing of a young John T. Scopes, and a lot of chance. John Scopes was born in Paducah, Kentucky on August 3, 1900. Scopes described the town as a “symbol of the live-and-let-live,” philosophy. Shaped by the environment and family he was born into Scopes was taught to revere truth, love, and courage, pillars that would be consistently tested through the trial he would face at age twenty-four. Scopes’ father, who was an inspirational and influential figure in the former’s life, set a precedent of sorts for Scopes. When Scopes was a child, his father was an elder of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Paducah. The Presbyterian Church in Paducah wanted to force the prostitutes of the red light district out of the town. Scopes’ father, Thomas Scopes thought that these people should be left alone and that all of God’s children should be loved as the Bible tells. Unfortunately, his fellow elders disagreed and had a “holier than thou” attitude towards those who did not follow the Bible as they did. Thomas Scopes left the Presbyterian Church, broke with organized religion, and never returned to it in any form.<sup>6</sup> What was important to Thomas Scopes was following what he

<sup>5</sup> Scopes and Presley, *Center of the Storm*, 52.

<sup>6</sup> Scopes and Presley, *Center of the Storm*, 23.

believed in and never compromising his beliefs, and he passed that ideal on to his son, John T. Scopes. Thomas raised his son with an open mind, reading books such as Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, *Descent of Man*, and *Voyage of the Beagle* to the young John T. Scopes. Raised on the theories of evolution, Scopes saw Darwin's words as the truth and was willing to defend them come what may.

As he got older, John Scopes chose to get a higher level of education. He went to the University of Illinois and enrolled in the fall of 1919. It was here that he met several teachers whom he enjoyed and where he learned a lesson that would continue to lead him down the path of violating the Butler Act in 1925. "If the teacher is lively and interesting, he is bound to make his subject lively and interesting,"<sup>7</sup> was the philosophy that led Scopes to choose what classes he took during his college career. He met teachers in subjects like chemistry, philosophy, and geology that would shape his future. One particular lecturer that would make a difference in Scopes's life was in the neighboring state of Kentucky.

In the spring of 1920 Scopes was ill while in a lab and was taken to the hospital. Thinking that tuberculosis was the problem Scopes moved to the warmer, neighboring state of Kentucky, where he would enroll as a student in the fall of 1920 at the University of Kentucky. While there he met a professor of geology who also happened to teach evolution. This professor, Arthur McQuiston Miller, became one of Scopes's favorite teachers. Scopes described Miller as slender, gray-haired, puritanical, and yet his life was devoted to science and study. By Scopes' account he was a man that was tolerant and respectful of the views of others.<sup>8</sup> Scopes took classes in the humanities- law, philosophy, and logic- and sciences- zoology, chemistry, geology, and biology. By the time he was a senior, Scopes' haphazard behavior of choosing classes based

<sup>7</sup> Scopes and Presley, *Center of the Storm*, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Scopes and Presley, *Center of the Storm*, 30.

on professors rather than requirements left him with only one option as a major when he was nearing graduation, a major in law. The major is ironic considering that within a year of receiving it, Scopes would be the subject of a court case where he would be surrounded by some of the best lawyers in the country.

Upon graduation in the spring of 1924, Scopes filed paper work with the University of Kentucky's teacher-placement bureau. At the end of the summer he was notified that a teaching-coaching position had opened up in Dayton Tennessee. A coach had unexpectedly quit at the end of the summer, leaving the local school without someone to coach their football team, or teach physics, algebra, and chemistry. Of course, Scopes would have to stray fairly far from the subject matter he was hired to teach to reach the conversation of evolution that he would be charged with teaching. During the spring of 1925, shortly before the final exams, the principal of the school, who was also the usual biology teacher, had become ill and his class needed a substitute. John T. Scopes was to be that substitute and used the state adopted textbook to help the students review for the finals. By the first of May the school year was over, Scopes's teaching contract was being extended for the next year, and he was planning on returning home to Paducah, Kentucky for the summer.

Scopes had been *planning* on leaving Dayton at the end of the school year but, unfortunately for him, he did not. He was going to stay in Dayton for a few extra days because two of his students had gotten injured in a car accident and because he met a beautiful girl who invited him to a church social. Due to these two chance events, Scopes decided to stay in town long enough to be invited to Robinson's drugstore where he had been called by the chairman of the school board, Doc Robinson, Dayton's leading lawyer, Sue Hicks, and George Rappleyea among others. The topic of discussion was whether it was possible to teach biology without



evolution and who to ask rather than someone who had served as a substitute for the subject.

Scopes' answer was of course that you could not teach biology without evolution. Scopes was then asked what textbook he used when he taught biology. He took one of the biology textbooks off a shelf in the store and showed it to the group, including a section of the book that talks about evolution and had evolutionary charts. It was at this point that Robinson told Scopes that he had been violating the Butler Act which had been passed earlier that year. Scopes could not actually recall whether he had in fact taught the section about evolution to the students he had substituted for but that did not matter. What did matter was whether Scopes was willing to be the center piece of a massive clash between science and faith. From here, Scopes was asked by Rappleyea if he would be willing to stand as the defendant in a test trial and immediately contacted the American Civil Liberties Union as soon as he heard Scopes' affirmation. John Scopes once said:

Darrow would have said I had no choice but to stand trial at Dayton and he would have started his proof at least with my parents, or as far back as he could go. I had been taught from childhood to stand up for what I thought was right and I did not think the state of Tennessee had any right to keep me from teaching the truth. So I was willing to test the law's constitutionality.<sup>9</sup>

Within a matter of weeks the biggest news in the history of Dayton had spread to the public and quickly moved outward to the entire country and had become the newest controversial issue on the tongues of people everywhere. Dayton was officially on the map. Reporters had come from all over the country to cover what was famously known as the Scopes Trial, and John Scopes was in the midst of a legal battle that even his bachelors degree in law could not have prepared him for. Luckily the ACLU had provided him with a legion of lawyers to fight his battles on his behalf.

<sup>9</sup> Scopes and Presley, *Center of the Storm*, 4.

## **California and Tennessee**

Hollywood, the Republican Party, and science. When we look at the different reactions to the Scopes trial from Californians compared to the people of Tennessee we need to keep in mind the cultural differences between these two states. Tennessee was the heartland of William Jennings Bryan and the Fundamentalist movement. California was nearly the complete opposite of Tennessee. Hollywood and the movie industry were starting to grow and become a part of the culture of California. The Republican Party was in firm control of the state. In all of the three attempts that William Jennings Bryan made on the White House he was never able to win California in the general election. Furthermore, the scientific community of California was larger and more influential than it was in Tennessee. As we will see later, the scientific community in California was willing to fight against legislation that tried to silence the scientific community in 1925. These differences would have an affect on how California perceived the issue of evolution and their reactions to the Scopes trial. Despite all these influences California was not wholly different from Tennessee. Many of the newspapers used in my analysis were smaller farm towns that at face value were similar to the towns in Tennessee. Towns like Lompoc and San Luis Obispo, these towns were not so different from the ones in Tennessee and yet their views could not be further apart.

## **Newspaper Articles with bias for Scopes**

The Scopes Trial was in newspapers all over the country from May through August of 1925. During its brief tenure as front page news on plenty of different newspapers even those

who were devoted to objective journalism showed a sense of bias for one side or the other in both obvious and subtle ways. One of the earliest articles that jumped into the fray and started reporting on the Scopes trial was published on May 26 of 1925. The article by the *Colusa Herald* demonstrated some of the earliest shows of support for Scopes and the scientific community and even went as far as to attack the religious communities that were attacking science writing:

John T. Scopes, science teacher, is on trial for violation of the Tennessee state law which prohibits the teaching of evolution in the schools. The American Association for the Advancement of Science has joined in the defense. The trial is being held in the Dayton baseball park in Tennessee and is being attended by 20,000 people Whether or not all of us believe in the evolution theory we are forced to admit that science is searching for the TRUTH. The evolution theory is a summary of the findings of science through many years of painstaking effort. Science, through its search, has made possible the invention of the X-Ray machine, the wireless telegraph and wireless telephone and has put radium to use for suffering humanity; in short, science has given us practically everything that makes our lives more worth living than our grandfathers 'were. Scientific researches in many cases have substantiated incidents in the Old Testament. No matter what our beliefs are, can we afford to put blinkers on science? That is what Tennessee has tried to do. If we could go to each bitter opponent of the evolution theory and ask him to tell us how science explains the conception and development of life on the earth we would be surprised indeed at the answers, many of which, would show only a hazy idea of the theory.<sup>10</sup>

The article took the time to do its job, it got the news out to the public by explaining the violation of the state law by Scopes, how the American science association joined the defense, and where the trial was happening. Once the article had done its job it left all pretense of non-bias behind and was willing to show where it stood on the issue of science and evolution and picked a side in the argument. It is important to note that the article did not completely throw the idea of religion aside. The author did make note that science had substantiated parts of the Old Testament showing that while the author believed in the cause of Scopes and the scientific community they were not completely interested in alienating their more religious audience. The newspaper

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<sup>10</sup> "Evolution on Trial," *Colusa Herald*, May 26, 1925, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=CSH19250526.2.24&srpos=1&e=-----192-en--20-CSH-1--txt-txIN-John+Scopes-----1>

wanted to communicate information in a way that pleased both sides of the argument so that their audience will continue buying the paper. The way this particular paper pushed the information seems as though there was a larger population of science supporters with a smaller, but still existent, population of religious supporters or people who unified evolution and religion.

Support for Scopes did not end there. In an article written by the *San Bernardino Sun* the author, Robert Small, talked about John Scopes' time spent in New York as Scopes talked with the ACLU about how they were going to go about his case. Small took the time to talk about Scopes as a person while also spending some time contextualizing the case itself. A good portion of the article is used to show people Scopes' beliefs and how he came to believe in evolution. The article explains how Scopes was using his time in New York to visit The American Museum of Natural History which had a exhibit that focused on evolution and human skulls, even taking the time to point out that William Jennings Bryan had refused to visit the museum since the exhibit went up.<sup>11</sup> By showing this side of Scopes, and Bryan to some extent, the author was able to make Scopes more likable and to allow readers to see him as a real person who just wanted to learn about the world and the things in it. In contrast the article paints Bryan as unlikeable and stubborn. The article itself was a simple way of trying to conjure support for Scopes in Californians by showing him as one of them and trying to allow the readers to connect to him on a more personal level, possibly creating support for Scopes throughout the state.

That was not the only example. The *Eagle Rock Sentinel* published an article showing that John Scopes could be hired by schools in Chicago. The paper went on to explain that no schools had actually made propositions to Scopes showing their interest. The paper did explain

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Small, "Central Figure in Fight Over Evolution Teachings Studies New York Museum," *San Bernardino Sun*, June 12, 1925, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SBS19250612.1.2&srpos=3&e=-----192-en--20-SBS-1--txt-txIN-John+Scopes-----1>

that these schools had hired other teachers that had been fired from schools in the past for similar reasons as Scopes, teaching evolution in biology<sup>12</sup>. By showing that other teachers were trying to teach evolution, the paper tried to make the teaching of evolution seem like a normal and perfectly acceptable subject to be taught in schools. It also took the opportunity to show that government institutions, such as public schools, were willing to support the teaching of evolution and that people should learn to accept it as well. This article showed that people in California were open to his cause and had sympathy for the young school teacher from Tennessee.

In an issue by the *San Bernardino Sun*, the paper compared Scopes to such historical figures as Martin Luther and Galileo who also had a falling out with the Church. The paper told the stories of their struggles to help the reader identify with Luther and Galileo and then went on to connect their stories with that of Scopes.<sup>13</sup> The point was to heighten Scopes to the plane of famous historical figures that most people have at least heard or know about. Quite possibly the most interesting point that was made in the paper was the idea that while Galileo's ideas seemed controversial at the time that he was making them, they eventually became mainstream and commonly accepted. The author made the connection that if it is possible with Galileo and his ideas on space, why would it not be possible that Darwin's ideas could become widely accepted and taught in schools the same way that Galileo's are taught in schools. The thought seems radical when compared to what had been happening in Dayton, Tennessee at the very time that these words were being printed. Yet, the fact that they were printed at all shows that they were not so radical. If a press such as the *San Bernardino Sun* was willing to print these for public

<sup>12</sup> "Scopes May Get Place In Chicago Schools," *Eagle Rock Sentinel*, July 3, 1925, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=ERS19250703.2.54&srpos=34&e=-----192-en--20--21--txt-txIN-Scopes-----1>

<sup>13</sup> R.C.M., "News Views," *San Bernardino Sun*, July 11, 1925, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SBS19250711.1.1&srpos=10&e=-----192-en--20-SBS-1--txt-txIN-John+Scopes-----1>

viewing it clearly shows that the idea was accepted by at least some people. The author of the article was also trying to connect all three of these men to a level of intolerance from Christianity. The author wanted people to know that, in their eyes, the entire argument of the Scopes Trial comes down to the Christians persecuting Scopes are being intolerant of his and other's beliefs just as they had with Martin Luther and his 95 theses and Galileo and his theories about space. The paper also dug into the jurors that would be trying the famed Scopes case. The paper made sure to draw attention to the possible biases of the twelve jurors mentioning their backgrounds and their lack of education of the Theory of Evolution.

An article by the *Blue Lake Advocate* shows that scientific associations were publicly endorsing Scopes and his defense counsel saying:

Maynard Shipley, president of the Science League of America, today addressed a night letter to Clarence Darrow thanking him for his contribution of "knowledge and ability in the cause of freedom of teaching" in connection with the Scopes trial which opens at Dayton, Tenn., tomorrow. "At the opening of the Scopes trial I thank you in the name of the Science league of America for your generous contribution of knowledge and ability in the cause of freedom of teaching," the telegram read.<sup>14</sup>

The publicity given was a sure sign of support from the *Blue Lake Advocate* towards the scientific community. By showing that institutions, such as the Science League of America and the ACLU, were supporting Scopes, the *Blue Lake Advocate* was hoping to help the cause and get their readers to support or feel sympathy for Scopes and the scientific community.

Another way that California newspapers exposed their bias and sympathy for Scopes was when they were talking about the jury and who was selected for it. The articles place particular emphasis on three very important things. Firstly, they showed the bias of the jurors and tried to make the implication that Scopes was not being given a fair trial by pointing out that every man

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<sup>14</sup> "Science League Thanks Darrow," *Blue Lake Advocate*, July 11, 1925, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=BLA19250711.2.71&srpos=1&e=01-07-1925-31-07-1925-192-en--20-BLA-1--txt-txIN-Scopes+Trial----1925---1>

on the jury was a devout believer in the Bible with the men either being Southern Methodists or Baptists. The articles then attacked the juror's occupations, the majority of the members of the jurors were farmers and did not have a higher education. Lastly, the articles attacked a very obvious part of the trial, whether the members of the jury were educated on the theory of evolution. The articles were keen to point out that many members of the jury were willing to admit they heard nothing of evolution prior to the case they were being selected to judge the case. A few of the members admitted they had only hazy ideas of what evolution was. The San Luis Obispo Tribune communicated what happened during the jury selection process writing:

The Jury was chosen this afternoon. Every man on it admitted reading the Bible. None had ever read a book on evolution. Most of them said they had only heard it discussed since the Scopes indictment. One talesman(sic) who admitted he was not a member of any church was peremptorily challenged by the prosecution. The course of questioning indicated the state would fight against any attempt of the defense to prove evolution in conformity with the Bible. Nine of the Jury are farmers.<sup>15</sup>

The Lompoc Review echoed a similar sentiment of the writing of the San Luis Obispo Tribune article stating:

John Thomas Scopes is to be tried by a jury made up chiefly of hardshell Baptists and Southern Methodists, farmers of middle age, who have extremely hazy ideas about evolution, but very firm beliefs as to the validity of the Bible in all things... There is one man on the jury who cannot read nor write. The state accepted him without a quiver. The defense exercised its three peremptory challenges, saw the worst coming, and took what they could get.<sup>16</sup>

The papers showed their obvious sympathies for Scopes by telling their readers just how painfully one sided this case was since the jury was made up of people who liked Bryan and were likely to follow the same doctrine that Bryan routinely preached, the literal interpretation of

<sup>15</sup> John Stuart, "No Experts To Give Testimony In Scopes Case," San Luis Obispo Tribune, July 14, 1925, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SLOTW19250714.2.2&srpos=6&e=-----192-en--20-SLOTW-1--txt-tx|N-John+T.+Scopes-----1>

<sup>16</sup> "Fundamentalist Jury For Scopes," Lompoc Review, July 14, 1925, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=L19250714.2.45&srpos=8&e=-----192-en--20--1--txt-tx|N-Scopes-----1>

the Bible. The papers portrayed the case as though Scopes had a chance to win and could be found not guilty. That was, until, the prosecution pulled this unfair move with getting a jury that would clearly side against Scopes simply based on the fact that they were completely ignorant to the theory of evolution and likely many other scientific ideas.

At the same time as the *Lompoc Review* and the *San Luis Obispo Tribune* were publishing these articles, the *Los Angeles Times* had published its own article which attacked both sides of the argument and tried to bring people to a more objective way of looking at the case stating:

Many earnest people whose lives have been enriched and blessed by Christianity for some reason regard this trial being staged at Dayton, Tenn., as of real significance, one in which their faith hangs in jeopardy. They have literally accepted the ridiculous declaration by William Jennings Bryan that the 'fate of Christianity hangs on the outcome.' Actually the sole question involved is whether Prof. Scopes did or did not teach the theory of evolution to his students and whether the law of Tennessee forbidding such teaching can be constitutionally upheld.<sup>17</sup>

The *Los Angeles Times* went on to attack both Bryan and Darrow and the entire trial as just a way to call attention to a battle between faith and science that did not really matter. The *Los Angeles Times* was much more interested in getting people to look at the battle objectively and get people to understand that nothing was truly in danger. The *Times* took a role of peacekeeper and mediator at the time of the trial and was trying to keep people under control and reasonable. The article then went on to point out the positives of both sides citing Christianity's long history and tried to explain what evolution actually teaches rather than the misinforming propaganda others were trying to spread.

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<sup>17</sup> "Faith and Evolution," *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1925, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/161777518/pageviewPDF/569E69F5C5DA42C4PQ/1?accountid=14521>



The *Sacramento Bee* joined the side of Scopes in a less obvious way but was supportive all the same. The article took the opportunity to paint Clarence Darrow in a positive light by focusing on one of his speeches made at the beginning of the trial saying:

The attorney for the defense, championing evolution, declared the move to prevent the teaching of science in the public schools of the state was but the opening wedge in a bigoted, brazen attempt to destroy liberty, which would reach to the other states, other schools, to the pulpit and into the home... The courtroom sat amazed, some of the spectators awed by Darrow's daring, half expecting to see him punished on the spot for defying their beliefs. Others were carried away by the moving eloquence of the speaker. William Jennings Bryan sat grimly, arms folded, apparently impervious to the shafts of Darrow's wit, the broad strokes of humor, the sudden burst of rage as the defense lawyer warmed to his subject. Other counsel for the prosecution joined in the occasional applause which swept the courtroom.<sup>18</sup>

The *Sacramento Bee* took the time to make Darrow out to be a phenomenal attorney that even his opponents could not help but admire. The article showed even those who would call Scopes guilty were willing to admit that Darrow was unbelievably good at what he did. The only person who did not cheer for Darrow would be old Bryan whom the article all but stated was sitting grumpily in his chair while Darrow soaked up the praise of those around him. The article showed what side it was on by playing up Darrow and his successes while putting Bryan as grumpy and unlikeable.

The *Press Democrat* quickly proved itself one of the most outspoken papers against fundamentalism and showed that there was a population of California that staunchly opposed Bryan and his followers. The *Press Democrat* attacked Bryan saying:

Mr. Bryan says evolution is an attack on the church, meaning, of course, HIS church. Suppose it IS, that should not worry the devout. True religion has divine power back of it. Evolution has only Darwin, Huxley, Haeckel and other mortals. Why does Mr. Bryan worry? Does he doubt the power of omnipotence to take care of itself and the truth?<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> William J. Losh, "Fighting Darrow Wins Admiration of Tennesseans," *The Sacramento Bee*, July 14, 1925, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/616883638/?terms=John%2BScopes>

<sup>19</sup> Arthur Brisbane, "\$1,000,000- Rockefeller Doubting Omnipotence. Bewildered Fundamentalists. 'Know Thyself' says Cary," *Press Democrat*, July 18, 1925,

The paper was almost immediately attacking Bryan and his efforts to censor scientific theories and discoveries. The article showed the clear disdain the author had for Bryan and his beliefs. The paper was sarcastic and tried to poke fun at Bryan, trying to bring people over to its side of the argument by degrading Bryan and calling Bryan out as controlling over what Christianity should be taken as. The author pushed the idea that the Church and Bryan's church were two different things by referring to "His church" This is done in the hopes that the author will not completely alienate their more religious audience from their argument and drive them toward the more hardcore ideas of Bryan. From the way the author openly attacked Bryan we can see that there was at least some population that supported evolution or at the very least disagreed with Bryan's more hardline ideals about where Christianity should be moving. The author then went on to further attack the beliefs of the fundamentalist movement writing:

It sayeth in the tenth verse of the 96th Psalm: The World also shall be established that it shall not be moved." That is enough for one deeply religious preacher in Tennessee. He denies indignantly that the earth goes round the sun and says the earth is flat, not round. A fundamentalist is bound to admit the reasonableness of that statement. If the world was "established that it shall not be moved," of course it CANT MOVE. And that shows how foolish it is to take things literally. The earth IS established, so that it cannot be moved out of the orbit. It is 'established' by the power of gravitation, in the path around the sun. It stays in that path, turning on its axis, so that your house moves around 25,000 miles every 24 hours.<sup>20</sup>

In this particular argument the author from the *Press Democrat* used both science and a biblical verse to prove the ridiculousness of some of the arguments that the Fundamentalist were making at the time of the Scopes Trial. The author was clearly showing that he was a believer in the facts that science had produced at the time and was willing to use those facts to disprove some of the arguments that the Fundamentalist made. Although, of course, the author did not completely

<https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SRPD19250718.1.1&srpos=6&e=01-07-1925-31-07-1925-192-en--20-SRPD-1--txt-txIN-Scopes+Trial---1925---1>

<sup>20</sup> Brisbane, "\$1,000,000."

disregard the Bible. Their usage of the biblical reference and the connection of the reference to the gravitational force not allowing the earth to move out of orbit is an example of religious people unifying their faith with scientific advances. We can see from this that the *Press Democrat* was not anti-religious, but simply was against the radical ideas that were proposed by the Fundamentalist movement and was willing to accept the theories and advancements of science that were able to provide proof or background information that supported the ideas they present.

In another article by the *Press Democrat*, published just a day after their initial article we can see the *Press Democrat* further pushed against Bryan and his followers. The article takes statements made by Bryan at the trial to rally support for the scientific community writing:

But Mr. Bryan has said the Bible and its miracles and its supernatural phenomena must be accepted as the revealed religion. There should be no attempt, he said, to explain the story of creation. The evolutionists have contended that the Bible has not explained God's processes of creation. Mr. Bryan has said to attempt to explain these processes would' he to make agnostics, infidels, scoffers and atheists of the children of the country.<sup>21</sup>

By publishing statements by Bryan that completely shut the door of interpretation of the Bible the *Press Democrat* used Bryan's statements to show the people of California what the fundamentalist movement stands for— a strict interpretation of the Bible that took what the Bible says for a literal meaning without room for movement or individual interpretation. Additionally, publishing the statement that the Bible must be accepted as the revealed religion served as a way to alienate people of different faiths as well as those who know about the separation between church and state. The article was a multi-pronged attack to alienate as many groups as possible from Bryan and the fundamentalist under the guise of showing the fundamentalist followers of

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Small, "Bryan is Jubilant Over Tennessee Case, Darrow Sees Victory Later On," *Press Democrat*, July 19, 1925, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SRPD19250719.1.2&srpos=2&e=01-07-1925-31-07-1925-192-en--20-SRPD-1--txt-txIN-Scopes+Trial----1925---1>

Bryan what could be seen as one of the many victory speeches he gave at Dayton near the end of the Scopes Trial. That was not the only situation the Press Democrat had turned against Bryan and the Fundamentalists further writing:

Through the hearing here, the state has persisted in its contention that evolution means but one thing that man came from a monkey. This has been injected into the records at every possible crook and turn. The judge has accepted the state's idea. William Jennings Bryan has preached upon it. Are we men or are we monkeys? the good Dayton folk have asked themselves. Judge Raulston harkened to the cry and has decided in favor of the men.<sup>22</sup>

Through the publishing of this section of the article the Press Democrat tried to enrage the scientific community by showing how the prosecution and the fundamentalist in the Scopes Trial were trying to get people to perceive evolution. While the theory of evolution may technically say that man had descended from monkeys that is not the only thing it teaches. The Press Democrat was showing that the Fundamentalists were trying to get people to believe that the theory of evolution taught that people were monkeys. Perhaps the best twisting of the situation the Press Democrat did had to do with Bryan's thoughts about those who do not follow a literal interpretation of the Bible as shown here:

Mr. Bryan had taken the position that any man who does not believe the Bible in its most literal sense, is an agnostic or an infidel. Judge Raulston has agreed with him. The judge, by ruling out the entire theory of the defense that evolution is compatible with Christian belief, has convicted Clarence Darrow, Dudley- Field Malone, Arthur Garfield Hays and the other counsel for poor little Scopes, in the eyes of this community. To them the trial is over.<sup>23</sup>

With this paragraph the Press Democrat had further alienated religious folk who did not follow a literal interpretation of the Bible from the fundamentalist movement. By taking Bryan's own words and using them to show the intolerance of the fundamentalist movement the Press Democrat showed where it stood on the issue of evolution versus fundamentalism and it showed

<sup>22</sup> Small, "Bryan is Jubilant."

<sup>23</sup> Small, "Bryan is Jubilant."

that people in California were against the intolerance that William Jennings Bryan had been preaching against anyone who did not follow the Bible down to individual letters as a universal truth.

The *San Francisco Examiner* was another one of the newspaper publishers who jumped onto the side of Scopes when it wrote an article that purposefully showed the false arguments that Bryan had made during the trial writing:

It was Bryan who said Mr. Darrow asked Howard Morgan, 'Did the teaching of evolution do you any harm?' Why didn't he ask the boys mother? 'Go to the father and mother.' The commoner thundered, 'and they'll tell you how their children's minds are being poisoned.' International News Service did, but the mother proved Bryan a poor prophet... 'The teaching of evolution hasn't hurt me or my boy,' said Mrs. Morgan.<sup>24</sup>

This article called out Bryan's argument and called him on his bluff. The *San Francisco Examiner* published this article knowing full well that it would act as a slap in the face to both Bryan and his followers. The article even pokes fun at Bryan by calling him a poor prophet. The word choice is intentionally used to show that Bryan's followers look to him as a sort of prophet that can say nothing wrong. The *San Francisco Examiner* showed where it stood in the battle between faith and science with this article.

The *San Bernardino Sun* returned to the Scopes trial and showed their support of Scopes by allowing Clarence Darrow to have the final word after the trial was over and Scopes was found guilty. They published a short speech by Darrow saying:

We know that in this state, under the surroundings and end of trial, Mr. Scopes was condemned from the start," he said. "We are now Interested In two things: "That a higher court shall pass upon this case and that in other states those who wish to pursue the truth shall be left free to think and investigate and teach and learn. We know that the great majority of intelligent Christians do not accept the literal interpretation for the whole Bible. We have learned here, both from laymen and clergymen, that a large part of the

<sup>24</sup> "Evolution Study Upheld by Mothers," *San Francisco Examiner*, July 19, 1925, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/457925219/>

fundamentalists do not accept it. This doctrine is a doctrine of the literalists and we are perfectly satisfied that the majority of the Christian church has long since passed beyond that.<sup>25</sup>

By allowing these words, the paper was trying to make the followers of Bryan seem like a minority and a group that is only large in Tennessee and nowhere else. The paper tried to push the idea that reasonable people do not believe in the literal interpretation of the Bible. The paper was trying to put peer pressure on those who did follow a literal interpretation of the Bible and hoped that this would keep that population from speaking out.

In a third article published by the *Press Democrat*, we can see the sentiments felt by people after the Scopes Trial and the decision by the jurors to find John a Scopes guilty of violating the Tennessee law. The article sprung onto the offensive, attacking the literal beliefs of the Fundamentalist movement. Specifically, the article took aim at the story of Joshua and how he supposedly stopped the sun from moving during an important battle in order to give his army an advantage.<sup>26</sup> The author attacked the lack of evidence and the possibility of a man to simply cause the sun to stop moving. The author even took shots at Bryan saying that Bryan must know that it was not possible for Joshua to have stopped the sun at will and took the opportunity to make the Fundamentalist look unreasonable by using sarcasm to make an argument that would appeal to those who did not think it was possible for someone to stop the movement of a star that was millions of miles away from the Earth. We can see the bitterness the author felt at Scopes

<sup>25</sup> "Intelligent Christians Do Not Accept Bible Literally Clarence Darrow's Belief," *San Bernardino Sun*, July 19, 1925, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SBS19250719.1.3&srpos=6&e=-----192-en--20-SBS-1--txt-txIN-John+Scopes-----1>

<sup>26</sup> Arthur Brisbane, "Brian and Noah Win, Scopes, Darwin Lose, Joshua Stopped the Sun, Noah Set Sail 2348 B.C." *Press Democrat*, July 22, 1925, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SRPD19250722.1.1&srpos=10&e=01-07-1925-31-07-1925-192-en--20-SRPD-1--txt-txIN-Scopes+Trial----1925---1>

being found guilty of breaking the law, the author seemed to take Scopes' being found guilty as the jurors saying evolution was not real.

To put the Scopes trial to rest we return to the *Blue Lake Advocate*. By July 25, 1925 the Scopes trial was well over and the tension between the scientific community and the Fundamentalist movement was starting to calm down. It was at this time that the *Blue Lake Advocate* published an article that tried to unify religion and science writing:

At the present time every scientist of repute who specializes in the studies that have to do with life accepts evolution as the inescapable answer. And this regardless of the religious faith of the individual scientist. For science does not attempt to say what the First Cause was. That is left to religion and to our conception of the Omnipotent Creator... There is no conflict between the doctrine of evolution and the doctrine of God.<sup>27</sup>

The fact that an article that voiced these beliefs was published gives credence to large groups of people happily believing in both doctrines and being able to unify the idea of both into a single belief. Based on this we can start to see that while people were supportive of Scopes and the scientific community they were not entirely willing to abandon their faith. Instead they kept both ideas and found ways to unite the two. The article did the work of spreading this belief and idea so that more Californians could be aware that it is possible to unite the two ideas and that the idea was not as far-fetched as some would believe. For every article that was written that spreads the idea of unifying the scientific theory of evolution and the religious doctrine of God the more common place the idea would have become in Californian society.

### **Newspaper Articles arguing against Evolution**

<sup>27</sup> "Tennessee Law Must Now Defend Itself," *Blue Lake Advocate*, July 25, 1925, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=BLA19250725.2.41&srpos=2&e=01-07-1925-31-07-1925-192-en--20-BLA-1--txt-txIN-Scopes+Trial----1925---1>

While California certainly had many articles that were able to show that many Californians sided with Scopes and the scientific community or at the very least had sympathy for their plight there were some articles that went out of their way to express dislike for the theory of evolution and John Scopes. The *Sotoyome Scimitar* attacked John Scopes calling him a “Monkey” teacher in the headlines of one of their articles.<sup>28</sup> This insult did two things to insult Scopes. It firstly, quite obviously, refers to him as a monkey. The paper in doing so was trying to make Scopes look absurd and like a person who is spouting ridiculous nonsense and had no idea what he was talking about. The second thing the insult was meant to do was bring up the argument of man being descended from monkeys and the sheer ridiculousness the author saw in this idea. Of course the theory of evolution was much more than man used to be a monkey, but that did not matter to the *Sotoyome Scimitar*. What they cared about was making Scopes and the scientific community look like they were making claims that were impossible. Claims that would go against religious doctrine so that they could bring the religious community together to drown out the theory of evolution.

Maynard Shipley, president of the Science League of America, has appeared before the state board of education to protest against the action of the board last April in declaring that evolution may be taught in the public schools of California only as a theory and not as a fact. Mr. Shipley's action will probably precipitate a lot of nonsense similar to that which has come lately from Tennessee. The board of education was certainly within its rights in making its ruling and not only within its rights but within its duty. Evolution is a theory—this much is admitted by most of its proponents. It may be correct and it may not be correct.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> “Darrow to Defend Monkey Teacher,” *Sotoyome Scimitar*, June 12, 1925, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SoSc19250612.2.45&srpos=1&e=-----192-en--20-SoSc-1--txt-txIN-John+Scopes-----1>

<sup>29</sup> “Evolution in California,” *Madera Mercury*, July 24, 1925, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=MM19250723.2.22&e=01-07-1925-31-07-1925-192-en--20-MM-1--txt-txIN-Scopes+Trial----1925---1>



From this article we can clearly see that some people were skeptical of the theory of evolution at the time of the trial and believed that until it could be proven, it should not be considered relevant enough to be taught in schools. This skepticism was likely most common among those who were more devout believers in any religion or those who were highly educated in the scientific community and had qualms with certain parts of Darwin's theory of evolution. What we can take away from this article is that there was some disagreement to the validity of the theory of evolution and that some Californians believed that it was within a state's Constitutional rights to deny the teaching of evolution in schools. There was a sense of malice in the article in the way the Scopes Trial is mentioned. It was referred to as nonsense. We can see the bias in the article starting here and continuing to the end. The author went on a kind of rant and tried to attack the theory of evolution and discredit the idea. In the eyes of the author, unless something is considered absolutely true and there is no room for it to be considered incorrect it should not be taught in schools. The very notion was contradictory based on what the Fundamentalists tried to do in Tennessee where the trial took place. They tried to silence evolution and push the teaching of creationism in schools. These Fundamentalists did not hate evolution because they thought it was wrong on a scientific level, but because they were afraid of the power that it would take away from the church in their every day lives.

Likely the best evidence that the *Sotoyome Scimitar* stood against Scopes in Dayton comes after the death of William Jennings Bryan in which the paper published an article about a speech given by Bryan just after the trial ended. The *Scimitar* claimed this speech was the greatest oration of modern times. The speech given by Bryan was presented in as great of a spotlight as possible. In a way it almost seemed as though the *Sotoyome Scimitar* was trying to recreate the martyrs of ancient Christianity in William Jennings Bryan. In doing so they may

have hoped to light the fires of the religious community and create more zeal for the battle against the theory of evolution and the scientific community. The *Sotoyome Scimitar* introduces the speech given by Bryan as such:

Even in death the mighty voice of William Jennings Bryan has spoken out against the 'bloody, brutal' doctrine of evolution and in impassioned defense of the principles of Christian faith for which he laid down his life.<sup>30</sup>

The *Scimitar* viewed Bryan as a martyr and was using the platform they had to immortalize him as such. The overall goal was to rally people against the theory that they viewed as harsh and horrible. They viewed the theory of evolution as a doctrine that did not belong in the world their God created and they would fight to make sure that this theory was not learned, was not thought of, and was not remembered. In the speech Bryan states:

This is not an interference with the freedom of conscience. A teacher can think as he pleases and worship God as he likes, or refuse to worship God at all. He can believe in the Bible or discard it. He can accept Christ or reject Him. The law places no obligations or restraints upon him. And so with freedom of speech: he can, so long as he acts as an individual, say anything he likes on any subject. This law does not violate any rights guaranteed by any constitution to any individual. It deals with the defendant [John T. Scopes] not as an individual but as an employee, as an official or public servant paid by the State, and, therefore, under instructions from the State.<sup>31</sup>

The argument presented by Bryan was just a fancy way of saying that Scopes could believe whatever he wants but he was not allowed to teach anyone those beliefs and slowly they would fade out of existence and be forgotten. That was the entire goal. If you could not immediately erase the idea of evolution as the church tried to do with Galileo's ideas about space, then you just slowly censor those beliefs out of existence. The Fundamentalist radicals were completely

<sup>30</sup> "Bryan's Reply to Darrow in Scopes Case," *Sotoyome Scimitar*, July 31, 1925, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SoSc19250731.2.45&srpos=3&e=-----192-en--20-SoSc-1--txt-txIN-John+Scopes-----1>

<sup>31</sup> "Bryan's reply to Darrow."

happy with this. They were willing to slowly censor other beliefs out of existence until the only things people could turn to was their literal take on the Bible.

The *Sotoyome Scimitar* also published an article in which it directly attacked the ACLU which sponsored John Scopes in his trial at Dayton saying:

The American Civil Liberties Union is composed largely of Socialists, feminists and other radicals. It was this organization which engaged Clarence Darrow and Dudley Field Malone as counsel for John T. Scopes in the recent "evolution trial" at Dayton, Tennessee.<sup>32</sup>

The author clearly had no love for the ACLU or what they represented. Based on what the article puts forth we can make the claim that the *Scimitar* could clearly not be considered progressive and certainly did not stand with Scopes at his trial. They disliked an institution who's goal was to fight for the civil liberties of Americans of all walks of life. For the Fundamentalists that follow William Jennings Bryan, the only ones who should have a voice were those who are Christian and follow the Bible to the letter. They were intolerant of any and all ideas and beliefs that did not match their own exactly. The fine that would be issued to anyone who broke the anti-evolution law was meant to silence people through fear. People would not want to be taken to trial. People would not want to be embarrassed in front of their peers. People would not want to pay \$500 in 1920 for the sake of teaching some theory that could not be proven. That is what the creators of the Butler Act thought. John T. Scopes was willing to go through all of that torture and these Fundamentalists could not stand him because in their eyes he was purposefully going against Christianity and trying to contradict the beliefs that the Bible taught. Due to all this Scopes and the ACLU were demonized and attacked by these Fundamentalist articles.

<sup>32</sup> "New Postoffice for Petaluma," *Sotoyome Scimitar*, August 28, 1925, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SoSc19250828.2.38&srpos=2&e=-----192-en--20-SoSc-1--txt-txIN-John+Scopes-----1>

Perhaps the most interesting thing about all these articles is that none of them were actually published during the trial. The papers publish a few articles before the trial and then a few after the trial but there is no coverage of the actual trial or what was happening to Scopes. The papers demonize Scopes by insulting him early on, they attack the ACLU after the case is finished, and they talk about legislation being passed in California that hurts evolution but they never address the actual trial.

### **Letters to Editors, against Evolution**

California newspapers are able to show us the vocal arguments made by many Californians in the time around the Scopes Trial. Through letters submitted to the editors of the Los Angeles Times, we are able to see the different arguments that were made by members of both sides of the battle between faith and science and we are able to see the rare citizen who straddled the line between either camp, trying to reconcile the two sides. These letters submitted to editors from people who lived in Los Angeles and the surrounding cities and counties allow us to see the arguments that were being considered at the time of the Scopes Trial.

The common denominator among almost every single argument in the letters to the editor that opposed John Scopes and Darwin's Theory of Evolution chained itself to a biblical argument. The Californians who made arguments against the theory of evolution were not non-religious concerned citizens who were worried about their children learning something they viewed as unnecessary in school. The Californians arguing against the teaching of evolution were worried it would turn children against Christianity and Fundamentalism. Very rarely did these people try to reconcile religion and evolution. They believed that the Bible was meant to be

taken literally and that the theory of evolution, which was different from the creation story, was another heresy that was trying to destroy Christianity. One of the simplest and most common arguments made can be plainly recognized in a letter written by Keith L. Brooks titled *Why make it a religion?*. In this piece Mr. Brooks argued that we must allow for a “bigger place for God and a deeper conviction as to the hatefulness of sin.”<sup>33</sup> Mr. Brooks further argued that if we were not careful, evolution would become the mainstream religion of the country and that it would lead us to immorality. He made the implication that man needed a source of external authority in order to act in a decent way toward their fellow man.

We can see this argument appear again in a letter from James D. McFarlin who says “Do you want to pay taxes to have the schools teach your children to reject the Bible? Stop and think. What would this nation amount to if it were dominated by atheists?”<sup>34</sup>. In this McFarlin furthered the argument and sentiments provided by Brooks. To them anyone that did not follow the Bible or their beliefs were not their equals. In McFarlin’s letter, non-believers in the Bible cannot run the country correctly because they have no morals unlike Christians who do. The argument was made commonly by Christians to legitimize laws that prevented the teaching of scientific discoveries that went against their biblical beliefs. A group of people who pushed for a literal take of the same bible that says to love your neighbor used hateful language and tactics to silence anyone who stood against the surging wave of Fundamentalism that was moving through the United States at this time.

<sup>33</sup> Keith L. Brooks, “Why make it a religion?” *Los Angeles Times*, July 11, 1925, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/161773963/pageviewPDF/C2179372331E4B81PQ/7?accountid=14521>

<sup>34</sup> James D. McFarlin, “Lawsuit not important,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 July, 1925, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/161777518/pageviewPDF/C2179372331E4B81PQ/8?accountid=14521>

In one letter, W.F. Thorne argued that “Evolution is of no value as a code of morals and ethics.” to support the idea that the theory had no place in schools.<sup>35</sup> Thorne further attacked the theory of evolution by arguing that it had no practicality in our everyday lives, but then, how often do historians, businessmen, psychologists, or biologists use the Pythagorean Theorem. Schools have taught plenty of things that have no practicality in our daily lives since their inception and yet we continue to teach these lessons because for some it will be used in their daily lives. Ignorance seemed to be yet another argument that was pushed forward by those who attacked Scopes as can be seen from Thorne:

The theory of evolution is horribly discouraging and depressing. If it took 100,000 years to bring man down to his present deplorable condition, what dreary must ensue before he reaches a state of wisdom and nobility.<sup>36</sup>

From this point of view, it seems that at least some of those who fought against evolution wanted to deny it because it would be a truth too terrible to bear; but would it not show the true never ending potential of humanity? If humanity could evolve, then we could inherently improve and leave the “deplorable condition,” we find ourselves in, and as Thorne put it they do believe man is in a “deplorable condition.” Thorne’s logic only allows for two possible conclusions. The first is that we are created by God and are in a deplorable condition from which we cannot evolve out of. The second conclusion would be that we have evolved and find ourselves in a deplorable condition after 100,000 years. Between these two conclusions only one allows man to eventually leave his deplorable condition without waiting for the second coming. By this reasoning Thorne’s choice to favor religion over science simply does not make sense in the context of their argument and the need to leave a deplorable condition. In truth, Thorne likely did not want to

<sup>35</sup> W.F. Thorne, “I Don’t Know, You Don’t Know,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1925, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/161777518/pageviewPDF/C2179372331E4B81PQ/8?accountid=14521>

<sup>36</sup> W.F. Thorne, “I Don’t Know.”

side with science and evolution because of a fear of the change in the times that the theory of evolution would bring to society. Thus we can come to the conclusion that another reason for siding against evolution and Scopes is that many people wanted things to stay the way they used to be. They wanted things to remain simple.

Another argument that is made by Californians simply denied evolution and any evidence that was provided by going directly to the Bible and arguing that God created man as he was and that man never evolved biologically. A letter written by an alias known only as “Mystical” claimed this argument and stated that “The souls of material men and women are advancing through the enfoldment of truth and the power of his hand is swaying their destiny. Believe ye in evolution of man from man to man not from monkey to man.”<sup>37</sup> The main idea behind this argument was that evolution did not happen on a biological scale, but on a spiritual scale and the souls of God’s children constantly evolve as they are guided by His hand. This argument had no proof and operated completely on the mentality that there was no way for the argument to be disproven. It relied on nothing but religious ideas, not even biblical scripture is cited. “Mystical” did not disagree with evolution because of issues in the theory, flaws in Darwin’s research, or logical fallacies of any sort. “Mystical” disagreed with evolution because it was at issue with their religious beliefs no matter how much proof there was for the theory

In a letter written by L.C. Pfaffenberger, we can see a more sound argument than the rest that did not rely solely on the Bible or sermons but used actual sources to create an argument. In the letter, Pfaffenberger, a pastor himself, explained his dislike for “Theistic Evolutionist,” or those who tried to unify religion and evolution so that they could coexist in the same sphere. He

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<sup>37</sup> Mystical, “Undeveloped Souls,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1925, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/161830251/pageviewPDF/C2179372331E4B81PQ/13?accountid=14521>

believed that the arguments made for theistic evolution did not explain certain points such as the fall and redemption through Jesus Christ. The pastor argued that arguments and congregations done through theistic evolution were inconsistent, loose, and unauthorized. The pastor then went on to quote several scientists who disagreed with the theory of evolution for a multitude of reasons spanning from those on their death bed recanting because they could no longer live with the uncertainty and a few scientists who argued that it simply cannot and has not been proven and therefore should not be believed as a possibility.<sup>38</sup> This was the most effective type of argument made at the time of the Scopes Trial, it tried to use outside sources with a semblance of credibility. The argument hit the points it could to show the argument of evolution by saying it had yet to be proven. The argument relied little on the Bible allowing it to have some appeal to those who were not completely bound to Christianity and had some doubt in their mind about evolution. When all is said and done it is clear that those arguing against evolution and Scopes in these letters to the editor were heavily religious Californians throughout the state.

### **Letters to Editors, for Evolution**

While there were many letters that expressed contempt for John Scopes and Darwin's theory of evolution there were even more letters that were willing to show their support for Scopes and the plausibility of the theory of evolution. In a letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, M.E. Talman writes:

In regards to this theory of evolution, what is there so terrible about it that that so many of the supposedly brainy men of the country are getting all worked up about it? It seems

<sup>38</sup> L.C. Pfaffenberger, "Evolution and The Bible," *Los Angeles Times*, July 28, 1925, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/161788205/pageviewPDF/97D73584E5A437DPQ/1?accountid=14521>



to me it is the law of nature or development. Do not the beautiful trees and flowers evolve from a tiny seed and the beautiful butterflies from an ugly worm? And so it goes through all nature. Why, then, are we so shocked at the idea at the human evolving from the animal?<sup>39</sup>

Several points could be pulled from Talman's letter. In his first sentence Talman asked what was so bad about Darwin's theory that people were up in arms about it. This means that the topic was controversial, especially among men who believed themselves "brainy," as Talman puts it.

Additionally, this letter was submitted on July 3rd, 1925, a week before the start of the Scopes Trial, showing that this controversial topic did not begin in California with the start of the Scopes Trial but was present before the "Monkey Trial," was being plastered on papers all around the country. While Talman did not use any sources to back up his reasoning it was a clear and logical reasoning that showed how he and others viewed evolution as the change in the world around them over time. Talman was also careful to not outright attack religion, showing that while they agree with evolution they did not have any perceivable ill-will towards religion in this letter. Interestingly, this lack of ill-will is not present in all letters.

As we view a letter from I.X. Osburn, we can see a clear resentment towards those who reject science when they write:

The fanatics in Tennessee and elsewhere may muzzle poor little Scopes, but there are other "scopes" that may not be muzzled- microscopes, telescopes, spectroscopes, and the like. These scopes tell the imperishable truth and nothing but the truth. They are God's appointed instruments to tell the truth and they will go on telling it with infallible certainty long after the last Fundamentalist has been turned to drifting dust.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> M.E. Talman, "Beware Of Ruts," *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1925, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/161830251/pageviewPDF/C2179372331E4B81PQ/13?accountid=14521>

<sup>40</sup> I.X. Osburn, "Plenty of Scopes," *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1925, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/161767293/pageviewPDF/29EDB2A2D17D4853PQ/1?accountid=14521>

The amazing part of this letter was that the author did not claim to be an agnostic or an atheist but simply a person who believed both in God and what science showed and tried to unite the two. This letter shows that there were those in California who were religious people who wanted to stand with Scopes and the empirical sciences. There were those who did not throw away what science was learning simply because it went against things they were taught from their religions but instead tried to unite what scientists said was the truth and what religious texts said was the truth. What was also clear in this letter was that there was some resentment between those who supported evolution and those who did not.

In another letter, written by Dana L. Teague, we hear that various religious controversies had been happening for months prior to the Scopes Trial. These controversies had been filling up the newspapers. Radio broadcasts had been consistently playing religious sermons as well as debates on evolution and Fundamentalism as well as other debates about religious sects and controversies. We are also able to see Teague mention an Oregon school law that related to the Scopes Trial. This showed that the controversy surrounding evolution and John Scopes was big enough that people from California were even following legal issues in other states. Teague ends her letter with statistics about the number of Christian denominations in the United States and making a play on words saying “divided we stand, united we fall.”<sup>41</sup> In this Teague was claiming that if the Christian denominations were ever to unite then the freedoms of everyone else would likely be stripped if everyone else went against biblical teachings much like with the teaching of human evolution in schools in Tennessee. This statement once again shows the resentment that

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<sup>41</sup> Dana L. Teague, “Strength in Division,” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 July, 1925, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/161738825/pageviewPDF/894F6FB0793E4F27PQ/1?accountid=14521>

people in California who believed in scientific theories such as evolution held against those who would censor scientific ideas and theories that went against religious teachings.

In a letter by J. Wesley Haskell, we can see the pattern of those who are religious or spiritual willingly accept scientific theories as truth continue to grow. In the letter, Haskell states “The disclosures of modern science in revealing to us the wonders of nature and the infinite life of the universe have forever made impossible the long cherished anthropomorphic idea of God. God is not a person- God is spirit.”<sup>42</sup> Haskell did not try to attack religion, but united religion and science in order to make sense of it for himself. In fact, Haskell uses biblical quotes throughout his letter, showing himself to be at least a fairly well read believer who was trying to come to terms with both his faith and science like many in California were trying to do as was apparent through these letters. This is not all Haskell did in his brief letter. He also went on to attack the church which had been another pattern that had been forming throughout these letters. Haskell went on to say “To be perfectly frank, there are too many tin-horn preachers in the world. The church is greatly in need of devout and earnest souls- men of intellectual power and spiritual discernment.”<sup>43</sup> In this statement, Haskell further pushed the idea that these “Brainy men,” as Talman put it, needed to be more flexible and free thinking.

Haskell was not alone in his thinking. Many people supported the letter that he wrote and even commented on it with letters of their own such as Robert McCourt. In his letter he said “In it Mr. Haskell deals with the question of evolution and the cosmic mind in nature. I prize the article very highly, so much so that I have made a clipping of it for future reference. While

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<sup>42</sup> J. Wesley Haskell, “A Scientific View,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 1925, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/161770651/pageviewPDF/40F996E736994A04PQ/1?accountid=14521>

<sup>43</sup> Haskell, “A Scientific View.”

reading it I was reminded of that famous hymn of Cowpers: God moves in a mysterious way.”<sup>44</sup> through this statement we can ascertain two key details: that McCourt thought Haskell’s argument warranted enough merit to be inspirational and that McCourt, to some extent, had a belief in God. This means that the argument of unifying evolution and faith can be observed in multiple letters. While it may not be the most prevalent belief in California at the time of the Scopes Trial, there was at least a small minority of people in California who were trying to unify a belief in God with Darwin’s Theory of Evolution.

When looking at Frank Snyder’s letter to the Times we can not only see a letter that directly showed support for Scopes, but a letter that was sent to Scopes as well as to the editor of the Times. In the letter, Snyder voiced his support to Scopes and gave thanks for Scopes making a sacrifice that would lead to the development of science being free from “molestation and annoyance,”<sup>45</sup> Snyder went on to state his fear of what might have happened had William Jennings Bryan won the presidency he tried to achieve on three separate occasions. The fear of a Bryan presidency was held by many who were not apart of the fundamentalist movement and often translated directly into support for Scopes and the evolutionist. Lastly, Snyder ended his letter by stating “The vast majority of all thinking peoples are with you and the ultimate outcome is foreclosed.” This furthers the idea that support for Scopes was high in California, especially among social groups that followed scientific developments or were well educated.

A letter by Elma Locke perfectly encapsulated almost every argument the pro-evolutionists used against the Fundamentalists stating:

<sup>44</sup> Robert McCourt, “Haskell Approved,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 1925, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/161824304/pageviewPDF/5109895B6F804659PQ/1?accountid=14521>

<sup>45</sup> Frank A. Snyder, “A Present For Scopes,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1925, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/161777518/pageviewPDF/569E69F5C5DA42C4PQ/1?accountid=14521>

There is not one of the (self-styled) fundamentalists who have so far expressed themselves on the subject of evolution but shows by his utterances that he has not studied real science enough to know what he is talking about... Nothing stands still, everything either progresses or deteriorates. There is nothing whatever in the theory of evolution against a sane belief in a supreme Creator; on the contrary, it gives us a conception of a Creator far nobler and more sublime than the angry, jealous, and challengeable-minded God handed down to us from barbarous times.<sup>46</sup>

The letter was simple yet gives us so much information. It corroborated previous letters sent by people who argued against evolution and supports the observation that Fundamentalists used biblical arguments to discredit evolution rather than arguing the validity of the theory of evolution. Except for Pfaffenberger, there were no letters that cited any source for their arguments aside from biblical references. From what we have to go on, Locke's claim held a level of validity. Very rarely do those who argue against evolution have any sort of education on the topic. Ignorant claims were made against the theory of evolution with only the backing of religious sermons and biblical references. The article then went on to explain their view of evolution which had been very similar if not the same through all the pro-evolution letters and said:

Anyone who believes in growth and progress from the less to the greater perfection believes in evolution (whether he knows it or not) for that is what evolution is- a gradual unfoldment of the latent powers within, aided by environment. And that is not a mere theory, but is shown everywhere and in everything in the universe.<sup>47</sup>

This shows that the evolutionist movement was consistent in their view of what evolution was. Finally, the letter addresses the issue of God and evolution being unifiable. While many of the Fundamentalists are completely against the idea of unifying evolution and religion it is not the same on the other side. Based on the letters, there is a considerable base of people who

<sup>46</sup> Elma Iona Locke, "Nothing Stands Still," *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1925, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/161833194/pageviewPDF/EC0C94E20644C1BPQ/1?accountid=14521>

<sup>47</sup> Elma Iona Locke. "Nothing Stands Still."

support the unification of evolution and religion and did not want to prevent people from believing in one if you believed in the other. The evolutionist's side of the argument seemed to be more prevalent in California according to the number of letters that were sent to editors. These letters were also more tolerant of those who wanted to follow what they believed in whether it be in solely evolution or a mix of the both. What the evolutionists did not seem to tolerate was the ignorance of those who had not even tried to understand evolution but said that it was wrong nonetheless.

### **Scopes being seen as a hero**

At the end of the Scopes Trial, many people had mixed feeling about John Scopes. Some in the religious community would have called him sacrilegious or an atheist. They believed he should not be teaching their children from fear of Scopes turning their children away from Christianity as can be seen in the many letters previously shown. Others who were not so focused on religion but still disliked him would call him a law breaker, a man who deserved no praise and only what the jury decided he would get as we can see in this letter written by A.C. Shafer:

By making a hero out of a lawbreaker others are encouraged to disobedience by the law. We honor the hero who scaled rugged heights and goes "over the top" in defense of the flag, because his act is an inspiration to the living. The young man who, at the risk of his own life, saves the life of his fellow man is justly rewarded with the carnige medal. The fireman who goes up the ladder in the smoke and claims of the burning building to rescue the imperiled child is justly cheered by the multitude below. The beach guard rescues the drowning maiden and we justly heap honors upon him. The color-bearer who plants his flag on the ramparts of death justly gets promoted. All these rewards are laudable because the living catch inspiration to the heroic from their deeds. But, pray tell me, what act of heroism, what noble deed has Mr. Scopes performed that he should be made and held up to the admiring gaze of our youth for their emulation? Why is he selected for honor? Has

he shown himself to be more brilliant than a thousand other young men of the Tennessee mountains?<sup>48</sup>

Still, others believed that there was something about Scopes that reflected something truly “American,” the willingness to stand up for a right, a freedom, Scopes believed was an inalienable right. Others saw Scopes as a man who was willing to take a stand for what he believed in, not because there would be a promise of fame or some other sort of material reward at the end of the tunnel, but because Scopes truly believed in what he was fighting for and he believed it was the only correct path to follow. This belief in Scopes is clearly illustrated by a letter written by W. B. Otis to the *Los Angeles Times*:

I wonder if it really is foolish to assist a man who has had that rare courage to step out and advocate the right, as he and others see it, while surrounded by the enemy, a man who was unselfish enough to refuse several moderate fortunes in the nature of motion picture contracts offered as a result of the publicity attendant upon his recent trial and, above all, one of those very rare and precious beings whose head has not been turned by the sudden good fortune heaped upon him and who conducted himself before, during, and after his trial in a modest, straightforward, American manner.<sup>49</sup>

Within these two articles we can see that there was a population of Americans who viewed Scopes as a hero who was willing to stand up for the rights and freedoms of his fellow man without asking for anything in return. Yet, we can also see a population of people who believed strictly in the law and believed that those who broke the law should be punished for it no matter what the law was.

## Conclusion

<sup>48</sup> A.C. Shafer, “But Why Mr. Scopes?” *Los Angeles Times*, August 11, 1925, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/161842103/pageviewPDF/14A576E1CA624CACPQ/1?accountid=14521>

<sup>49</sup> W.B. Otis, “A Tennessee Horatius,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 20, 1925, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/161759457/pageviewPDF/13784F0B4F27488DPQ/1?accountid=14521>

There was a clearly divided opinion on the preference among Californians between evolution and the Bible. Despite the divided opinion on the matter there was a clear bias in Californians towards John Scopes and the theory of evolution. Looking at the letters to the editors we can see the opinions of your average Californians trying to reach out to the local newspapers to provide them with the opinion of the people. In these we can see a rather sharp divide between those who supported Scopes and those who saw Scopes as an affront to the Bible and the morality of the human race. Throughout the letters to the editors that clearly disliked Scopes we can see a lot of biblical arguments against evolution and claims that Scopes and his beliefs will lead to a society without morals. Based on these letters, what they say about Scopes, and how they try to combat evolution we can see that the population of Californians who side against Scopes most often are the heavily religious sorts, though that should not surprise many. What is meant by “heavily religious” would be the most devout individuals of Christianity, the ones who believe in the literal interpretation of the Bible or at least something close to the literal interpretation of the Bible. Generally these people would be among the one-third of Californians who voted for William Jennings Bryan in his presidential bids. They would also be among the Fundamentalist movement in Christianity. These were people who were happy to speak out and make their voices heard among the many who disagreed with them and supported Scopes. Speaking of which, when we look at the letters that were submitted to the editors that sided with Scopes we can see Californians think of religion as important but also believe evolution has some credence. We can also see that there are Californians who thought purely of evolution in their arguments.



We can see that a sizable portion of people in California are willing to unite the ideas of evolution and religion and are able to frame evolution in the light of something that God designed for the world so that it could grow. This section of Californians are religious and believe in God, but they separate themselves from the much more intolerant faction of Christianity that we saw in the Fundamentalist movement. Even when we look at the letters of Californians that are purely focused on evolution we can see that they were at least educated in the Bible since they used biblical stories and scriptures and then used arguments with evolution to deconstruct or contradict these stories in a way that supported the theory of evolution. If we are to go based on the letters sent to the editors of newspapers we can see that among Californians there was a slight leaning towards the number of people that support Scopes and the scientific community in the battle against the Fundamentalists. While there are a good number of letters that attacked evolution and Scopes the number that supported Scopes was greater and showed that the average Californians supported the young teacher from Tennessee.

Now looking at the articles written by California newspapers we can see a much more clear divide between those who support Scopes and those who do not. In fact the only newspapers that had clear bias against Scopes were the *Sotoyome Scimitar* located in Sonoma county and the *Madera Mercury* located in Madera county both of which are located relatively in central California. Both of the articles admitted some disagreement with the theory of evolution and side with Bryan very clearly supporting the cause he represented. These articles are very much in the minority compared to the very large number of articles that supported Scopes, painted him in a good light, or tried to lessen the blows of bad news because of the sympathies they felt for the defense. A rather large list of newspapers spanning most of California found themselves supporting the cause that Scopes was the face of. The majority of California

newspapers likely sided with Scopes for two reasons. First, they genuinely believed in the theory of evolution and were educated in the topic enough to have an opinion and that opinion happened to side with Scopes for the majority of California newspapers. The second possibility is what was the more likely explanation. In order to run a newspaper correctly you need to have the freedom of speech. To a member of the press the first amendment is arguably the most important by far. The journalists and newspaper publishers of 1925 California likely saw the anti-evolution law in Tennessee as the first step by Fundamentalists in censoring and suppressing any and all ideas that did not fall in line with their religious beliefs. Seeing the possible future censorship as a threat to the first amendment and their jobs as journalists the majority of newspapers in California sided with Scopes not necessarily because they believed in the theory of evolution, but because they believed in the freedom of speech and did not want the Fundamentalist movement to be breathing down their necks after they had finished censoring the scientific community.

Based on what California newspapers allow us to see of the 1920s we can safely come to the conclusion that John Scopes and evolution were liked by most Californians and that the newspapers of California were absolutely willing to defend Scopes to the best of their abilities no matter how bleak his fate seemed during the trials that took place thousands of miles away in Dayton, Tennessee. California journalists and publishers in particular were willing to take the side of Scopes against the Fundamentalist movement that was spreading through the country at the time. Even Californians who were Christians and knew the Bible were willing to stick up for Scopes and evolution to some extent. While there was a sizable population of Californians that outright did not like Scopes and were not willing to consider the ideas of evolution there were those who listened to the theory of evolution and were willing to merge it with their own Christian beliefs. In a way these people were evolving the very fabric of Christianity

to include the theory of evolution into their beliefs and the letters that these people sent to the editors of newspapers show us this evolution. It is undeniable that the majority of Californians sided with Scopes, the scientific community, and the theory of evolution when the question of science or faith came to their doorstep.

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