The Impact of the Theological Views of William Jennings Bryan upon His Educational Ideals

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE IMPACT OF THE THEOLOGICAL VIEWS OF
WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN UPON HIS EDUCATIONAL IDEAS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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BY

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SOLI DEO GLORIA
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................... iii

INTRODUCTION ......................................................... 1

    Definition of Terms ........................................... 6
    Conclusion ..................................................... 25

Chapter

I. BRYAN'S EARLY LIFE AND RELIGIOUS HERITAGE ............... 27

    Bryan's Early Life ........................................... 27
    Bryan's Religious Heritage ................................. 43
    Conclusion ................................................... 50

II. BRYAN'S ROLE IN THE FUNDAMENTALIST-MODERNIST
    CONTROVERSY .................................................. 52

    Introduction ................................................ 52
    Origins of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Contro­
     versy ....................................................... 55
    German Higher Criticism ................................... 55
    Darwinian Evolution ......................................... 60
    Impact of the Fundamentalist-Modernist
     Controversy On American Protestant
     Christianity .................................................. 66
    Bryan's Role in the Fundamentalist-Modernist
     Controversy ................................................ 69
    Conclusion ................................................... 86

III. CHAUTAUQUA--BRYAN'S LINK WITH THE COMMON MAN ....... 90

    Introduction ................................................ 90
    History and Purpose of the Chautauqua Movement ......... 92
    The Founders ................................................ 94
    The Founding ............................................... 97
    The Curriculum ............................................. 99
    Summer Schools and the C.L.S.C. .......................... 101
    Chautauqua As University .................................. 103
    Traveling Chautauqua ....................................... 105
    Famous Personalities at Chautauqua ....................... 108
    Chautauqua and the Church ................................ 111
    William Jennings Bryan and Chautauqua .................... 112
    Chautauqua As a Link with the Common Man ................ 114
    Chautauqua and Bryan's Personal Finances ................. 116
    Conclusion .................................................. 120

IV. BRYAN'S ESCHATOLOGY AND HIS THEOLOGY OF THE SOCIAL
    GOSPEL ........................................................ 124

    Introduction ................................................ 124
    Millennialism in Theology .................................. 127
    The Positions Compared and Contrasted .................... 127
INTRODUCTION

William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925) has been variously described as a political idealist, fervent Christian and orator of the faith, naive proponent of bimetallism, international statesman, and a voice for the American common people. In a sense, he was all of these and more. At times, he appeared as the idealist whose lofty notions completely engulfed his practical side, with the result that he made decisions which were imperfectly understood and poorly implemented. At other times, he was so practical that his ideals themselves seemed compromised.

As a result of this extremist tendency, Bryan won both friends and enemies. He has been characterized on the one hand as a theological obscurantist, a bigoted Fundamentalist, and an anti-intellectual who used the political process for his own ends. Lewis Einstein, an American foreign diplomat during Bryan's tenure as Secretary of State, writes:

Bryan possessed the politician's trick of professing to have a cure for everything and not bothering much about the merits of the remedy. He was a product of the American small town, as sincere as he was half-baked, and he made on me the impression of a likable and kindly man who had a magnificent voice, spoke with deep moral fervor and although he had singularly little general information, he possessed a shrewd and
specialized knowledge of American political psychology.\textsuperscript{1} Einstein has little good to say of Bryan and would as soon have sent the Secretary back to the Nebraska cornfields from which he had emerged. Indeed, the State Department may not have been ideal for the exercise of Bryan's talents and skills. Nevertheless, his ability to draft a peace treaty which was ultimately endorsed by thirty nations, and his diplomacy when dealing with sensitive issues such as the alien land legislation in California, seem to indicate both knowledge and wisdom in foreign affairs beyond what Einstein allows.

In a similar vein, Furniss caricatures Bryan as a 'fighting Fundamentalist' who used his mellifluous voice and his political clout to wage war against what he perceived to be the rising tide of theological liberalism in the schools, colleges, and seminaries of America. Furniss attempts to demonstrate that Fundamentalism was completely out of step with modern theology in the 1920's, and that without Bryan as its leader, the movement died a slow and painful death in the latter part of that decade. He states:

As Bryan thundered his denunciations of evolution to the state legislatures, as he aroused the orthodoxy of his audiences with poetic if inaccurate apothegms, the fundamentalist crusade grew to great proportions; after his death it entered a period of rapid decline. Without his support the other champions of the movement--[William Bell] Riley, [J. Frank] Norris, [John Roach]

\textsuperscript{1}Lewis Einstein, \textit{A Diplomat Looks Back} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 27.
Straton—would have been unable to give the dispute national importance.  

Furniss ascribes undue influence to Bryan and too little to other Fundamentalist leaders such as J. Gresham Machen and Benjamin B. Warfield—leaders who forged ahead with Fundamentalism both before and after Bryan's death. In fact, most conservative theological treatments of the Fundamentalist controversy omit Bryan as an historic figure in the debate, probably because he was never regarded as having a determinative influence in the drafting of new theological affirmations or doctrinal positions in any of the major denominations. Instead, he was oriented toward issues—whether theological, political or social—usually attacking one major issue at a time.

A more balanced approach is that of Lawrence Levine, who attempts to link Bryan's theology to his political views. He states:

... all of Bryan's political works were inextricably bound up with, and based upon, his religious faith. Bryan's interest in politics was antedated only by his interest in religion, and religious works always constituted one of his main concerns. His political speeches were studded with Biblical allusions and references, and even at the height of his political glory he found time to deliver religious lectures.  

In contrast to Furniss, Levine notes that Bryan and his

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Fundamentalist friends were not a product of the lunatic fringe in America. Rather, they correctly pointed out that something was seriously amiss with religion in the 1920’s; and they sought to remedy the error as best they could. Their remedy included scathing attacks upon their conception of Darwinism and evolutionary theory. Such attacks did not, however, constitute them as the theological and intellectual obscurantists that some have portrayed them to be. Nevertheless, even Levine feels that Bryan suffered from a glaring weakness which must have affected his capacity to deal with issues at the intellectual level. He states:

Bryan almost totally lacked any introspective quality; he never questioned his own actions, he never sought to know his deepest motives, he never agonized about the ‘real’ meaning of things.

Regrettably, such a conclusion fails to take into account Bryan’s deep concern for the common man, the children and youth of America, or his own self-perception as a servant of the people. Nor does it reflect adequately his love for God and his steadfast commitment to the principles taught and exemplified by Jesus Christ.

Historians generally treat William Jennings Bryan as a political leader, a three-time Democratic presidential candidate, and as Secretary of State in the Wilson

4 Ibid., 259.
5 Ibid., ix.
administration from 1913 to 1915; but he was more. While not professing himself to be either a theologian or an intellectual, he regularly engaged in theological and educational reflection. Moreover, he viewed his world in positive terms, as Levine notes:

His own brand of fundamentalist religiosity, his imperishable faith in the reason and goodness of his fellow man, and his belief in the divinely ordained nature of his own and his nation's destiny, combined to make him almost compulsively optimistic. . . .

Perhaps it is this factor which accounts for most of the criticism which Bryan received regarding his intellectual capacity. His opponents generally could not reconcile such a positive world-view with what they saw taking place around them. Bryan, on the other hand, rarely wavered from his belief that the world was moving in a godly and better direction.

Throughout the dissertation, several key terms will be used, which require clear definition at the outset: Fundamentalism, Common Man, Theology, Education, the Social Gospel, Eschatology, Postmillennialism, Chautauqua, and Church. While definitions may vary between theological liberals and conservatives, or between Levine, Furniss, and other authors, understanding will be promoted as these terms are used throughout this paper according to the definitions that follow.

Ibid., 7.
Definition of Terms

Fundamentalism

Of all the terms that have been used to describe conservative evangelical Christians since the beginning of the twentieth century, this is perhaps the most pejorative and emotionally-laden. Packer notes:

There is no mystery as to what the term meant when it was first coined. It was the title taken by a group of American Evangelicals, of all Protestant denominations, who banded themselves together to defend their faith against liberal encroachment after the First World War.7

Fundamentalism sought to provide the Christian layman with a means of self-defense against the reduction, by the Liberals, of "grace to nature, divine revelation to human reflection, faith in Christ to following His example, and receiving new life to turning over a new leaf."8 Furthermore, it sought to present a defense against the encroachment of liberalism upon the literal interpretation of the Bible. For many Liberals, the Bible was now interpreted not as being the Word of God, but as containing it. This meant, of course, that biblical scholars could now admit to the inclusion of numerous errors in Scripture without relinquishing a reverence for it in areas that were deemed to be theologically significant. As long as the basic themes and

8Ibid., 27.
message of the Bible were not changed, so these interpreters felt, the integrity of the Word had not been violated. To this view, Fundamentalists sought to bring a response that would preserve the infallibility and inspiration of Scripture.

In the process of this defensive posturing, however, the movement developed in a decidedly anti-intellectual direction which, in some circles, resulted in a theology devoid of concern for academic rigor and integrity. It was this form of Fundamentalism that would be so viciously attacked by the likes of H. L. Mencken and Clarence Darrow in the mid-twenties. In their view, William Jennings Bryan represented the very embodiment of such intellectual and theological obscurantism. Nevertheless, as will be noted in this paper, Fundamentalism also served a useful purpose in American Christianity during the first half of this century. It helped to focus attention upon key theological doctrines that were in danger of being discarded by a majority of those who called themselves Christians. The Fundamentalists issued a clarion call to return to the basics of the evangelical faith. While the term 'Fundamentalist' would later fall into disfavor and would be replaced by less pejorative and emotionally-laden terms such as 'conservative evangelical,' the basic issues would remain the same.

The Common Man

Bryan was proud to be known as 'The Great Commoner,' for
he championed the rights of the common man throughout his career. He began his newspaper, The Commoner, as an effort to represent the views and needs of the common people before the American public. In one of his editorials, he states:

The common people form the industrious, intelligent and patriotic element of our population; they produce the nation’s wealth in times of peace and fight the nation’s battles in time of war. They are self-reliant and independent; they ask of government nothing but justice and will not be satisfied with less. They are not seeking to get their hands into other people’s pockets, but are content if they can keep other people’s hands out of their pockets.  

Indeed, throughout his life Bryan strove to keep the hands of the eastern rich out of the pockets of the mid-western commoners. This theme clearly marked all three of his presidential campaigns (1896, 1900, 1908). The issue of eastern wealth and financial control, versus the needs of the mid-western and western farmer, were juxtaposed in his platform. It was this issue which gleaned him the vote of the Populists during this period as well.

Bryan was also motivated in his quest for the good of the common man by the example and teaching of Christ, Whom he designates as ‘the lowly Nazarene,’ and Who identified so strongly with the common people of His day.  

Commager summarizes this blending of politics, religion, and socio-economic concerns:

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10Ibid.
No one had more faithfully represented the American mind and character than the Great Commoner who had thrice led the Democracy, the Peerless Leader who had championed righteousness and morality with a consistency without parallel in modern politics; but it was the mind and character of the mid-nineteenth, not the twentieth, century that he represented; it was for the America of the middle border, of the farm and village, of the little red schoolhouse and the little brown church, of the Chautauqua tent and the Redpath circuit, of puritanism and evangelism, of agrarian democracy and homespun equality, that he spoke.\textsuperscript{11}

While this may be an overstatement of the case, few would deny that Bryan remained, to the end of life itself, the undaunted advocate of the common people of America. For him, the common man was the epitome of everything contrary to what, in his mind, the rich eastern businessman and financier stood for. To the end of his life, Bryan would gravitate toward associations with those who represented the farmers, the rural, even the poor, and away from those who stood for wealth, possessions, and power. He was never able to reconcile these opposites; nor did he seek to, for his following among the common people was widespread and gratifying to him personally.

**Theology**

As its etymology implies, the term 'theology' is simply the word (logos) about God (theos). More precisely, it is the study of the nature and attributes of God. Various systems of theology have been constructed, based

upon the variety of interpretations that the Jewish, Christian and other Scriptures have been given.

For William Jennings Bryan, theology did not mean anything abstract, however. He was a practical man who desired to help people to see the application of theological truth in their daily lives—even extending to the realms of politics and education. For him, 'theology' was better translated by terms such as 'faith' or 'applied Christianity.' Smith notes:

From an early date Bryan believed that religion included the whole of life and could not be compartmentalized. The church must not only preach the gospel to save individuals, but it must cry out against the evils of the day and help bring about a better society.12

Not only did he believe that religion and life were intertwined, Bryan regularly acted on that belief. In the political realm, for example, his decisions were guided by a desire to please the God Whom he served, and Whose will he discerned from the Scriptures. Levine points out the close relationship between his religious and political thought:

Because of Bryan's emphasis upon religious concepts and his dependence upon the Bible as a source of inspiration, a guide, and at times a rationale, it is impossible to draw any arbitrary line between his purely religious and his purely political endeavors. In a sense, the latter never existed, for all of Bryan's political works were inextricably bound up with, and based upon, his religious faith.13

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13Levine, Defender of the Faith, 248.
Because of this belief in the practical side of theology, Bryan felt free to move about among churches of varying doctrinal persuasion, such as Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists; and he could espouse many of the social causes of the theological Liberals while still clinging to fundamentalist dogma in other matters. For him, perhaps the best summary of the relationship between theology and life might be encapsulated in the biblical command to "let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father Who is in heaven" (Mt. 5:16). Doctrine and practice were thus inseparable.

Education

Bryan has been criticized by many as one who never thought deeply about the great issues of life. In equating him with the agrarian and common man, his critics have often drawn the conclusion that he must have been incapable of intellectual prowess. In fact, he possessed an undergraduate degree from Illinois College (Jacksonville) and a degree in law from Union College of Law (Chicago). In addition, his own writings give ample evidence of wide reading across various disciplines, and of specific ideas as to the appropriate curriculum to be included in a well rounded education.

Education has been variously defined. Cremin describes it as:

... the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort
to transmit or evoke knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and sensibilities, a process that is more limited than what the anthropologist would term enculturation or the sociologist socialization, though obviously inclusive of some of the same elements. Education, defined thus, clearly produces outcomes in the lives of individuals, many of them discernible, though other phenomena, varying from politics to commerce to technology to earthquakes, may prove more influential at particular times and in particular instances.¹⁴

Education may also be defined as the vehicle through which a culture transmits its social, political, educational, moral and religious structures to the next generation, and in so doing, perpetuates itself. The process of transmission or perpetuation is, of course, often debated among educators. John Dewey, for example, correctly identifies traditional education as follows:

The subject-matter of education consists of bodies of information and of skills that have been worked out in the past; therefore, the chief business of the school is to transmit them to the new generation.¹⁵

He then elaborates his thesis of progressive education as gained through experience—a theme carried by many non-traditional educators throughout the history of Western education.

William Jennings Bryan also advocated a dual approach to education. He definitely believed in the value of a liberal arts or general education, but especially as it


relates to one's value as a functioning member of society.

He states:

The person who understands the fundamental principles of science can render a larger service than one who is ignorant of the lines along which nature acts; mathematics teaches exactness in thought and argument; literature and language give readiness, expression and illustration, while history equips us with that knowledge of the past which is essential to a proper estimate of the future. And how shall we excuse the blindness of those—if there be such—who, believing in popular institutions, would deny to the masses a knowledge of political economy, sociology, and the science of government—a knowledge so useful in the discharge of the high duties of citizenship? 16

Bryan would agree with those who advocate selectivity in the educational curriculum, since not everything can be transmitted to the next generation through the educational process. However, he also linked the education of the mind with the training of the heart for service to mankind. He was a lifelong critic, for example, of those who possess great wealth and then use education as a means to exploit the masses so as to secure still more riches. He says in this regard:

I fear the plutocracy of wealth and respect the aristocracy of learning, but I thank God for the democracy of the heart that makes it possible for every human being to do something to make life worth living while he lives and the world better for his existence in it. 17

Thus for Bryan, education is of value only as it enhances


17 William Jennings Bryan, Under Other Flags (Lincoln, NE: The Woodruff-Collins Printing Company, 1904), 261.
the ability of a person to serve society more effectively.

The Social Gospel

Bryan's social, political, and educational views coalesced in the doctrines of the Social Gospel—a socio-religious movement whose theological tenets he did not necessarily espouse but whose commitment to the betterment of the common man appealed to him. The Social Gospel, exemplified by theologians such as Walter Rauschenbusch of Rochester Seminary, grew out of the movement that became known as Liberalism in American theology. "Liberal theologians," says Ahlstrom, "... wished to 'liberate' religion from obscurantism and creational bondage so as to give man's moral and rational powers larger scope." Linking theology and ethics, this movement saw in social reform the essence of religious commitment. Furthermore, its adherents held to the perfectibility of man. Ahlstrom continues his description:

In the language of historical theology, liberals were Arminian or Pelagian. With regard to human nature, they emphasized man's freedom and his natural capacity for altruistic action. Sin, therefore, was construed chiefly as error and limitation which education in morals and the example of Jesus could mitigate, or else as the product of underprivilege which social reform could correct. Original sin or human depravity was denied or almost defined out of existence. As their predecessors of the Enlightenment had done, liberals tried to avoid deterministic conclusions by arguments for the creative and autonomous nature of the human

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Indeed, the writings of William Jennings Bryan contain very little mention of sin and condemnation, but much affirmation of the positive and ethical side of man's nature. In this sense, he was more aligned with the theological left than with the right-wing Fundamentalists whose cause he eventually espoused. With the proponents of the Social Gospel, he saw the perfectibility of man as at least a distinct possibility; he recognized the moral imperative contained in the demand for social reform; and he optimistically viewed such reform as holding the keys to the coming millennial kingdom, when the power of evil would be broken and righteousness would reign supreme on the earth. Apparently, not even the tragedy of the Great War could dissuade him from this point of view.

Eschatology

Bryan never professed to be a theologian; nevertheless, he wrote several books in which he discussed questions of theological importance. In his *Seven Questions In Dispute*, for example, he addresses the following topics: the inspiration of the Bible; the deity of Christ; His virgin birth, blood atonement, and bodily resurrection; biblical miracles; and the origin of man.\(^\text{20}\) In a similar

\(^{19}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^{20}\text{William Jennings Bryan, *Seven Questions In Dispute* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1924), 11.}\)
vein, several of his other works speak to themes which are clearly theological in nature.

Most of his work in theology relates to the practical side, namely, its effects upon the way a person lives or behaves in society. Bryan never concerned himself with the more esoteric theological topics such as eschatology. Yet, his approach to the application of theology in the life of the individual and in society has definite eschatological implications.

As its derivation signifies, eschatology deals with 'last things.' In other words, this doctrine "covers the sweep of future events from the return of Jesus Christ on to the creation of the new heavens and new earth."\textsuperscript{21} Within the scope of this discussion and chronology are included sub-topics such as the Great Tribulation, the second coming of Christ, the resurrections, the judgment of Israel and the nations, and the millennium.\textsuperscript{22} Each of these in turn can be divided into additional areas for discussion. While Bryan appears to have been oblivious to most of these fine distinctions, his speeches and writings nevertheless reveal a definite inclination toward the position called post-millennialism.

\bibitem{thiessen}

\bibitem{chafer}
Postmillennialism

An integral component in most theological treatises is a discussion of the coming kingdom of Christ on earth, commonly known as the biblical millennium. Three major views prevail relating to this age: premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism. Premillennialism holds that the second coming of Christ will occur prior to His thousand-year reign on earth. Immediately following the millennium, during which He will reign as the supreme yet benevolent ruler over all the earth, He will usher in the eternal state comprising a new heaven and a new earth.

Amillennialism, by contrast, denies a coming literal millennial kingdom on the earth. Proponents of this view hold that Christ will simply return at His Second Coming and will bring in the eternal state with no intervening period. In fact, they reinterpret the concept of a literal millennium (one thousand years) to mean simply a long period of time. The key biblical passage relating to this millennial concept describes it as follows:

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

(Revelation 20:1-3)\textsuperscript{23}

A major difference in the method of interpretation used for passages such as this accounts for the differing millennial views. The premillennialist holds to a literal, grammatical, and historical interpretation of Scripture, which demands that the term 'thousand years' be interpreted as such. The amillennialist, on the other hand, interprets such a phrase quite differently. Hoekema, for example, states:

> The book of Revelation is full of symbolic numbers. Obviously the number 'thousand' which is used here must not be interpreted in a literal sense. Since the number ten signifies completeness, and since a thousand is ten to the third power, we may think of the expression 'a thousand years' as standing for a complete period, a very long period of indeterminate length... we may conclude that this thousand-year period extends from Christ's first coming to just before his Second Coming.²⁴

For Hoekema, therefore, the millennium has already extended for almost two thousand years (since the ascension of Christ to heaven after His resurrection); and it may well extend another two thousand years. The chronological length of the period is less important to this view than the basic fact of the Second Coming of Christ.

In a similar fashion, postmillennialism sees the thousand-year period as already in progress and possibly extending well beyond a literal thousand years. Boettner describes the position:

Postmillennialism is that view of the last things which holds that the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals, that the world eventually is to be Christianized and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the millennium. . . . The millennium to which the postmillennialist looks forward is thus a golden age of spiritual prosperity during this present dispensation, that is, during the Church Age.\textsuperscript{25}

Most significant about this view is its tenet that the entire world will be Christianized before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It sees society progressing in the direction of godliness, however slowly this may be taking place. Eventually, on this view, peace and righteousness will reign and the earth will thus be prepared for the return of its triumphant King, Jesus Christ. Regrettably, the facts of the contemporary world argue otherwise, as Ladd notes:

The argument that the world is getting better is a two-edged sword. One can equally well argue from empirical observation that the world is getting worse. In New Testament times, civilization enjoyed the great Pax Romana--two centuries when the Mediterranean world was at peace. This has never been repeated. Our lifetime has seen two worldwide wars and an unending series of lesser wars--in Korea, Vietnam, the Near East, Ireland, Lebanon. We have witnessed the rise of Nazism with its slaughter of six million Jews, the rise and fall of fascism, the rise and stabilization of Communist governments. The world today is literally an armed camp.\textsuperscript{26}

Nevertheless, it is to this third view that William

\textsuperscript{25}Loraine Boettner, "Postmillennialism," in Clouse, ed., Ibid., 117.

Jennings Bryan, although no theologian or eschatologist himself, seems to belong. With his indomitable optimism, he saw his world getting better with each passing year; and even the horror of World War I could not dissuade him from this belief.

**Chautauqua**

Throughout his career, Bryan used numerous vehicles for expressing his views on a variety of topics to the American people. One of the most regular and long-lasting of these was his weekly newspaper, *The Commoner*. The other was Chautauqua—a phenomenon unique to the rural regions of the nation. Gould describes the movement:

Specifically, the Chautauqua movement pioneered in correspondence courses, lecture-study groups, and reading circles in the United States. It filled a vast need for adult education opportunities, predominantly in the rural regions of America. Chautauqua and its imitators also provided a free platform for the discussion of vital issues at a critical time in an era when men hungered for good music, 'book learning,' and lectures in a way which we cannot imagine today.  

It was in the Chautauqua tents where Bryan found praise and acceptance among the common people whom he represented; but it was a mutual admiration, for he gave eloquent voice to the feelings and thoughts which they were unable to express. Harrison describes their reception of him:

The truths he proclaimed were only those the people themselves would have proclaimed, if they had only

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known how. He belonged to them; he knew it and they knew it. He was the 'Great Commoner,' a man with a mission. They thought of him not as a politician, not as a Democrat or a Republican, not as a paid attraction they had just spent thirty-five cents to hear, but as the echo of their own inner voices refined to purest gold. So they sat, in sweating ecstasy. When the golden voice ceased, they swarmed down the aisles toward him. He shook their hands willingly.  

Here, amid his most zealous supporters, Bryan could be confident that his views would receive hearty approval; and he could 'test' new ideas on his audience without fear of public rejection. Furthermore, as his wife notes in his autobiography, the lecture circuit provided a welcome relief from the pressures of governmental service and political battles. As he spoke, she says, "he could forget the hardships and weariness of travel. His voice would grow deep and solemn, for he knew that he was speaking to the heart of America." Although criticized severely for accepting honoraria while lecturing as Secretary of State, Bryan steadfastly continued this practice until his death. In so doing, he was able to reach an audience estimated to be as large as 5,000,000 Americans.

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Church

As will be seen in the discussion of Bryan's early life and religious heritage, it is apparent that he was somewhat eclectic with regard to denominationalism. He could as easily worship with a Methodist as with a Baptist or a Presbyterian. He could even fellowship in a social way with Roman Catholics, whose theology he probably would have opposed in most areas if he had studied it more thoroughly. What seems to have concerned him most was membership in the broader or universal Church--the Body of Christ on earth throughout the ages. Chafer describes it thus:

The church in the New Testament is revealed to be the central purpose of God in the present age. In contrast with God's purposes for individuals and nations of the Old Testament and a larger purpose for the nation of Israel, the church is revealed to be the company of believers formed of both Jew and Gentile who are called out of the world and joined together in one living union by the baptism of the Spirit.  

Thiessen also notes that this universal Church was attested by Jesus Christ Himself while He was on the earth, in that He spoke not of building individual congregations but the Church (Matthew 16:18); He is said to have loved the Church and to have given Himself for her (Ephesians 5:25); and He is described as head of the Church, not churches (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23; Colossians 1:18). Thiessen continues:

In all these Scriptures the Greek word ekklesia is used. In itself this term means simply a body of

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called-out people, as an assembly of citizens in a self-governing state; but the New Testament has filled it with a spiritual content, so that it means a people called out from the world and from sinful things. . . . Membership is not, however, hereditary or by compulsion but by a personal decision of faith in Christ. 33

Bryan loved this idea of universality, although he might not have articulated it as clearly as do the formal theologians. In fact, he tended to reinterpret it into the idea of the brotherhood of man. Speaking of the biblical teaching about the coming universal reign of Christ, as prophesied in the ninth chapter of the book of Isaiah, he explains his understanding of the concept:

In the verse quoted we find that the enduring government—the government of Christ—is to rest on justice. And so, our government must rest on justice if it is to endure. But what is justice? We are familiar with this word but how shall it be interpreted in governmental terms? Christ furnished the solution—He presented a scheme of Universal Brotherhood in which justice will be possible. 34

Bryan then briefly analyzes some of the social ills facing American society—profiteering, child labor, unsafe foods, usury, and 'brutish' business practices in general. He concludes:

How can Christ’s teachings relieve the situation? Easily. He dealt with fundamentals, and gave special attention to the causes of evil. He taught, first, that man should love God—the basis of all religion; second, He taught that man should commune with the Heavenly Father through prayer—the basis of all worship; third, He proclaimed the existence of a future life in which the righteous shall be rewarded and the

33 Ibid.

wicked punished. These three doctrines contribute powerfully to morality, the basis of stable government.  

Or again, he states categorically:

. . . . I go a step farther and ask whether the Church as an organization—not any one denomination, but the Church universal—appreciates its great opportunities, its tremendous responsibility, and the infinite power behind it. If the Church is what we believe it to be it must be prepared to grapple with every problem, individual and social, whether it affects only a community or involves a state, a nation, or a world. There must be some intelligence large enough to direct the world or the world will run amuck. We believe that God is the only intelligence capable of governing the world, and God must act through the Church or outside of it. . . . Christians have no other alternative; they must believe that the teachings of Christ can be successfully applied to every problem that the individual has to meet and to every problem with which governments have to deal.

Thus, the universal brotherhood of man called the Church—constituted through a personal relationship with Christ and including all who believe in Him—is Bryan’s key to societal reform. For him, this is no abstract theological concept but the practical application of the teachings of the Bible to daily living.

Conclusion

In actuality, then, William Jennings Bryan appears to have been an undeclared postmillennialist who viewed education as a means of perfecting humanity and of spreading the ‘gospel’ to the ends of the earth in his generation. It

\(^{35}\)Ibid., 224.

\(^{36}\)Ibid., 203-04.
will be the purpose of this dissertation to examine the evidence for this thesis and to draw such conclusions as are warranted. The study will seek to demonstrate that Bryan's theological views had a measurable effect upon his educational ideas. The first chapter will trace his early life and religious heritage, in which the influence of his father is clearly seen to be a determinant of the younger Bryan's faith in God, his career as a lawyer, a politician, and proponent of education. The second chapter will discuss his role in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the early twentieth century. It was this theological debate, more than any other, that set the tone for his later religious writings, even for the infamous Scopes Trial itself in 1925, immediately prior to his death. The third chapter will trace Bryan's use of the Chautauqua conference to secure a platform with the American common people. It will demonstrate how he used this public vehicle to expound and develop many of his views before he brought them into the broader political, educational, or religious arenas. Chapter four will describe his religious tolerance, his millennial perspective, and his adherence to the practical aspects of the Social Gospel movement. The fifth chapter will examine his role as an educational philosopher, philanthropist, and practitioner, especially in the last years of his life as he sought to stem the tide of Darwinism in the public schools and to reclaim the youth of America
for God. Finally, the sixth chapter will evaluate the impact of the Scopes Trial itself--the place where Bryan's theology and educational philosophy came into bitter conflict with theological liberalism and public education in the United States.
CHAPTER I

BRYAN'S EARLY LIFE AND RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

Bryan's Early Life

William Jennings Bryan was born on 19 March 1860 in Salem, Illinois. He was the son of Silas Lillard and Mariah Elizabeth (Baird) Bryan, whose lineage was Irish and English respectively. Both the Bryan and Baird families had lived in America since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Bryans had first resided in Virginia and West Virginia, and then migrated to Illinois and Missouri; the Bairds had moved from Kentucky to Illinois.

Of Bryan's remote ancestry, little is known with certainty. Williams, who is effusive in his praise of The Great Commoner, attempts to trace his lineage back to the Middle Ages and earlier:

In one line, the Bryan ancestry goes back to Baron William De Mowbray, who helped wrest Magna Carta from King John in 1215 A.D. A second line goes back to Bryan, King of Munster, born in 927 A.D., who later was so mighty that he was known as King 'Bryan-Born,' and later 'Bryan Borou.'

Regrettably, Williams' apparent disregard for the sources of this information renders his statement suspect.

On the other hand, Hibben may come closer to the truth.

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in his assessment, when he says that...

... the Bryans were of those two hundred thousand Scotch-Irish immigrants who suddenly began to flood America in 1718 and for a generation scattered to the farthest reaches of the new World, infusing a new element into the blood of the Founding Fathers. Thrifty to the verge of miserliness, vigorous, hardy, industrious, the Scotch-Irish added to these qualities a conviction that they were always right, rooted in the persuasion that their affairs were conducted by direct divine intervention.²

Of his own ancestry, William Jennings Bryan seemed to know or care little. Although acknowledging the importance of ancestry in the inspiration of a great life, he was able to trace his own beginnings only as far back as his great-grandfather, William. He says of him:

William Bryan is the most remote forefather of whom I have knowledge. He lived in what was then a part of Culpeper (now Rappahannock) County and near the town of Sperryville, Virginia. He owned a tract of timber land in the Blue Ridge mountains of which we learned when I was a young man because of a ninety-nine year lease which expired about that time. ... We know nothing of the parents, brothers, or sisters of William Bryan, ... and therefore have been unable to answer a multitude of questions which have been asked from time to time, the most persistent being whether our ancestor was related to the wife of Daniel Boone, whose maiden name was Bryan.³

Indeed, reputable historians verify Bryan's lineage only as far back as William Bryan.⁴


Of John Bryan, grandfather to William Jennings, it is known that he had ten children—six boys and four girls—of which the eighth to be born was Silas Lillard. The family removed from Culpeper County to Point Pleasant, West Virginia, in 1826. Eight years later, his wife Nancy died, and John Bryan followed her in 1836. Thus, Silas Lillard Bryan, who had been born in 1822, lost his mother at the age of twelve and his father at fourteen. Thereafter, he was entrusted to the care of various relatives, some of whom ultimately moved to Salem, Illinois, where Silas was finally to reside and raise his own family.

Silas Bryan learned early the values of thrift and hard work. Since his family was not rich, he found himself engaged in manual labor in order to help meet the necessities of life. He also developed an ambition to learn, so he began to work his way through public school and college at a time when education was not easily earned. The Herricks describe his struggle:

Education wasn’t handed out on a platter by any means in those days of abundant hard work. But Silas was determined to obtain an education. And he did. When he had completed the public school course, he made up his mind he’d like to go to college. He went. Sometimes a slim purse compelled him to drop his Latin and his Greek for a hoe and a plough. Then he would work for six months in order to earn sufficient money to enable him to return to the classroom.6

5 Ibid.
Hibben adds that, during his college days, Silas cut wood on Saturdays and worked as a farm hand during vacations in order to pay his bills. He also lived with another student near the college in a shack in the woods which the two of them had built. In this way, they were able to reduce their cost of living and thus pay for their education.\(^7\)

Alternating between work and education, the elder Bryan completed his college degree, graduating with high honors from McKendree College of Lebanon, Illinois in 1849.\(^8\) He then went on to law school and was eventually admitted to the bar.

Silas' wife, Mariah Jennings Bryan, was the daughter of Charles and Maria Woods Davidson Jennings, who had relocated from Kentucky to Walnut Hill, Illinois at an unknown date. The Herricks describe her lineage:

The Jennings family came from England, but just when it came no chronicler has ever been able to determine. We can, however, go back, authentically, to Mariah Jennings' grand-father, one Israel Jennings, who was born about 1774. Originally New England colonists, his ancestors had braved the frontier, and Israel spent his youth in Mason County, Kentucky. Married at the age of twenty-five to a Mary Waters, the couple moved to Illinois and raised a family of eight children at Walnut Hill.\(^9\)

Like her future husband, Mariah assumed the values of the farm and country folk. She also attended the public school

\(^7\) Hibben, *The Peerless Leader*, 17.


\(^9\) Ibid., 34.
in Walnut Hill, and it was there that she first met Silas Bryan, who was teaching in order to earn enough money to return to his studies. Although twelve years senior to Mariah, he developed a personal relationship with her and they eventually married after he had become an attorney. Bryan recalls that his mother was a paragon of virtue and hard work, surviving her husband by sixteen years and revered by all her children.¹⁰

The Bryan family roots thus went deep into American soil, and William Jennings valued this lineage throughout his life. He enjoyed a secure childhood which inculcated strong family ties and traditional, mid-nineteenth century American values in his life. He recalls:

... I was blessed with as happy an environment as a child could hope for or ask. The two older children, John and Virginia, had died before the third child was born. As she was a daughter, I became the oldest son and had all the care that a mother could bestow upon a child and all the interest that a father could feel.¹¹

Later in life, Bryan and his wife would care for her mother for twelve years in their own home, and her father for twenty-one, again demonstrating that the home and family exercised a strong influence on the Great Commoner.¹² In fact, the influence of his parents and the Mid-West were so great upon him that Ashby remarks:

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¹⁰Bryan, Memoirs, 29.

¹¹Ibid., 16.

¹²Ibid., 29.
To a remarkable extent William would never leave the world of his childhood, despite the fact that he traveled widely, lived through sixty-five years of profoundly turbulent change in American history, and became one of the best-known political figures of his era.\(^{13}\)

Not only did his childhood produce a commitment to the family and traditional values, it also provided Bryan with a respect for classical education. Following a period of home-schooling, he attended grade school in Salem, then Whipple Academy in Jacksonville, Illinois. The Academy was the preparatory school of Illinois College, from which he would graduate with a Bachelor's degree in 1881. As early as his grade school days, however, he recalls that his parents and teachers both exercised a formative influence upon his educational ideas. Williams describes the educational atmosphere in the Bryan household:

... young Bryan studied at home until he was nine and up in the little back bedroom he attended with regularity and there his mother heard the lad recite his lessons. McGuffey's reader ... and Webster's spelling book were the foundation stones which formed the beginnings of the future statesman's education and it is unanimously affirmed that he profited by them. On a little wooden table two feet square they stood young Bryan to make his first speech and his first audience was his mother, while McGuffey furnished the oratorical themes for the lad who was some day to be the greatest orator of his time. Bryan is not the first national figure to derive early intellectual stimulation from McGuffey.\(^{14}\)

Recalling his parents' early encouragement of his native


ability in public speaking, Bryan relates:

I began very young to manifest an interest in speaking and received all the encouragement that a child could from both father and mother. As the profession which I liked leads up to forensic efforts, it must also be taken into consideration that no child could have had an environment more favorable to a public career or stronger incentives to follow this particular line of work.\textsuperscript{15}

Indeed, McKendree College had provided Bryan's father with a classical education as well. He was always, according to Bryan, a good student, interested in literary societies, and a believer in classical education for the young.\textsuperscript{16} This legacy he passed along to his son.

Some critics, such as Wilson and Hibben, have ridiculed early Mid-Western colleges as offering a sub-standard education at best. Wilson describes McKendree College, where Silas Bryan had attended, as "a poor and believing school, typical of the frontier church-sponsored 'colleges' of its era."\textsuperscript{17} Likewise, Hibben attributes little educational value to either Whipple Academy in Salem or to Union College of Law, where the younger Bryan received his law degree. Of the latter experience, Hibben says:

William Jennings Bryan fetched back from Chicago with him scarcely more than he had brought there two years previously: assurance a little more firmly grounded;

\textsuperscript{15}Bryan, Memoirs, 41.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 22.

self-sufficiency more fully developed; a growing sense of righteousness; and a conviction of his own destiny. The knowledge of the law he obtained was negligible.\textsuperscript{18}

To these criticisms, it may be answered that the quality of education in Mid-Western schools and colleges during Bryan's youth and early manhood may well have varied to a considerable degree. Perhaps the true measure of their value lies in what their graduates later contributed to society. Measured by this standard, Bryan's education appears to have been more than adequate. Furthermore, as Williams adds:

It is a grave mistake to suppose or assume that no sound, valuable college or cultural training can be had outside of the more ancient seats of learning in American life. The newer colleges... such as the alma mater of William Jennings Bryan, offer a genuinely valuable course in higher education and from them have come some of the finest prepared individual graduates and most effectively trained men in American public or scholastic life.\textsuperscript{19}

Williams also reminds the reader that Bryan graduated from Illinois College with the highest academic record of his class, thus qualifying him as valedictorian; and his classmates had also chosen him as class orator, in recognition of his native speaking ability.\textsuperscript{20} Furthermore, a review of Bryan's life and career seems to indicate that his college experience helped to provide him with a heightened

\textsuperscript{18}Hibben, The Peerless Leader, 98. See also p. 57 for his criticism of Whipple Academy.

\textsuperscript{19}Williams, William Jennings Bryan, 35.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 42.
awareness of his own identity, self-assurance, righteous motives, and a conviction of his destiny.

A third influential factor in young Bryan's early life, again received from his father, was an intense interest in and commitment to American politics, especially as it could be utilized to improve the lot of the common man. After graduating with high honors at the age of twenty-seven, Silas Bryan had gone to law school for two years and was admitted to the bar in Salem, Illinois in 1851 at the age of twenty-nine. Bryan records of his father:

He began the practice of law in 1851 and in 1852 was elected to the Senate of the State of Illinois, where he served for eight years. He soon became prominent at the bar and prominent also as a public speaker. In 1860, at the age of thirty-eight, he was elected a judge of the Circuit that included about half a dozen counties and was re-elected in 1866, serving until 1872.21

Again, he says of him:

It interested me to know that he shared Jefferson's confidence in the capacity of the people for self-government as well as in their right to self-government. He believed in entrusting them with their own affairs . . . . I . . . am indebted to him for the trend of my views on some fundamental questions of government, and I have seen no reason to depart from the line he marked out.22

Ashby notes that the elder Bryan imbued his son with the belief that God is a reasonable and benevolent Creator, and therefore it follows that He would care for the general


22 Bryan, Memoirs, 25.
welfare and individual morality of man. This being the case, one role of the politician is to enact laws and promote causes that help to bring the affairs of men into line with the purposes of God in the world. Ashby continues:

This meant that politics was loaded with moral meaning, a point that Judge Silas Bryan could not make often enough and that William echoed again and again as he grew older. In this respect the Bryans were in large company. Such concern with morality fed a rich reform tradition in American religion, pushing many believers from spiritual retreat to worldly activism.  

For all of his days as a politician, William Jennings Bryan would be known as a reformer who sought radical change in the name of God and for the sake of the common people. Through this means, he believed, society could finally be made to conform to the will of God and thus be perfected. Certainly, Silas Bryan's influence and example as a small-town judge who prayed regularly, applied the law as consistently as he was able, and who believed devoutly in the American system of law and order, helped to shape his son's own political and legal landscape.

In terms of political party allegiance, Bryan was a thorough-going Democrat. Reared in this tradition by his father, he never deviated from his loyalty to the party, even though at times the party itself appeared ready to reject him completely. Ashby summarizes Bryan's democratic devotion:

23Ashby, William Jennings Bryan, 4.
William Jennings Bryan came happily and early into the Democratic fold, and stayed in it. As a twelve-year-old, he had accompanied his father during Silas's unsuccessful campaign for Congress. At age sixteen, he had sold enough corn to pay for a trip to St. Louis to observe the 1876 party convention. Although he had not been able to gain formal admission, he had breathlessly looked down upon the proceedings from a window. Shortly thereafter he had become an active volunteer in local Democratic activities. His reading in college of George Bancroft's History of the United States surely helped to confirm his political allegiances. Bancroft glorified Andrew Jackson by pitting him as the voice of the people against un-American forces of special privilege. No political image would ever be more appealing to Bryan than that of a champion of the little folk battling wealthy elites and unfair advantages. For him the party of memory was thus Democratic, and his emotional ties to it were strong. 24

To the very day of his death, Bryan could be found using the political and legal processes in order to secure improvement of the lot of the common person and to protect him from the ravages of the wealthy aristocrats of the Eastern United States. He believed strongly that the voice of the American people was expressed in their electoral vote; and when once they had spoken in the voice of a political majority, he did not question that decision.

A fourth value that Bryan received during his childhood years was a commitment to the common man. His father had worked his way through college and law school; and he raised much of his family on the farm outside of Salem. Thus, young William Jennings knew his share of the hard work and daily chores that are part of such a lifestyle. In the process, he gained a great respect for the common man who

24 Ibid., 22.
toils at his labor day after day without ever gaining great riches. It was to these people that Bryan addressed himself throughout most of his public and political career. So committed was he to this large segment of the American populace, that he would write of them in the closing years of his life:

I have reason to know that the masses are patriotic and incorruptible. They cannot be purchased and they cannot be terrified. No matter how they may err or be led astray, the American people are sound at heart. They have solved successfully all problems that have confronted them during the momentous years of our nation's history and there is not the slightest reason to doubt that they will meet every emergency, rise to every responsibility and prove that their capacity for self-government is as undeniable as their right to self-government. 25

Throughout his life, William Jennings Bryan would be found strongly advocating the rights and worth of the common person. Hence, he was known as The Great Commoner. In fact, one of his favorite stories was to relate how the Bryan family had descended from Irish nobility but in more recent history had been "just common people." 26

The common people of America, moreover, reciprocated his love and devotion. In three national elections, Bryan won over six million of their votes for his presidential candidacy. While not sufficient to gain him the coveted position, these votes verify the bond that existed between him and the people whose rights he advocated so strongly.

25Bryan, Memoirs, 12.
26Ibid., 20.
In fact, even his opponents would come to admit that Bryan had launched the 'era of the common man' in America and that "the common American had no choice other than standing against the conspiracies of greed that could, and, left unchecked, would destroy him."\textsuperscript{27} For this battle, Bryan's upbringing and education fitted him well.

Fifth, Bryan's heritage provided him with an irrepressible optimism about life that carried him through religious and political turmoil when others would have given up in defeat. Thus, he was able to withstand the humiliation of defeat three times in his effort to reach the White House; he seemed oblivious to the attacks of religious liberals who viewed him both as a theological obscurantist and a philosophical illiterate; and he consistently viewed society as progressively moving toward God and not away from Him. In his famous speech, \textit{The Prince of Peace}, he says:

> My faith in the future--and I have faith--and my optimism--for I am an optimist--my faith and my optimism rest upon the belief that Christ's teachings are being more studied today than ever before, and that with this larger study will come a larger application of those teachings to the everyday life of the world, and to the questions with which we deal.\textsuperscript{28}

Indeed, Bryan had the optimistic faith that saw an eventual infusion of the tenets of the Judeo-Christian religion into every area of society; and no evidence to the contrary could

\textsuperscript{27}Wilson, \textit{The Commoner}, 157.

shake that belief.

Such was the optimism, for example, that enabled him to carry on with his peace treaty proposal as Secretary of State, while the world was sliding inexorably into war. International conflict was for him an incomprehensible idea; thus the peace treaties that he drafted, and which thirty nations of the world ultimately signed, were an indication of his commitment to bringing opponents together around the conference table to resolve their differences by peaceful means. Regrettably, others failed to see the benefits of his approach, and the world went to war. Nevertheless, Bryan remained hopeful until the end.

An illustration of Bryan's optimistic approach to the problems of life was provided during the California Alien Land Legislation dispute with Japan in 1913. Californians had become concerned about the purchase of American land by Japanese immigrants. Accordingly, legislation was drafted which would severely limit the amount of property thus purchased. The Japanese government communicated its displeasure over this proposed act, and a heated discussion ensued between the California legislators, the Wilson administration in Washington, and the Japanese government. Ultimately, President Wilson asked Bryan to travel to California in order to persuade the State to moderate its position on alien land ownership. The attempt failed, and California passed its law in defiance of the wishes of the
federal government, claiming its state's rights as a reason for non-interference by Washington. With this argument both President Wilson and Bryan basically agreed, although both wished for a satisfactory solution to this delicate political problem.

In early May of 1913, the Japanese government lodged a protest to Washington, using language as strong as possible in peacetime. Bryan was dispatched by Wilson to ameliorate the anger of the Japanese. He met with Ambassador Chinda of Japan, asking him to soften the tone of his government's protest. Chinda replied that he would not, but that the problem would be resolved if the government of California would rescind its law. When Bryan responded that the California law would stand, Chinda arose to leave, saying, "I suppose, Mr. Secretary, this decision is final." It was obvious to both that negotiations had reached an impasse and this was now the end. Diplomatic relations between the two countries stood on the brink of disruption. Bryan, however, shook the Ambassador's hand and stated simply, "There is nothing final between friends, my dear Ambassador." Chinda resumed his seat and continued the discussion for another hour and a half, until an agreement was reached between the

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30 Ibid., 177.
two men. Bryan's optimism had won the day.

To the end of his life, Bryan would remain optimistic in the face of extreme difficulty. Having technically won the Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee just five days before his death, he nevertheless had been vilified by Clarence Darrow. He had been deprived of his desire to enter a strong case against Darwinism in his closing statement when Darrow suddenly conceded defeat and the trial ended abruptly. Nonetheless, Bryan spent the next few days preparing his lengthy closing argument for publication. After he died, the speech was in fact published and read widely. Again, his optimism carried his own views forward, this time posthumously.

Had he not been so optimistic about the eventual outcome of most circumstances, Bryan could have seen his career cut short. Indeed, after each of his three defeats in the race for the Presidency of the United States, his opponents predicted that he would never be seen or heard from again. Each time, Bryan rose from the ashes of defeat to fight another day, and in the process he was responsible for the initiation or passage of a host of legislative reforms in behalf of the American people. Cornelius summarizes some of these accomplishments:

... the 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th Amendments to the Constitution (graduated income tax, direct election of senators, prohibition of liquor, woman suffrage),

31Ibid.
public disclosure of newspaper ownership and the signing of editorials, an array of labor laws and reforms (workman’s compensation, minimum wage, eight-hour day, improved conditions for seamen and railroad employees, prohibition of injunctions in labor disputes), public regulation of political campaign contributions, Federal Reserve Act, Federal Trade Commission, Federal Farm Loan Act, governmental regulation of railroads and telegraph/telephone, safety devices and pure food processing, tariff reform, control of trusts, government control of currency and banking, the initiative, the referendum, establishment of departments of health and education and labor, promotion of public parks, defense of rights of minorities, anti-imperialism, settling of international differences through peaceful arbitration, support of education (including Negro education), strengthening of Latin American relations . . . voting reform, influence on the revision of state constitutions, reform to make the Constitution more easily amendable.\footnote{Richard M. Cornelius, "William Jennings Bryan, The Scopes Trial, and Inherit the Wind," (Dayton, TN: William Jennings Bryan College, 1987), 1-2.}

Bryan’s indefatigable energy and incurable optimism thus carried him far in his personal and public life.

**Bryan’s Religious Heritage**

Perhaps as important as family values, formal education, politics, commitment to the common man, or his native optimism was the religious influence of Bryan’s father upon the younger Bryan’s approach to life. Describing his father’s religious convictions, William Jennings recalls:

Father was a very devout Christian. Just when he joined the Church I do not know, but it was probably at an early age. There came a day, however, when he was a young man, when religion took a very strong hold upon him and held him and became a controlling
influence in his life.\textsuperscript{33}

As a judge, Silas was known to pray three times daily, even stopping at his bench to bow his head at noon. With this example before him, young William soon joined the church too. In fact, because his father was a Baptist and his mother a Methodist, he attended both Sunday schools for a time.\textsuperscript{34}

As a young teenager, Bryan experienced exactly what his father had—a personal change of belief that lasted the rest of his life. He had been attending the Methodist and Baptist Sunday Schools in Salem, until a new young preacher by the name of Reverend John Hendrick assumed the pulpit of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Hendrick had a great interest in the youth of Salem, and arranged a series of "Progressive Sequences" or revival services, at which he invited the questions of sincere seekers of truth or those desiring membership in his church. Among those who came and listened were William Jennings Bryan and his sister Frances. After several sessions, they both elected to join the Presbyterian church.\textsuperscript{35} Bryan, however, describes the occasion somewhat more theologically, when he states: "At the age of fourteen, I reached one of the turning points my life. I attended a revival that was being conducted in a

\textsuperscript{33}Bryan, \textit{Memoirs}, 23.

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., 44.

\textsuperscript{35}Wilson, \textit{The Commoner}, 27.
Presbyterian church, and was converted." He and his sister thus appear to have undergone the classical, evangelical experience called 'conversion.' In other words, their entire worldly and eternal perspective was turned toward God; and this new focus would profoundly affect the rest of Bryan's life.

Conversion is defined by conservative evangelical theologians as a voluntary change in the mind of the sinner in which he turns on the one hand from sin, and on the other to Christ. The turning from sin is called repentance, and the turning to Christ is called faith. Conversion, moreover, is the human side of that fundamental spiritual change which, viewed from the divine side, is called regeneration. Thiessen describes it as follows:

Conversion is . . . turning to God, and it represents the human response to the call of God. It consists of two elements: repentance and faith. The Scriptures never ask man to justify himself, to regenerate himself, or to adopt himself. God alone can do these things, but man by God's enablement can turn to God. 37

Because of his heritage and the religious instruction of his parents, and because he was as yet but a young teenager, Bryan admits that he was not converted from a life of debauchery at this point. In fact, he records that he had already developed strong convictions in at least three

36 Bryan, Memoirs, 44.

areas: lying, swearing, and gambling. His parents were unalterably opposed to all three vices, and they had inculcated a similar disdain of them in their son.\textsuperscript{38} No record is found in his private or public life to indicate that he ever engaged in them.

Nevertheless, Bryan's conversion experience was conscious, deliberate, and real; and its impact would be felt in a variety of ways throughout his life. The religious beliefs and values of his parents became his own, and many of his later speeches such as "The Prince of Peace" and "The Value of an Ideal" would find their basis in the religious conviction which now gripped him.

The reality of Bryan's conversion at this young age is attested later in his life by friends and critics alike. Richard Hofstadter--certainly no friend--describes him thus:

What was lacking in him was a sense of alienation. He never felt the excitement of intellectual discovery that comes with rejection of one's intimate environment. The revolt of the youth against paternal authority, of the village agnostic against the faith of his tribe, of the artist against the stereotypes of philistine life, of the socialist against the whole bourgeois community--such experiences were not within his ken.\textsuperscript{39}

Bryan never felt the need for the kind of revolt against authority and values that Hofstadter views as necessary to normal human development, because he had made his peace with

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{38}Bryan, \textit{Memoirs}, 44-46.
\end{itemize}
God and man at such an early age.

Moreover, this element of unity with God, family and his fellow-man gave him an entree into the hearts of millions of American common people and won him friendships from some unlikely sources. Dan Bride, who served for many years as Bryan’s personal assistant, was a Roman Catholic who felt complete religious freedom in the Commoner’s presence. He describes the Bryan home in which he lived:

Theirs was a Christian home. Every morning before breakfast, which was regularly served at seven-thirty, the family would kneel in prayer in the sitting room. There were no restrictions placed on me as to whether I would join or not. Sometimes I did and sometimes I did not.40

Again, Bride attests of Bryan:

We were of different faiths, he a Presbyterian and I Roman Catholic, but one’s religious faith made no difference with him. He was the friend of all who believed in God, regardless of the church at which they worshipped.41

Bride's experience underscores another significant feature of Bryan’s life that might appropriately be termed 'religious tolerance.' By the time of his conversion, he had undergone religious experiences in the churches of three different denominations. His mother had been raised a Methodist, and she relinquished that church for the Baptist faith of her husband only after twenty years of marriage. However, Bryan recalls no discord in the family as a result


41 Ibid., 267-68.
of these multiple faiths. On the contrary, he remembers that it provided a breadth of perspective in their home that allowed them to reach out to their community in tangible ways. He describes his parents' practical religious faith and its effect upon his own family life:

Both of them were firmly wedded to the fundamentals of Christianity, but charitable on all nonessentials. This liberality in the matter of denominations was early impressed upon my mind by the family gatherings. It was in the old days of simple social customs when family dinners emphasized companionship and friendly intercourse rather than elaborate bill of fare. We were in the habit of having all the ministers at our home once a year and I knew all the ministers as 'Brother.' . . .

My attitude on the subject of religious tolerance has been inherited, so to speak, from my parents. In memory of these religious social gatherings my good wife has been led to set aside certain days for the bringing together of the representatives of the various denominations in a social way. 42

Bryan also recalls that his parents offered to him the same opportunity to accept people of differing faiths without judgment or question. They allowed him to make his own decision to join the Presbyterian church when their personal preference would have been with the Baptists. This decision was to have lifelong implications for the young Bryan, as he carried his membership primarily in the Presbyterian church thereafter. 43

This is not to say that Bryan was never afflicted with theological doubt. He recalls that, as a college student,

43 Ibid., 48-49.
he had some serious questions of his faith when first confronted by agnostics and atheists:

Some have rejected the Christian religion because they could not understand its mysteries and its miracles. I have passed through a period of skepticism when I was in college, but I have seen outside of the Bible so many things more marvelous than anything recorded in Holy Writ that its mysteries no longer disturb me.\(^{44}\)

While Bryan himself seems to accord relatively little importance to this period of religious doubt, it might be questioned whether in fact it did not leave a deep impression upon him, so much so that in his later years he would be found attempting to buttress the faith of young people against the inroads of Darwinism. Ashby draws a more complete picture of this episode in Bryan’s college experience:

In his first encounter with the evolutionary ideas of Charles Darwin, the scientist scored heavily. For a short while, Bryan wrestled with serious doubts as he tried to reconcile his childhood views of God and the universe with Darwin’s theories. For a moment, he wavered. He even toyed with thoughts that he would not join a church in Jacksonville. . . . For the first time in his life, he had pushed away from his parents, flirting with nothing less than a rejection of their most basic beliefs. Although he later shrugged off these brief challenges to accepted family authority as silly examples of youthful exuberance, at the time his doubts. . . must have seemed considerably more significant. . . . the momentary loss of his theological bearings had been searing enough that, decades later, when he publicly staged his last battle with Darwinian theories and modernist thought, he worried about the vulnerability of college students to unorthodox ideas.\(^{45}\)

Ashby also notes that, after this brief interlude of doubt, 

\(^{44}\)William Jennings Bryan, Under Other Flags (Lincoln, NE: The Woodruff-Collins Publishing Company, 1904), 224.

\(^{45}\)Ashby, William Jennings Bryan, 14.
Bryan's views became hardened and fixed to the point of his being labeled as inflexible, ignorant, simpleminded, and undistinguished in ability. quite to the contrary, however, his theological convictions provided for him a ballast and sense of direction in a turbulent society that appeared, to many, as devoid of either element. They also provided a religious and moral compass toward which over six million common people could turn as they attempted to grapple with the complexities of societal change and global warfare.

Conclusion

It is thus clear that the early life and religious heritage of William Jennings Bryan had a measurable effect upon him. The influence of his parents is clearly seen to be a determinant of the younger Bryan's faith in God, his career as a lawyer, a politician, and proponent of education. For the rest of his sixty-five years, he would operate with a worldview that was shaped and matured during the first two decades of his life. Ashby summarizes these shaping forces:

William's childhood was stable, secure, and full of assurance. Growing up in a locally distinguished and respectable family in small-town, Middle-America, he accepted without question the traditional values of the mid-nineteenth-century. The certainties of progress, the rewards of religious faith, the fruits of hard work, close social bonds, and a need for an orderly, self-disciplined life formed his moral landscape as decisively as the rich farmland shaped Marion County,

46 Ibid.
where his father owned five hundred acres.\textsuperscript{47}

These values and traditions would guide Bryan as he succeeded in bringing many societal reforms to pass, in winning major concessions for the common people whom he served, and in defending the faith 'once delivered to the saints' against the ravages of German higher criticism and Darwinian evolutionary theory. His battle against theological liberalism in particular will be delineated in a discussion of his role in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy.

\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., 1-2.
CHAPTER II
BRYAN’S ROLE IN THE FUNDAMENTALIST-MODERNIST CONTROVERSY

Introduction

American theology in the early twentieth century was in a state of flux, as German higher criticism and Darwinian evolutionary theory made their inroads into the fabric of traditional church dogma. Grounded in eighteenth century rationalism, the German critics began, in the mid-nineteenth century, to question the historicity of the biblical narratives. This in turn threatened the very authority of the Scriptures—a doctrine that had been relied upon at least by Protestant Christianity since the Reformation when Luther had enunciated the principle of ‘sola scriptura.’ Then came Spencer and Huxley—followed by Charles Darwin—who discarded biblical doctrine and authority, boldly replacing it with a new theory of the origins of man.

These liberalizing perspectives caused a virtual theological earthquake in both Roman Catholic and Protestant theological circles. Ahlstrom summarizes the cumulative effect of this shift of world view:

On the intellectual level the new challenges were of two sorts. There was a set of specific problems that had to be faced separately: Darwin unquestionably became the nineteenth century’s Newton, and his theory of evolution through natural selection became the century’s cardinal idea. But the struggle over the new
geology was a vital rehearsal in which new conceptions of time and process were absorbed. Historical research meanwhile posed very detailed questions about the Bible, the history of doctrine, and other world religions. Accompanying these specific problems was a second and more general challenge: the rise of positivistic naturalism, the cumulative result of modern methods for acquiring knowledge. In every discipline from physics to biblical criticism, myth and error were being dispelled, and the result of this activity was a world view which raised problems of the most fundamental sort.¹

By the turn of the twentieth century, movements were being organized to counter what were perceived as the insidious effects of the new liberal trends. First at the academic, then at the clerical, and finally at the lay levels, the battle would be fought to preserve fundamental Christianity. In this theological mix, William Jennings Bryan would be found vigorously defending most if not all of the fundamentals.

Another major area of conflict, and one in which Bryan took a leadership role during the last five years of his life, was that of Darwinian evolutionary theory. He had come into contact with Darwinian teaching much earlier than the 1920s, but it was not until evolutionary theory began to make inroads into the public education system of America that he felt constrained to make it the single issue of his focus. When he did, the battle raged fiercely, as he preached against this new enemy across America from church

pulpits, political platforms, and on the Chautauqua circuit.

Bryan's crowning blow to the "Menace of Darwinism," as he called it in one notable sermon, was to have occurred at Dayton, Tennessee in the famous Scopes Evolution Trial. Instead, he suddenly died and the energy of the reactionary Fundamentalist movement began to dissipate without its leader. In fact, by the early 1930s, the Fundamentalists had begun reacting not to Liberalism or evolution, but to one another, with the result that numerous splinter groups were formed, thus robbing them of the opportunity to constitute a collective, conservative response to theological liberalism and evolutionary theorizing in the church of their day. In the meantime, non-conservative theology took its own turns, as neo-orthodoxy, existentialism, and even the death-of-God movement came on the scene. In the process, fundamentalism was pushed to the perimeter of theological discussion. Although it has continued to the present in a variety of forms, its strength is not what it was in the 1920s, nor what it could have been thereafter.

This chapter will trace the origins of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy through German higher criticism and Darwinian evolutionary theory. It will then examine the effects of the controversy on Protestant Christianity in early twentieth-century America, and the role that was played in this battle by William Jennings Bryan.
Origins of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy

German Higher Criticism

As early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a group of scholars arose in Germany, who challenged the traditional views of the inspiration and canonicity of the Scriptures. Johann Semler (1725-1791), for example, questioned whether the Scriptures contained all of the Word of God. Latourette notes of him:

He believed in revelation and held that it is to be found in the Bible, but that not everything in the Bible is revelation, that not all parts of the Scriptures are of equal value, and that while the Bible contains permanent truths, they are conditioned by the circumstances in which the various books were written. ²

Semler was accompanied in this nontraditional approach by other scholars such as Johann D. Michaelis (1717-91), who held that a number of the New Testament books were not inspired; by Hermann Reimarus (1694-1768), who discounted the miraculous and supernatural elements of the biblical accounts; by David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874), who viewed the Gospel narratives as composed of magical or mythical tales; and by F. C. Baur (1792-1860), who interpreted the New Testament in Hegelian terms, seeing a controversy (thesis/antithesis) between the apostles Peter and Paul, which was solved in the synthesis of the Jerusalem Council as recorded in the Book of Acts. Baur interpreted the teachings of Peter as being exclusively Judaistic in nature,

while those of Paul he saw as universal for Jew and Gentile alike. These perspectives came into conflict but were finally reconciled, according to Baur, by the decision of the Church council recorded in Acts chapter fifteen and perpetuated in the Catholic Church which developed in the second century.\(^3\) He then attempted to show that New Testament books which tend to demonstrate this conflict are of earlier dating, while those which do not are later. Using this method, he dated some books, such as the Gospel of John, as late as A.D. 185.

Strauss, a student of Baur's, caused even more consternation in conservative circles when he published his Leben Jesu in 1877. While attempting to retain the supernatural elements of the Christian faith as eternal truth, he nevertheless questioned the historicity of the Gospels, including vital doctrines such as the virgin birth of Christ as well as the accounts of His death, burial, resurrection and post-resurrection appearances. Latourette describes the effects of Strauss's work:

He summed up the queries which had thus far been raised about the historicity of the picture given by the Gospels, introduced some of his own, and left the impression of a lack of dependable knowledge of Jesus as an historical character. He attacked the positions of both the rationalists and the orthodox. The book created an enormous stir and awakened a mixture of hearty agreement, partial endorsement, and vigorous and often emotional rebuttal. Its repercussions continued to be felt at least as late as the middle of the

\(^3\)Ibid., 1127.
In the area of Old Testament studies, one of the most controversial of the new German scholars was Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918). Building on the work of previous critics such as H. B. Witter, Jean Astruc, J. G. Eichorn, W. M. L. De Wette, Hermann Hupfeld, and K. H. Graf, Wellhausen constructed what came to be termed the "JEDP Theory" of Old Testament criticism. Influenced by Hegelianism and evolutionary theory, he postulated that the Old Testament was compiled from at least four major sources: the Jahwistic literature (J) dating from about 850 B.C.; the Elohistic writings (E) dating from about 750; the Deuteronomistic portion (D) dating from 621; and the Prophetic or legal portion (P) dating from about 450. Wellhausen believed that the authors of the J and E documents were unknown, while D and P were composed by multiple authors but not necessarily all those to whom the later Old Testament books are attributed. He also presupposed that religion developed in an evolutionary way from animism to polytheism and finally to monotheism. Archer notes:

... he restated the Documentary Theory with great skill and persuasiveness, supporting the JEDP sequence upon an evolutionary basis. This was the age in which Charles Darwin's Origin of Species was capturing the allegiance of the scholarly and scientific world, and the theory of development from primitive animism to

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4 Ibid., 1128.

sophisticated monotheism as set forth by Wellhausen and his followers fitted admirably into Hegelian dialecticism . . . and Darwinian evolutionism. 6

Wellhausen also held that the duplication of accounts in supposedly historical material implies multiple sources; hence, his ability to identify at least four major sources for the Old Testament. Finally, he approached the Bible as history and therefore preferred a rational explanation for the narratives rather than a supernatural one.

The cumulative effect of this new biblical criticism was to cast serious doubt on the authenticity and reliability of much of the Bible. Nor was this trend isolated among the intellectuals alone. The average person in the church pew felt the effects of this teaching increasingly, as seminaries began to graduate a new generation of pastors and teachers of theology who held to the European approach. Thus, by the early 1900's, higher criticism had gained a firm foothold even in American institutions and churches.

Ahlstrom summarizes five distinct developments of historical criticism during the nineteenth century, which had a profound impact on twentieth century biblical scholarship:

1. Uniformitarian principles, when applied to the Scriptures, excluded miracles and divine providence.

2. The Scriptures came to be interpreted as any other major historical document, with all the questions of authorship and dating that accompany such research.

3. Historical theology developed as a specific discipline, and with it came a questioning of major biblical

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6Ibid., 79.
doctrines such as the Atonement and the nature of Christ.

4. Comparative religion began to develop as a separate discipline; thus Christianity was recast in the light of other major systems of thought and belief and lost its primacy in the minds of many.

5. Historicism, as opposed to supernaturalism, came to occupy a dominant role in the thinking of many. All men were seen to be on equal footing and in the same quest for historical certainty, whatever their theological or philosophical convictions. 7

Higher criticism had thus succeeded in undermining many of the fundamental and traditional doctrines of the established church, whether Catholic or Protestant. Torbet summarizes the implications of this theological coup, particularly for Baptists in America:

Under the impact of these ideas, the traditional views of man as a lost sinner apart from the atonement of Christ, of eternal punishment and eternal blessedness, of justification by faith, of predestination and the perseverance of the saints, and of sanctification, began to lose their significance for many seminary-trained men. Even the Bible, which had been the final authority of Baptists for matters of faith and life, seemed about to be overthrown by the findings of science. In a desperate effort to retain their hold upon Christianity without forsaking the new learning about them, some sought refuge in a liberal theology which taught that sin is the product of ignorance, that man has an innate goodness within him which merely needs unfolding, that the miracles recorded in the Bible are expressions of the manner of describing natural processes in an unscientific age, that the resurrection may be interpreted as the continuance of the teachings and exemplary life of Jesus in His disciples, and that the main task of the church is to reform society and so make the kingdom of God an actuality here on earth. 8

What Torbet describes among the Baptists could be applied

7Ahlstrom, 772-73.

equally to other major denominations as well. It was against such an attack on the Christian religion, especially of the Protestant variety but including much traditional Catholic theology as well, that William Jennings Bryan would take his stand in the early twentieth century.

**Darwinian Evolution**

The second late-nineteenth century development which seriously threatened organized Christianity was the teaching of Charles Darwin, especially his theory of the evolutionary development of all species of living things, including man. With the publication of his epochal works, *Origin of Species* (1859) and the *Descent of Man* (1871), he unleashed a fire-storm within the Christian community which continues to burn. What once had been a purposeful and well-ordered universe governed by an omnipotent and benevolent God was suddenly transformed into a non-supernatural process devoid of the power of God and ruled by the principle of natural selection. To this change the conservative Christian world reacted strongly, as Szasz notes:

> Evolution came to be blamed for a multitude of sins, but among those which seemed the most threatening were the lengthening of the time span of the earth and the interjection of teleological aimlessness in the doctrine of natural selection. . . . The first churches to notice evolution were those of the upper classes, inheritors of the intellectual tradition of the eighteenth century. It took much longer for the popular
mind to be disturbed. 9

Once this popular mind became aroused by evolution, however, the reaction would be strong.

While the reaction to Darwinian evolution would be swift, the development of his theory was not. He spent five years aboard the H. M. S. 'Beagle,' gathering data about the varieties of species of plants and animals to found, especially in South America. Returning home to England in 1837, he began to record his observations and reflections on the voyage. In 1844, he developed a summary of conclusions which embodied the basics of his theory of evolution; and finally, in 1859, he published his Origin of Species. In the Introduction to this work, Darwin throws down the gauntlet to theology and previous scientific theories of divine creation:

Although much remains obscure, and will long remain obscure, I can entertain no doubt, after the most deliberate study and dispassionate judgment of which I am capable, that the view which most naturalists until recently entertained, and which I formerly entertained—namely, that each species has been independently created—is erroneous. I am fully convinced that species are not immutable; but that those belonging to what are called the same genera are lineal descendants of some other and generally extinct species, in the same manner as the acknowledged varieties of any one species are the descendants of that species. Furthermore, I am convinced that Natural Selection has been the most important, but not the exclusive, means

He then describes many of the individual differences that he found among plant and animal life; and he concludes that all living things engage in a struggle for existence. By this he means that while many individuals of any given species are born, only a few survive. Those that do are generally marked by superior characteristics as compared with those who did not. This principle Darwin calls Natural Selection. He summarizes his theory thus:

Can it, then, be thought improbable, seeing that variations useful to man have undoubtedly occurred, that other variations useful in some way to each being in the great and complex battle of life, should occur in the course of many successive generations? If such do occur, can we doubt (remembering that many more individuals are born than can possibly survive) that individuals having any advantage, however slight, over others, would have the best chance of surviving and of procreating their kind? On the other hand, we may feel sure that any variation in the least degree injurious would be rigidly destroyed. This preservation of favorable individual differences and variations, and the destruction of those which are injurious, I have called Natural Selection, or the Survival of the Fittest. Variations neither useful nor injurious would not be affected by natural selection, and would be left either a fluctuating element . . . or would ultimately become fixed, owing to the nature of the organism and the nature of the conditions.\(^\text{11}\)

In addition, Darwin recognized that the process of Natural Selection operated very slowly, thus demanding large periods of geological time to manifest itself. Therefore, he posited a much longer age for the earth than had been


\(^{11}\)Ibid., 88.
proclaimed by earlier scientists and theologians. 12

From the principle of Natural Selection with respect to plants and animals, it was but a small step for Darwin to propound his theory of the evolution of man. This he did in his Descent of Man and Selection In Relation to Sex (1871). In fact, he designates man as a highly developed animal, citing certain similarities:

It is notorious that man is constructed on the same general type or model as other mammals. All the bones in his skeleton can be compared with corresponding bones in a monkey, bat, or seal. So it is with his muscles, nerves, blood-vessels and internal viscera. The brain, the most important of all the organs, follows the same law, as shown by Huxley and other anatomists. 13

Once more, Darwin posits the law of Natural Selection as being the operative principle in man's development over aeons of time.

Having evaluated and compared numerous species of plant and animal life, Darwin concludes:

He who is not content to look, like a savage, at the phenomena of nature as disconnected, cannot any longer believe that man is the work of a separate act of creation. He will be forced to admit that the close resemblance of the embryo of man to that, for instance, of a dog . . . all point in the plainest manner to the conclusion that man is the co-descendant with other mammals of a common progenitor. 14

The reaction of fundamentalist Christians to this

12Ibid., 113, 492-93.


14Ibid., 602.
The theory is easily understood in light of these statements by Darwin. Nor was the scientist unaware that his theory would evoke a fierce controversy among pastors, theologians, and Christian laymen. He admits that man is possessed of a moral sense in addition to the intellectual, but he relegates even this aspect to the forces of Natural Selection and inheritance over time:

The moral nature of man has reached its present standard, partly through the advancement of his reasoning powers and consequently of a just public opinion, but especially from his sympathies having been rendered more tender and widely diffused through the effects of habit, example, instruction, and reflection. It is not improbable that after long practice virtuous tendencies may be inherited. With the more civilized races, the conviction of the existence of an all-seeing Deity has had a potent influence on the advance of morality. . . . Nevertheless, the first foundation of the moral sense lies in the social instincts, including sympathy; and these instincts were no doubt primarily gained, as in the case of the lower animals, through natural selection. 15

Darwin ascribes the development of the moral nature to the effects of social forces which become instinctual; to the approbation and disapprobation of man's fellow-beings; and to man's superior mental faculties which retain past impressions much longer than those in lower forms of animal life. 16

Recognizing that he could not relegate religious thought and feeling to morality alone, Darwin also attempted to address the problem of God in his theory. He states:

15Ibid., 606-07.

16Ibid., 605.
The belief in God has often been advanced as not only the greatest, but the most complete of all the distinctions between man and the lower animals. It is however impossible . . . to maintain that his belief is innate or instinctive in man. On the other hand, a belief in all-pervading spiritual agencies seems to be universal; and apparently follows from a considerable advance in man's reason, and from a still greater advance in his faculties of imagination, curiosity and wonder. . . . The idea of a universal and beneficent Creator does not seem to arise in the mind of man, until he has been elevated by long-continued culture.\textsuperscript{17}

Darwin concludes his discussion about the existence of God by admitting that his arguments will be denounced as highly irreligious by some. Then, using a classic non sequitur argument, he deftly avoids the issue by stating that the explanation of birth and reproduction is just as difficult to fathom as is his theory of variation among species and natural selection.\textsuperscript{18}

Little wonder, therefore, that the Fundamentalists and other Christians reacted strongly to Darwin's theory. Indeed, it posed a serious threat to their belief in the existence of God and to the biblical account of a literal, six-day creation of this world and man. William Jennings Bryan would react loudly and sometimes caustically to Darwin, drawing with him as he did so the majority of conservative evangelical Christians in America during the early twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 607.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.
Impact of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy On American Protestant Christianity

Around the turn of the century, American Protestants in particular began to attack higher criticism and evolution in their writing, their preaching, and some of their educational institutions. In 1886, for example, the Moody Bible Institute was begun in Chicago, Illinois under the leadership of Dwight L. Moody; and in 1907, the Bible Institute of Los Angeles came into being on the west coast. Both schools stood firmly for fundamental Christianity. Furniss notes that in 1902, Robert Dick Wilson, Luther Townsend, and William Bell Riley formed the Bible League of America to combat these new forces. In the following two decades, other groups—such as the Research Science Bureau (1921), the Anti-Evolution League (1925), and the Bible Crusaders of America (1925)—would also come into existence for the same purpose.¹⁹

During this period, a series of books was written by a wide variety of conservative scholars, addressing what were considered to be the fundamental themes of biblical Christianity. Published under the title of The Fundamentals, this work sought to reaffirm five fundamental truths with regard to the Bible and Jesus Christ: the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures; Christ's virgin birth; His substitutionary death and atonement for man's sin; His

resurrection from the dead; and His bodily Second Coming to
the earth to establish His kingdom. Canon Dyson Hague, in
his introductory article, "The History of Higher Criticism,"
expresses well both the feelings of the multiple authors and
the intention of the book:

Sadly enough . . . higher criticism has become identi-
fied with a system of criticism which is based on
hypotheses and suppositions which have for their object
the repudiation of the traditional theory, and has
investigated the origins, forms, styles, and contents,
apparently not to confirm the authenticity and credi-
bility and reliability of the Scriptures, but to dis-
credit in most cases their genuineness, to discover
discrepancies, and throw doubt on their authority. 20

These works were sent to every pastor and Christian worker
who could be identified in the United States and abroad,
thanks to funding provided by Lyman and Milton Stewart--
wealthy brothers and Christian laymen of Los Angeles, Cali-
fornia. 21 As late as 1990, the single volume edition of The
Fundamentals was being republished for continuing use by
Fundamentalists.

Conservative theologians would spend several decades of
the early 1900s arguing the case for these truths, in the
face of other theologians who no longer saw value in them,
but who instead turned their attention to the social appli-
cation of the Gospel. William Jennings Bryan would ulti-
mately emerge as one of the leading proponents of

20 Ibid., 14.

21 R. A. Torrey, ed., The Fundamentals (Grand Rapids,
Fundamentalism; and he would not be alone in this battle for the faith. Other Fundamentalist leaders were also emerging, such as Clarence E. Macartney, J. Gresham Machen, J. C. Massee, J. Frank Norris, William B. Riley, and John Roach Straton. With the exception of Machen and Bryan, all were local church pastors from various parts of the United States, and all were unalterably opposed to liberalism in the church. Regrettably, their methods were at times unorthodox and questionable, as Russell notes:

J. Frank Norris and John Roach Straton represent the radical, militant wing of Fundamentalism. Their beligerency--and in Norris' case instances of violence--did much to discredit the movement and made it extremely difficult for others, including their own colleagues, to work with them. William Bell Riley, the most conservative of the group theologically, was exceedingly aggressive in his opposition to Liberalism; however, he was not as flamboyant a showman as Norris or Straton. J. C. Massee and Clarence E. Macartney reflect the more moderate leadership, generally characterized by propriety and gentlemanliness, although still manifesting deep convictions. J. Gresham Machen is the intellectual of the fundamentalists but equally tenacious in clinging to his religious beliefs. Had he lived long enough, the denomination he founded might have been reduced to a single member. A poor politician, he saw the danger of theological heresy in others, but not the evil of anarchy caused by his own doctrinal rigidity. William Jennings Bryan is the single statesman-politician of the seven. 22

Russell goes on to describe these men as controversialists who frequently instigated division in the churches of which they were the pastors or the institutions with which they were associated. "In fact," he says, "at times it appears

as if controversy, for them, was a substitute for intellectual, theological, and biblical content in their sermons and discourses." \(^{23}\) They enjoyed a theological battle, and they found in the liberalism of American churches a ready foe.

**Bryan's Role in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy**

Scholarly opinions vary regarding the actual role that William Jennings Bryan played in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy. Russell holds that he jumped as readily into the fray as did the other Fundamentalist leaders:

Within the context of the liberal-fundamentalist controversy, Bryan had harsh words to say about the biblical scholars known as the 'higher critics.' He referred to the average higher critics as 'men without spiritual vision, without zeal for souls, and without any deep interest in the coming of God's Kingdom.' Their opinions, Bryan was convinced, were formed before their investigations. Like many other liberals, in their handling of the Scriptures, they were 'tampering with the mainspring' and mutilating the inspired biblical books. In Bryan's judgment, they lacked the 'spiritual fluids' to digest the miraculous and the supernatural in the Bible. \(^{24}\)

Szasz, on the other hand, holds that Bryan did not involve himself with either the arguments of the higher critics and theological liberals or with evolution, until the latter became a useful issue for promoting his own social and political agenda. In fact, he notes that the

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\(^{23}\) Ibid.

Bryan correspondence at the Library of Congress reveals that much of his contact with the ministerial community prior to 1921 was through theological liberals.\textsuperscript{25} Further, he states:

Nor can one say that Bryan had a long-standing concern with evolution. Although his most famous lecture, The Prince of Peace, which he began delivering shortly after his 1900 defeat, contains a passing reference to evolution, too much can easily be made of this. He never gave any speeches specifically against evolution, and in The Prince of Peace he cautioned his listeners that he was not attacking those who did believe in Darwinism. He simply said that he felt that more proof was needed. His chief objection to evolution was teleological, for he felt that acceptance of the theory would cause man to lose the consciousness of God's presence in his daily life. Surely there is a difference between a passing comment against evolution and the decision to devote one's whole life to stopping it.\textsuperscript{26}

Szasz believes that Bryan simply used the issue of evolution to take control of the Fundamentalist movement in the early 1920s. He indicates further that Bryan had some major theological differences with organized Fundamentalism:

1. He did not believe in the premillennial return of Christ.

2. He was not a dispensationalist.

3. He desired to merge Christianity with the world through positive social action, rather than desiring to separate the church from the world as most Fundamentalists sought to do.

4. He was no Calvinist.


\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., 264.
5. He was not even a biblical literalist, as evidenced by his testimony during the Scopes Trial of 1925.27

While these theological differences may have been real, Bryan nevertheless would have aligned himself more closely with the Fundamentalists than with the Modernists. In addition, a case can be made to demonstrate that he was aware, much earlier than the 1920s, of the inroads into conservative Protestant Christianity that were being made by higher criticism and evolutionary theory. Russell says of him:

National in his influence in contrast to the regional impact of other representatives of ultraconservative theology, the colorful Bryan in his twilight years brought fundamentalism to the attention of the masses through his relentless opposition to the theory of Darwinian evolution. Bryan’s fundamentalism was not an appendage of later years. The ingredients of that theological tendency and lifestyle had been with him from his earliest days.28

In fact, Bryan testified to a personal battle with infidelity early in his college career (ca. 1877-78). It was at this time that he first encountered Darwin’s theory, and it cast some brief but serious doubt upon his religious beliefs. He recalls:

I passed through a period of skepticism when I was in college and I have been glad ever since that I became a member of the church before I left home for college. . . . It was at this period that I became confused by the different theories of creation. But I examined these theories and found that they all assumed something to begin with. . . . Well, I have a right to assume, and I

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27Ibid., 272-73.

prefer to assume, a Designer back of the design--a Creator back of the creation; and no matter how long you draw out the process of creation, so long as God stands back of it you cannot shake my faith in Jehovah. . . . We must begin with something--we must start somewhere--and the Christian begins with God. 29

Notably, Bryan's lack of theological clarity regarding the biblical account of a six-day creation would return to haunt him in 1925, as Clarence Darrow pressed him upon this point and won the day. In addition, Bryan's statement reveals the roots of what some have labeled as theological and intellectual obscurantism. Unwilling to face the evolutionists squarely on the basis of the evidence that they adduced for their theory, Bryan instead chose simply to ignore their major presuppositions and to accept the orthodox doctrine of creation in their place. It would seem that a much stronger argument could have been made for fundamental Christianity, and against evolutionary teaching, if the scientific evidence had been weighed more carefully. Nevertheless, it is evident that Bryan was at least exposed to these theories at a young age. It is also apparent that his own belief-system assumed a firm and inflexible form probably before the turn of the century. Russell notes:

One may conclude that early in his career Bryan had adopted a way of life consistent with what Fundamentalism later came to be. The Bible, literally interpreted, had become his central religious authority; there was agreement in his family on the basic doctrines of Christianity; faith was already recognized as superior to reason; and the pietistic life was being

followed.  

In addition, as early as 1909, he was writing editorials in his widely read newspaper, The Commoner, which addressed the issues of theological liberalism and evolution. Speaking to the theological views of former President Eliot of Harvard University, who held that conservative and orthodox Christianity was a religion which emphasized sorrow and death rather than joy and life, Bryan responded:

Dr. Eliot, ex-president of Harvard, announces that we are to have a 'new' religion and he proceeds to give the world an outline of it. . . . It so happens that this new religion is the very religion that Dr. Eliot has practically monopolized for a lifetime. Its good features have been borrowed, without credit, from Christianity and its immaterial features need no copyright to prevent their being appropriated. . . . the Christian religion has grown in influence in spite of Dr. Eliot, and it will continue to exist even when his death withdraws the stimulus furnished by his opposition. If the scholarly ex-president would only include the Bible in his model library and READ it, he would find that it does not present a religion which deals 'chiefly with sorrow and death,' but that it abounds in 'joy and life.' He seems to have overlooked the fact that at the birth of the Founder of Christianity angels sang and proclaimed 'Peace on earth and good will toward men.' The old religion is good enough.

A year later, Bryan spoke to the delegates at the World's Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland. In his address, he first provided answers to those who objected to world missions as a Christian endeavor. He then enumerated twelve key fruits that ought to characterize the

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30 Russell, Voices of American Fundamentalism, 176-77.

life of a true Christian:

1. Belief in God as Creator, Preserver, and Father.
2. Belief in Christ, as Son and Savior.
4. Man's highest purpose as being the search for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.
5. Love as the law of life.
6. Forgiveness as the test of love.
7. Brotherhood as the Christian ideal.
9. The example of the Christian life.
10. Service as the measure of greatness.
12. The promise of immortality.\(^{32}\)

A cursory glance at these principles reveals themes that marked Bryan's career, and which aroused supporters to his cause from both the liberal and conservative theological camps. Advocates of the Social Gospel, for example, would see great value in the principle of 'love as the law of life,' while anti-evolutionists would identify with his principle of 'Belief in God as Creator.' In addition, perhaps alluding to the later battle of faith against reason as seen in the creation-evolution controversy, Bryan states: "Faith is a heart virtue; doubts of the mind will not

disturb us if there is faith in the heart . . . ."\(^{33}\) Or again, in answer to the objections of atheists who criticized Christians for their lack of intellectual acumen, he says:

A speech may be disputed; even a sermon may not convince, but no one has yet lived who could answer a Christian life; it is the unanswerable argument in support of the Christian religion.\(^{34}\)

While philosophers might decry such a position as committing a form of the genetic fallacy, Bryan was seriously attempting to live out the command of Jesus, Who had said: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father Who is in heaven" (Mt. 5:16). For Bryan, theology was not just theoretical but intensely practical as well.

Bryan, therefore, played a significant role in the fight against theological liberalism for many years; but it was the decade of the 1920s which saw him ascend to the leadership position, as Fundamentalists sought to eradicate modernistic thought and teaching from the schools and churches of America. While the other Fundamentalist leaders, noted earlier, were emerging and establishing their roles in the battle, it was Bryan who quickly achieved prominence in it through his newspaper articles, his many speeches, and his political clout. Russell notes of him:

\(^{33}\)Ibid., 41.

\(^{34}\)Ibid., 43.
With his national influence, in contrast to the regional impact of other representatives of ultraconservative theology, the colorful Bryan in his twilight years brought Fundamentalism to the attention of the masses through his relentless opposition to the Darwinian theory of evolution.  

Indeed, Bryan became very concerned about the effects of evolutionary theory, especially in light of the horrors of World War I and the inroads that he saw Darwinian teaching making in American public education. In his later years, he read Vernon Kellogg's *Headquarters Nights*, which helped to convince him that the principle of war stemmed from evolutionary theory. Reflecting upon his conversation with a German biologist, for example, Kellogg states:

> In talking it out biologically, we agreed that the human race is subject to the influence of the fundamental biologic laws of variation, heredity, selection, and so forth, just as are all other animal--and plant--kinds. The factors of organic evolution, generally, are factors in human natural evolution. Man has risen from his primitive bestial stage of glacial time, a hundred or several hundred thousand years ago, when he was animal among animals, to the stage of today, always under the influence of these great evolutionary factors, and partly by virtue of them.

Kellogg had served in Europe during the war as a member of the Commission for the Relief of Belgium—a non-partisan entity which sought to provide civilian relief in that country in the midst of the German occupation. For a time, he also lived at the headquarters of the German Great General Staff and of the German Army of Occupation in

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Belgium. He was thus a first-hand witness of the philosophy and practice of the German mind at that time. While he was indeed an evolutionist, he also came to believe in the principle of altruism or mutual-aid, which for him served as the key to solving international and interpersonal conflict. He states:

... the adoption by two widely distinct and perhaps antagonistic species of a commensal or symbiotic life, based on the mutual-aid principle--thousands of such cases are familiar to naturalists--would ameliorate or abolish the interspecific struggle between these two species. 37

Again, he says:

Altruism--or mutual aid, as the biologists prefer to call it, to escape the implication of assuming too much consciousness in it--is just as truly a fundamental biologic factor of evolution as is the cruel, strictly self-regarding, exterminating kind of struggle for existence with which the Neo-Darwinists try to fill our eyes and ears, to the exclusion of the recognition of all other factors. 38

While Bryan seems to have agreed at least in part with Kellogg's principle of mutual aid--as is evidenced in his own peace treaty plan--he also found in these writings a rationale for the German occupation which pointed an accusing finger at Darwinian evolution. He would have agreed completely with Kellogg's conclusion about the German philosophy:

... it is a point of view that will never allow any land or people controlled by it to exist peacefully by the side of a people governed by our point of view.

37 Ibid., 26.

38 Ibid., 27-28.
For their point of view does not permit of a live-and-let-live kind of carrying on. It is a point of view that justifies itself by a whole-hearted acceptance of the worst of Neo-Darwinism, the Allmacht of natural selection applied rigorously to human life and society and Kultur. 39

Bryan's own writings, several years before his death, reveal the development of the same theme. He saw Darwinian evolution as a direct threat to belief in God. He states:

... anything that weakens belief in God weakens man, and, to the extent that it impairs belief in God, reduces his power to measure up to his opportunities and responsibilities. If there is at work in the world to-day anything that tends to break this mainspring, it is the duty of the moral, as well as the Christian, world to combat this influence in every possible way.

I believe there is such a menace to fundamental morality. The hypothesis to which the name of Darwin has been given—the hypothesis that links man to the lower forms of life and makes him a lineal descendant of the brute—is obscuring God and weakening all the virtues that rest upon the religious ties between God and man. 40

Bryan castigates Darwin, first for using vague terminology when speaking of his theory—words such as 'apparently,' 'probably,' and 'assumptions.' He then accuses the scientist of drawing conclusions on the basis of guesses and similarities between species, without proving that a connection exists between them. 41  In language that his Chautauqua audience would have appreciated, Bryan parodies the evolutionary theory of the development of various bodily organs:

39 Ibid., 22.


41 Ibid., 29.
How long did the 'light waves' have to play on the skin before the eyes came out? . . . And why did the light waves quit playing when two eyes were perfected? Why did they not keep on playing until there were eyes all over the body? Why do they not play to-day, so that we may see eyes in process of development? And if the light waves created the eyes, why did they not create them strong enough to bear the light? Why did the light waves make eyes and then make eyelids to keep the light out of the eyes?  

Bryan was scathing in his rebuke of Darwinian theory, not willing to give ground to the famous scientist in the slightest. Nor would he entertain a compromise between theology and evolution. Rejecting materialism as a philosophy of life, he stated that Darwin's teaching is even more dangerous because it allows one "to believe in a God, but puts the creative act so far away that reverence for the Creator--even belief in Him--is likely to be lost." He directed his most searing criticism, however, at what he termed Darwin's principle of hatred as the fundamental law of human development. He emphatically declared:

If hatred is the law of man's development; that is, if man has reached his present perfection by a cruel law under which the strong kill off the weak--then, if there is any logic that can bind the human mind, we must turn backward toward the brute if we dare to substitute the law of love for the law of hate.  

What Darwin scientifically termed 'natural selection,' therefore, Bryan interpreted morally as the law of hatred. Quoting extensively from the scientist's writings--

42Ibid., 99-100.  
43Ibid., 90.  
44Ibid., 107.
especially his *Descent of Man*—Bryan concludes:

The language which I have quoted proves that Darwinism is directly antagonistic to Christianity, which boasts of its eleemosynary institutions and of the care it bestows on the weak and the helpless. Darwin, by putting man on a brute basis and ignoring spiritual values, attacks the very foundations of Christianity.\(^45\)

A reading of Darwin’s works reveals that Bryan’s charge may have merit. With regard to man’s efforts, for example, to eradicate sickness through vaccination for various diseases, Darwin states:

With savages, the weak in body or mind are soon eliminated; and those that survive commonly exhibit a vigorous state of health. We civilized men, on the other hand, do our utmost to check the process of elimination; we build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed and the sick; we institute poor laws; and our medical men exert their utmost skill to save the life of every one to the last moment. There is reason to believe that vaccination has preserved thousands, who from a weak constitution would formerly have succumbed to small-pox. Thus the weak members of civilized societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man.\(^46\)

In spite of the obvious implications of this statement upon morality, religion and ethics, Darwin did not admit that his theory constituted an attack on organized Christianity. In fact, in concluding his *Origin of Species*, he says: "I see no good reason why the views given in this volume should shock the religious feelings of any one."\(^47\)

\(^{45}\)Ibid., 110.

\(^{46}\)Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 130.

\(^{47}\)Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 498.
Bryan, however, correctly interpreted these views as a direct threat to Christianity, especially of the fundamental kind. Furthermore, they were drawing away the young men and women of the faith into agnosticism and atheism. After his own brush with infidelity during his college years, Bryan was sensitive to any teaching that would impair the ability of young people to come to know and love the same God Whom he worshipped. Therefore, to see Darwinian evolutionary theory being taught in the schools and colleges of America evoked his anger and harsh criticism. Speaking of the typical college classroom lecture, for example, he says:

The instructor gives the student a new family tree millions of years long, with its roots in the water (marine animals) and then sets him adrift, with infinite capacity for good or evil but with no light to guide him, no compass to direct him and no chart of the sea of life!

No wonder so large a percentage of the boys and girls who go from Sunday Schools and churches to colleges (sometimes as high as seventy-five per cent.) never return to religious work. How can one feel God's presence in his daily life if Darwin's reasoning is sound? This restraining influence, more potent than any external force, is paralyzed when God is put so far away. How can one believe in prayer if, for millions of years, God has never touched a human life or laid His hand upon the destiny of the human race? What mockery to petition or implore, if God neither hears nor answers. . . . Darwin mocks the Christians even more cruelly; he tells us that our God has been asleep for millions of years. . . . Darwinism chills the spiritual nature and quenches the fires of religious enthusiasm.48

To substantiate his claims about the loss of religious vitality among the youth of America, Bryan quotes statistics

compiled by James H. Leuba, professor of Psychology at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, and author of *The Belief in God and Immortality*. Leuba sought to demonstrate that the loss of belief in God among young people is a natural consequence of their placing rigorous scientific standards of investigation against the principles taught in the Bible and in church. It is, in addition, a conclusion arrived at inductively through empirical research rather than deductively argued from a biblical doctrine. He says:

> Metaphysical arguments are instances of deductive reasoning which differs in kind from inductive reasoning in that the former derives the proposition to be established from some more inclusive proposition regarded as self-evident, or as already proved; whereas an inductive demonstration is made by way of generalization from the observation of a sufficient number of facts. It follows from the nature of a deductive proof that, however strictly logical it may be, there remains always the previous question of the truth or adequacy of the major premise upon which hangs the whole demonstration.  

Again, Leuba states that, "No proposition can claim . . . absolute validity that is not empirically verifiable. This verification . . . cannot be provided for most religious truths."  

While Bryan might have taken issue with the methods used by Leuba to arrive at his conclusions, or the size of his samples, he reacted instead to the professor’s major presupposition against the existence of God. Leuba

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50 Ibid., 142-43.
summarizes this position:

When we consider not merely what has taken place on this planet since man's appearance on it, but also the numberless other worlds at various stages of frigidity or organic activity, we do not find it possible to read in the brief span of human evolution an indication of an irrevocable purpose on the part of a Power directing the Universe.\textsuperscript{51}

Having outlined his thesis, Leuba then goes on to show that the beliefs of young people in college verify his view. He concludes:

The . . . statistics show that young people enter college possessed of the beliefs still accepted, more or less perfunctorily, in the average home of the land, and that as their mental powers mature and their horizon widens, a large percentage of them abandon the cardinal Christian beliefs. It seems probable that on leaving college, from 40 to 45 per cent. of the students with whom we are concerned deny or doubt the fundamental dogmas of the Christian religion. The marked decrease in belief that takes place during the later adolescent years, in those who spend those years in study under the influence of persons of high culture, is a portentous indication of the fate which, according to our statistics, increased knowledge and the possession of certain capacities leading to eminence reserve to the beliefs in a personal God and in personal immortality.\textsuperscript{52}

To this testimony of the loss of Christian belief, Bryan responded:

Can Christians be indifferent to such statistics? Is it an immaterial thing that so large a percentage of the young men who go from Christian homes into institutions of learning should go out from these institutions with the spiritual element eliminated from their lives? What shall it profit a man if he shall gain all the learning of the schools and lose his faith in God?\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., 142.

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., 280-81.

\textsuperscript{53}Bryan, \textit{In His Image}, 118.
Because of this threat to organized Christianity in America, Bryan assumed a role in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy; and in doing so, he became, at least for a time, its chief spokesman. Admittedly, he never achieved a position of status or power within the organized churches of Protestant America. The fact that he was neither a trained theologian nor an ordained minister probably kept him from playing such a role. His most impressive religious position was within the Presbyterian church, where he was appointed vice-moderator of the General Assembly in 1924; but, as Russell notes, this may have been due to ecclesiastical politics as much as anything else. In any event, the position appears to have been honorary at best.

Nevertheless, Bryan made himself heard amidst the clamor of the Controversy, chiefly through his writings, his speeches, and finally through the Scopes trial. In his Seven Questions In Dispute (1924), for example, he attacks the liberal higher critics:

> When the miracles and the supernatural are taken from the Bible, its inspiration denied, and its Christ robbed of the glory of a virgin birth, of the majesty of deity, and of the triumph of a resurrection, there is little left in the Bible to make it worth reading—certainly not enough to justify one in patterning his life after it or in carrying it to heathen lands.

Then he links biblical criticism with evolutionary theory.

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"Scratch a critic of the Bible," he says, "and you are sure to find an evolutionist."

Such statements were sure to attract the attention and approval of the religious zealots among the Fundamentalists. They also served to enhance Bryan's image as a leader among that group, whether he held the reins of power within it or not.

Bryan also utilized The Commoner as a vehicle for publicly flaying the evolutionists. In his famous article, "Tampering With the Mainspring," he categorically states:

The preacher deals with The Science of How to Live, the most important of all the sciences. While it is DESIRABLE that man shall understand all the sciences, it is NECESSARY that he shall understand The Science of How to Live. If one had to choose between this science and geology, for instance, it is more important to know the ROCK OF AGES than to know the age of rocks.

While such a statement does little to remove the image of theological obscurantism with which he and the other Fundamentalists were charged, Bryan concludes with a clear delineation of the issue as he saw it:

Belief in God is the mainspring of life and as vital to a correct life as the mainspring of a watch is to a correct timekeeper. We contend that Darwin's hypothesis impairs the mainspring by weakening faith in God, even when it does not entirely destroy that faith. Atheistic evolutionists deny the existence of God while theistic evolutionists accept all the arguments of the materialists, rejecting only their final conclusion—the non-existence of God; but some of them put God so far away that He has no influence on life. . . . What compelling force can the consciousness of responsibility have if it is strained through the blood of all

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56 Ibid., 125.

the lower forms of life? And when does hope of immortality begin if man is linked to protoplasm by an unbroken line of descent?58

From this position Bryan refused to move, even when, during the course of the Scopes trial, Clarence Darrow pressured him into admitting to the essence of theistic evolution—a position that the more conservative Fundamentalists flatly rejected. Had Bryan lived for a few more years, it is likely that he and the Fundamentalists would have suffered a parting of the ways, since their theology was not clearly aligned.

Conclusion

For almost two decades, the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy raged within the American church. Protestants and Catholics alike were required to face the issue; some did so openly and honestly, while others attempted to ignore it, hoping that it would disappear. Into this fray strode William Jennings Bryan, the fearless leader of multiple causes. From about the time of the publication of The Fundamentals in the second decade of the century, to his death in 1925, Bryan unhesitatingly and remorselessly attacked German higher criticism, Darwinian evolution, and, perhaps more significantly, their adherents. Some writers, like Furniss, believe that Bryan was strategic to the entire Fundamentalist movement, and that when he died, the movement

58 Ibid.
died with him. Others, such as Szasz, believe that "he was by no means the main leader of the Fundamentalist movement, and he certainly was not Fundamentalism itself."\(^{59}\) Rather, he is seen as more of a political opportunist who seized the issues of the day--and the Fundamentalist movement itself--in order to further his own ends. Szasz believes that Bryan brought the issue of evolution to a dying Fundamentalism and thus gave it new life for a few years. With his passing, however, the last gasp of the movement was but a few years away. However, Szasz would say, the movement did not require Bryan's death to bring about its own. It was rather in its last throes when it met the Commoner. Szasz concludes:

No one could take over the Fundamentalist movement from William Jennings Bryan because William Jennings Bryan had taken over the Fundamentalist movement. By his sudden increased interest in evolution, his lack of theological training, his concern for all aspects of Christianity, especially the social gospel, and the magic of his name, he had thrust himself into the center of the controversy. . . . Moreover, Bryan was an inclusive force whereas the other Fundamentalists were primarily exclusive. His tolerance, perspective, and genial warmth were to be found in none of his successors. In spite of their activities, none of his followers could approach the publicity which Bryan received just by being Bryan. After 1925 the Fundamentalist movement was largely limited to attempts at passing anti-evolution legislation and defections from the mainline Protestant denominations.\(^{60}\)

The actual relationship between the Fundamentalist


\(^{60}\)Ibid., 275.
movement and William Jennings Bryan appears to lie somewhere between the perspectives of Furniss and Szasz. In fact, the movement did not die with Bryan; most of the major mainline denominations continued to struggle with the issues of fundamentalism and modernism for years. As late as the 1940s, Baptists were engaged in fierce debate over the issue; and other Fundamentalists established new associations and denominations as late as the 1960s. Furthermore, as has been demonstrated, Bryan was more than just a political opportunist. He carried a concern for the moral and spiritual development of the youth of America for many years prior to the outbreak of the Controversy itself. What he saw happening to young people in the colleges and schools of the nation in the second decade of this century, however, prompted him to action. The Fundamentalist movement gave him a ready vehicle for the expression of this concern. The marriage seems to have been more satisfactory than some critics believe.

One of the most effective vehicles for communication that Bryan used in getting his message to the people was the Chautauqua circuit. To these gatherings--held in small towns and large cities across the land--the common people flocked to hear speakers whose topics covered the spectrum, and whose elocutionary abilities varied likewise. Politicians, orators, theologians, educators, and social reformers all sought to promote their agendas on the Chautauqua
platform. In this milieu, however, Bryan felt truly at home, because here he was in touch with grassroots America. It will be the intent of the following chapter to investigate this unique relationship between The Commoner and his people.
CHAPTER III
CHAUTAUQUA--BRYAN'S LINK WITH THE COMMON MAN

Introduction

Of all the titles ascribed to him during the years of his public life, Bryan probably valued most being called The Great Commoner. In this designation can be seen one of the themes of his life and a value which drove him relentlessly toward the common people. He always felt slightly uncomfortable in the presence of wealth, although he himself amassed a considerable amount of this world's goods. By some accounts, he is said to have died a millionaire. Nevertheless, he felt an affinity with the common people that persistently brought him back to them.

The title itself--The Great Commoner--was first given to Bryan at the conclusion of the 1896 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, where he made his famous "Cross of Gold" speech and thus won the heart of the Democratic Party. Williams records Bryan's departure from a Chicago hotel:

As he was about to leave the hotel a representative of one of the large railroads came in to offer him a private car for the home-ward trip. Bryan considered when a young newspaperman, Willis J. Abbott (later editor of the Christian Science Monitor) stepped forward and said, 'Mr. Bryan, you should not accept this offer. You are the great Commoner, the people's candidate, and it would not do to accept favors from the great railroad corporations.' 'You are right,' said
Bryan, as he declined the offer and the title of the 'Great Commoner' stuck to him for the rest of his life.¹

Bryan might well have received this title a few years earlier, however, as he championed the cause of the Populist Movement in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Describing his rise to political prominence in Nebraska, Mahnken notes:

Bryan . . . was the product of agrarian discontent. His first election to Congress in 1890 came in a year in which Nebraskans were showing at the ballot box their dissatisfaction with the depressed state of agriculture on the Great Plains. Bryan; Omer M. Kem, a Populist; and W. A. McKeighan, a Democratic-Populist fusion candidate were sent to the House of Representatives as a completely new Congressional delegation. The explanation for their victory lay in the popular discontent which the Farmers Alliance and the Populist party had sensed and exploited. Bryan from the beginning of his political career was probably more influenced by populism than he realized.²

Echoing a populist theme, Bryan later wrote about the plight of the American farmer:

Thus in every State, . . . the proportion of home-owning farmers is decreasing and that of tenant farmers is increasing. This means but one thing; it means a land of landlords and tenants; and, backed by the history of every nation that has gone down, I say to you that no people can continue a free people under a free government when the great majority of its citizens are tenants of a small minority.³


Shortly after his arrival in Lincoln, Nebraska in late 1887, Bryan began to champion the cause of the American farmer; and in the Populist crusade he found a listening ear among the people. By the election of 1896, when the Populist platform was eclipsed by the gold-silver debate in the Democratic Party, he had secured his place in the hearts of agrarian America, partly through his courting of Populist advocates.

In his efforts to reach the common people with his message of change, Bryan used his newspaper--The Commoner--for many years as a vehicle of communication. However, he also attempted to reach them on a personal basis; and for this purpose, he found in the Chautauqua circuit a means perfectly suited to his purposes.

This chapter will discuss the role of the Chautauqua movement as an educational force in American society; and it will examine Bryan's role in it, both as an entertaining speaker who offered to the common people a brief respite from their toils and as a platform or sounding board for many of the ideas that he would later carry into the political and religious arenas.

History and Purpose of the Chautauqua Movement

Like its predecessor, the Lyceum Bureau, the Chautauqua movement represented a response to the need of pioneering Americans for intellectual and cultural stimulation. In the early nineteenth century, the Lyceum Bureau had come into
existence as a separate, popular system of education designed to take up where community schools left off. The Lyceum offered a system of informal or non-formal education that complemented the grade-school education possessed by many people on the frontier.

One of the most well-known of these educational vehicles was the Chicago Redpath Lyceum Bureau. The lyceums were very successful in frontier areas, where, because of the hardships of their new life and the distance between them and "civilization," people who had left the relative comforts of the East to resettle on the frontier sought further education and exposure to higher culture in the absence of universities and centers of cultural awareness.

Because of its political, social, and economic impact on America, the Civil War greatly reduced the need and effectiveness of the lyceum system of education. People lacked discretionary time for, or interest in, the topics that the lyceum had brought to them. However, when the war ended, the desire for education and culture once more became a popular felt need, and the Chautauqua movement filled this void in the lives of the common people again. Thus, it continued the valuable educational work that the Lyceum had begun. Referring to the more formal academic aspects of the new movement, Gould notes:

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The Chautauqua movement offered the discouraged settlers of the new west a link with the heritage they felt they had lost. The books and lessons widened the narrow circle of their lives, and they sought to find in their courses of study a set of unchanging principles that could guide them through their difficulties.5

William Jennings Bryan would both use and shape this American phenomenon, in order to take his religious, social and political message to the common people. On the Chautauqua circuit, he would find a listening and appreciative ear, even when the rest of the country was rejecting his reform message.

The Founders

Frontier Americans, then, wanted something more than the daily routine of their difficult new life. To meet this need, the Chautauqua movement was formed by two men, one a cleric, the other an entrepreneurial businessman. Morrison notes:

Chautauqua began in the minds of two Methodists, stout-hearted, imaginative, and intellectually flexible, one of whom eventually became resident bishop of his church in Europe, with headquarters in Zurich, the other an inventor and manufacturer whose business success enabled him to become an important benefactor not only to Chautauqua but to other institutions as well. Both acquired an early interest, amounting to a passion, in education, strengthened by the fact that each had to forego, or felt called on to forego, the higher education he would have liked to complete.6

5Ibid., 11.

Bishop John Heyl Vincent was a clergyman who began his career as a circuit riding preacher and eventually rose to the position of bishop in the Methodist Church. He pastored local congregations from 1857; he established the Sunday School Quarterly in 1868, for the purpose of promoting higher standards in Sunday School teaching; and in 1869 he was chosen as the first General Agent of the Methodist Sunday School Union. Concerned with securing good Sunday School teaching from unlearned and untrained lay men and women, Vincent promoted two-day Sunday School Institutes (similar to Normal Institutes for public school teachers).

Lewis Miller was a prosperous Akron, Ohio manufacturer whose devotion to Methodism was as strong as his love for work. Like Bishop Vincent, he was devoted to the Sunday School. In fact, Gould notes that he even designed and built a Sunday School hall for the First Methodist Church in Akron.7 Miller was also strongly committed to education. Morrison notes:

... his passion for education continued in full force. He was a member of the Akron Board of Education and served as its president for several terms. In 1865 he joined and later became president of the Board of Trustees of Mount Union College, said to be the first in America to give full educational privileges to women as well as men, and the first to include electives instead of limiting the students to a four-term academic year, giving students who came mostly from farm families the opportunity to use any of the terms for study or for work, as circumstances made it seem best. The four-term year was still a novelty when William Rainey Harper, after leaving Yale and Chautauqua,

7Gould, 3.
installed it at the University of Chicago. Miller also urged making the scientific faculty as broad as possible and commended the value of soil chemistry, surveying, and other practical applications of science for the clientele of the college. Besides his services as trustee, Miller and his brothers became considerable benefactors to Mount Union as well.\(^8\)

Bishop Vincent desired to offer to all educationally-disadvantaged Americans the means of their own advancement in knowledge and cultural awareness. He categorized people into four basic classes: those with inherited wealth and privilege; the working class who generally remain in this condition for their lives; the few who fight their way to power and intellectual acumen; and the many of the working class who gradually awaken to the realization that their lot in life has cost them educational opportunity and expanded horizons. According to Vincent, this last group too often fails to realize that the gaining of education and culture is never too late. Chautauqua was designed with these people in mind, to give them:

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\text{. . . the college student's outlook upon the world of thought, by short studies in literature and science, by the reading of books, by the preparation of synopses of books read, by written reports of books read, and by correspondence with experts in the several departments.}^{9}\]

It was to the working class as a whole, and specifically to those who realized that they needed additional education of some kind, that Bryan would appeal through his oratorical

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\(^{8}\)Ibid., 25.

skills, as he travelled from town to town--by train, horse-drawn carriage, horseback, and even on foot--carrying his message of hope, encouragement, and the need for change.

In 1874, Vincent and Miller collaborated and decided to open a large Sunday School institute in a setting of natural beauty, such as a lakeshore, where lay people would be able to come and take advantage of the scenery and serenity while exercising their minds in the study of Sunday School and other topics. The men chose a camp-meeting site on Lake Chautauqua in western New York as the home for their new venture. Hurlbut notes that the initial focus of the new movement was primarily the improvement of religious education through the Sunday School. As the movement grew, however, so did the interests and topics discussed. In addition, Bishop Vincent's own aversion to the traditional "camp-meeting" atmosphere of emotion and excitement to the neglect of reason and intellect may have stimulated him to develop the Chautauqua concept beyond the initial focus of the Sunday School.

The Founding

The beginning of Chautauqua was inauspicious at best. Hurlbut records that "It was opened on Tuesday evening, August 4, 1874, in the out-of-doors auditorium, now Miller

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10 Ibid., 27-28.

11 Ibid., 23.
Park, beginning with a brief responsive service of Scripture and song, prepared by Dr. Vincent." It quickly became apparent, however, that the new institution was meeting a felt need among its constituents. Morrison records that the average daily attendance during the first year program was approximately four thousand, with as many as twenty-five thousand attending at one time or another. He also notes that:

the core of earnest seekers . . . consisted of ministers and Sunday school superintendents and teachers, and from the beginning they represented denominations besides the Methodist. Presbyterians, Baptists, and Congregationalists spoke from the platform. 13

Portman adds that, by 1889, over 20,000 people had graduated from the Chautauqua academic plan. 14 Hurlbut, who was an early ally of Vincent and Miller at Chautauqua, summarizes the founding purposes of the new institution which was to reach out to hundreds of thousands of Americans during the course of its existence:

First, Chautauqua, now an institution for general and popular education, began in the department of religion as taught in the Sunday School. Second, it was an out-of-doors school, held in the forest, blazing the way and setting the pace of summer schools in the open air throughout the nation and the world. Third, although held upon a camp meeting ground it was widely different in aim and method, spirit, and clientele from the old-fashioned camp meeting. Fourth, it maintained the sanctity of the Sabbath, closed its gates, and frowned

12 Ibid., 49-50.

13 Morrison, 34.

upon every attempt to secularize or commercialize the holy day, or to make it a day of pleasure. Fifth, the enterprise was supported, not by collections at its services, or by contributions from patrons, but by a fee upon entrance from every comer. Sixth, it was to represent not one branch of the church, but to bring together all the churches in acquaintance and friendship, to promote, not church union, but church unity. And seventh, let it be added that it was to be in no sense a money-making institution. There were trustees but no stockholders, and no dividends. If any funds remained after paying the necessary expenses, they were to be used for the improvement of the grounds or the enlargement of the program. Upon these foundations Chautauqua has stood and has grown to greatness.\(^{15}\)

The Curriculum

Although the Sunday School and the Bible were the central themes of the Movement when it began, the curriculum quickly diversified until "Chautauqua became a summer university . . . offering more than two hundred courses, taught by nearly one hundred and fifty instructors."\(^{16}\) Morrison indicates the probable reason for this development:

Both men were entirely hospitable to science and general knowledge, including music and the arts, as proper studies in a world made by a universal creator. Both possessed independence and curiosity of mind, and would not be deterred from carrying out their educational ambitions by narrowness of piety or contentions of sect. They had that freedom from intellectual intimidation that can accompany a strong central faith when it is in fact faith and not a predetermined adherence to vulnerable tenets. Neither was by temperament a theologian, but rather concerned with the improvement of the human condition and the use of fundamental Christian piety and ethics as an instrument to that end.\(^{17}\)

\(^{15}\)Hurlbut, 36-37.

\(^{16}\)Ibid., 162.

\(^{17}\)Morrison, 26-27.
Such a description could also fit William Jennings Bryan, who throughout his life was committed to the betterment of the living conditions of the common man, and who saw his Christianity as a means toward that end. While it would be much later in his career before he concerned himself with the actual curriculum of education, Bryan was vitally interested in improving the lot of the common people, and he utilized the Chautauqua platform to promote that goal. Of all the Chautauqua speakers, he was one of the foremost promoters of biblical themes in his orations, for he believed that the principles delineated in Scripture had a direct application to life.

This is not to say that the Bible was devalued by others in the early days of Chautauqua; in fact, Portman notes that "... never has so much and so intelligent thought been given to the place that the Bible shall occupy in the Chautauqua Movement."\(^{18}\) However, Vincent and Miller quickly realized that their audience desired intellectual stimulation in a variety of areas, and they responded to this need by expanding the Chautauqua curriculum. Morrison notes, though, that by 1894 theological readings were eliminated from the curriculum because of protests by the students against theological prescription due to their diverse religious interests.\(^{19}\)

\(^{18}\)Portman, 204.

\(^{19}\)Morrison, 61.
Summer Schools and the C.L.S.C.

Within five years of the founding of Chautauqua, the institution had developed into a full-fledged summer school program, with correspondence or extension work being conducted around the country. Speaking of the 1879 season, Hurlbut notes:

On July 17th began the classes in the Chautauqua Normal School of Languages, held in a rough board-walled, white-washed building, which had formerly been used as a lodging-house, but was no longer needed since cottages had opened their doors to guests. This may be regarded as the formal opening of the Chautauqua Summer Schools, although already classes had been held, some of them three years, others four years, in Greek, Hebrew, and kindergarten instruction.20

Thus, what had at one time been a religious camp-meeting ground was now transformed into a bustling center of academic activity sparked by intellectual curiosity on the part of those who faithfully attended each year. Morrison quotes Bishop Vincent's conviction about this phenomenon:

'I am thoroughly convinced,' Vincent writes . . . 'that there is a hunger of mind abroad in the land,--in the rural districts, in the villages, among the working-people, and the trades-people, the people that are not acquainted with school thought and school learning in the higher forms.'21

The Chautauqua curriculum became formalized in what was called the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circles (C.L.S.C.). Announced in 1878, the C.L.S.C. consisted of a four-year cycle of readings culminating in a diploma and

20Hurlbut, 160.

21Morrison, 54.
graduation, either on the conference grounds at Lake Chautauqua or in one of the many extension centers which would develop elsewhere. Hurlbut comments that the C.L.S.C. was Bishop Vincent's dream come true. Acutely aware of his own lack of higher education, he was committed to making the best minds of the world available to his students through extensive readings.²² A short list of these readings includes the following works:

1. John Richard Green, *Short History of the English People*

2. Stopford Brooke, *English Literature*

3. J. Dorman Steele, *Fourteen Weeks in Human Physiology*

4. Charles Kingsley, *Hypatia*

5. Richard T. Ely, *An Introduction to Political Economy*

6. James Bryce, *Social Institutions of the United States*

7. Jane Addams, *Newer Ideals of Peace*

"Even so sketchy a sampling," says Morrison, "shows that the choice of reading for the CLSC, at least at its best, represented a much more than respectable range of knowledge and level of intellectual understanding."²³ Basically, the readings covered the histories and thought of four nations: England, America, Greece, and Rome. Students could enter the course of study at any one of these four points and

²²Hurlbut, 116-17.

²³Morrison, 62.
eventually graduate, having completed all four academic areas.  

The C.L.S.C. grew rapidly, to the point that, as Gould notes, "In an incredibly short period of time, nearly every community of any size in the United States had at least one person following the Chautauqua reading program as a member of the C.L.S.C." Morrison adds that, by 1891, Bishop Vincent reported a membership of 180,000; and by 1918 the total enrollment had surpassed 300,000. Despite a period of decline between the late 1890s and the years of the Great Depression, the C.L.S.C. continued to attract a wide audience, both at home and abroad, as Morrison notes:

Riding on its initial momentum, the CLSC achieved a rate of growth that seemed to recognize no visible limit. Its cumulative total by 1940, as reported by Chautauqua President Arthur E. Bestor to the New York commission of education, had reached a membership of three quarters of a million, of whom 10 percent had graduated. Members and circles spanned not only the United States, but the continents and subcontinents from Labrador to Argentina, from Puerto Rico to Ceylon, from Russia to Korea. Europe was represented along with China, India, Turkey, Japan, South Africa.

Chautauqua As University

The educational designs of the founders of Chautauqua seemingly knew no bounds, so that, for a short period of time, the various academic programs were combined into a

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24Hurlbut, 170.


26Morrison, 69-70.
university concept. By 1883, several distinct programs of study has been developed: the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, the Chautauqua Teachers Retreat (later called the School of Pedagogy), the Chautauqua School of Languages, and the School of Theology. Perhaps in an effort to gain respectability in the academic community, Vincent and Miller sought for and received university status for their institution on 30 March 1883, from the New York State Legislature. Despite the educational uniqueness of this new venture, it was now a fully recognized university, with the right to confer degrees. Gould comments:

In less than ten years, what began as a modest project for improving the quality of teaching in Sunday schools was now a full-fledged university, although uniquely different from any other university in the world. This in itself was sufficiently miraculous. Certainly no one would have been foolhardy enough to predict that this freak among universities would put the stamp of its own uniqueness on all of American higher education. But that is what happened, and here Fate uniquely combined character, chance, and circumstance.\textsuperscript{27}

In its drive for academic respectability, the new University even enjoyed the services, for a time, of William Rainey Harper, who would later become President of the University of Chicago. At Chautauqua, Harper served as principal of the educational system until 1895, dividing his time between Chicago and New York.\textsuperscript{28} Thus, it is evident that the Chautauqua University concept was by no means

\textsuperscript{27}Gould, 13.

\textsuperscript{28}Morrison, 78.
without acceptance within the realm of higher education.

Despite the assistance of educators such as Harper, the new university lacked several critical elements which were necessary for its perpetuation: endowment funds; a proper academic calendar to enable it to carry on its instructional program throughout the year; and a president or chancellor who could conduct the vital work of friend- and fund-raising. As a result, by 1892 the university was forced to relinquish its title of University; in 1898 it abandoned its degree-granting status; and by the turn of the century, it even ceased to offer official correspondence courses except through the C.L.S.C.²⁹ Once more, the educational program became known simply as "The Chautauqua System of Education;" and in so doing, the organization reverted to its originally intended purpose of providing continuing education on a popular basis.

Traveling Chautauqua

Shortly after the founding of Chautauqua in New York, other communities began to emulate the program. Independent Chautauquas began to spring up throughout the Midwest region and beyond to accommodate those who, for financial or other reasons, were unable to travel to Lake Chautauqua for the "main" program each summer. Hurlbut notes that, within fifteen years of its founding, nearly a hundred independent

²⁹See Morrison, 49-50 and Hurlbut, 228.
assemblies existed, which quickly evolved into a "circuit Chautauqua." He adds:

Chautauqua never took a copyright upon the name or a patent for the idea. It was natural, however, for many of these Assemblies to combine their interests, for it soon found that half a dozen Chautauquas in the same section could save expenses by employing the same group of speakers and passing them on from one gathering to another. There were already lyceum bureaus offering lecturers and entertainers. At first the Assemblies secured a few of their speakers from these offices, and after a few years their entire programs were arranged in conjunction with the bureaus. Finally the lyceum agencies began to organize and conduct assemblies directly, and thus the Chautauqua circuit or the system of a Chautauqua chain was developed.30

Thus, Chautauqua became a rallying point for the common people in small towns which offered little contact with the world beyond their own Main Street. In fact, as Ashby remarks:

By the early 1900s, the Chautauqua was one of the most familiar forms of popular culture in small towns throughout the nation. . . . Across the nation, small towns came up with their own versions of "Chautauqua week," usually trying to bring in famous people to give a series of lectures or performances. Chautauqua became a large business; agencies organized tours by which orators, musicians, singers, and other entertainers took "culture" to the provinces. The main purpose was ostensibly to educate and uplift. For local people, Chautauqua could be an unforgettable experience, offering the opportunity to see and hear nationally known people, including former presidents, popular writers, and other celebrities.31

Indeed, Chautauqua tended to flourish, not in large cities but in small communities of a thousand or less. To these

30Hurlbut, 384-85.

31Ashby, 106-07.
hamlets, several thousand people would migrate for the annual Chautauqua week. Braving the intense summer heat, incessant attacks by swarms of mosquitoes, fierce storms, and even tornadoes, the people faithfully streamed back to the Chautauqua tent each year, to hear their favorite speakers—even those whom they might already have heard give the same lecture on numerous other Chautauqua tours. Among these favorites, and perhaps best loved of them all, was William Jennings Bryan. In truth, Bryan seemed to love the small town atmosphere as much as the people themselves did, for he returned to them just as faithfully year after year.

As the "mother Chautauqua" in New York sought to provide a variety of interesting topics for those who attended, the traveling Chautauquas did likewise. Gould notes:

Traveling Chautauqua brought to the attention of millions of Americans an impressive number of new ideas and concepts, many of which might never have received the popular support that guaranteed their acceptance. The graduated income tax, slum clearance, juvenile courts, pure food laws, the school lunch program, free textbooks, a balanced diet, physical fitness, the Camp Fire Girls, and the Boy Scout Movement—all these and many more were concepts introduced by circuit Chautauqua to communities that had heard of them—if at all—only from the occasional schoolteacher or minister who had had the good fortune to spend a few weeks at Chautauqua Lake.33

Morrison notes that these independent Chautauquas sometimes honored, and at other times discredited, the original

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32Hurlbut, 386-87; Ashby, 107.
33Gould, 81-82.
institution in New York.\textsuperscript{34} Little or no control was placed on the curricular content of the independents, so that on occasion the founders might have been embarrassed had they known what was being proclaimed under the name of "Chautauqua." Nevertheless, the programs seemed to flourish wherever they went, probably because of the intense hunger of the people for intellectual and cultural stimulation.

**Famous Personalities at Chautauqua**

Speakers from a variety of disciplines were attracted to the Chautauqua program---both the main program on Lake Chautauqua as well as the independent chapters. A list of speakers compiled by Jesse Hurlbut reveals that the program drew preachers, educators, authors and editors, social reformers, and political leaders. A few examples from each category quickly demonstrate the breadth of topics that were covered during the course of Chautauqua lectures:

1. **Preachers:**
   - Harry Emerson Fosdick
   - Washington Gladden
   - T. DeWitt Talmage
   - Cornelius Woelfkin

2. **Educators:**
   - Charles W. Eliot
   - Richard T. Ely
   - G. Stanley Hall
   - William Rainey Harper
   - William T. Harris
   - Francis W. Parker
   - Booker T. Washington

3. **Authors/Editors:**
   - Lyman Abbott
   - Henry Drummond
   - Edward E. Hale

\textsuperscript{34}Morrison, 161.
Rear Admiral Peary
Henry Watterson

4. Social Reformers: Jane Addams
Susan B. Anthony
Maude B. Booth
Julia Ward Howe
Francis E. Willard

5. Political Leaders: President James A. Garfield
President Ulysses S. Grant
President Rutherford B. Hayes
President William McKinley
President Theodore Roosevelt
President William H. Taft
Hon. William Jennings Bryan
Senator Mark A. Hanna
Governor Charles E. Hughes
Governor Robert M. LaFollette

In addition to Bryan and LaFollette, other notables participated in the independent Chautauquas: Albert W. Beveridge, Lincoln Steffens, Eugene V. Debs, and George W. Norris from the political realm; and clergymen such as John McCormack, Bishop John Ireland, and Rabbi Stephen Wise.  

Women were also noticeable, as Hurlbut notes:

Francis Willard was the first but by no means the last woman to lecture on the Chautauqua platform. Mrs. Mary A. Livermore soon followed her, and before many summers had passed, Dr. Vincent was introducing to the Chautauqua constituency women as freely as men, to speak on the questions of the time.

Thus, the future cause of women's suffrage received some of its initial impetus through the Chautauqua program.

Bryan fit the Chautauqua platform well, since many of

\[35\text{Hurlbut, 395-99.}\]

\[36\text{Gould, 80-82.}\]

\[37\text{Hurlbut, 77-78.}\]
the preachers, educators, authors, reformers and politicians who shared the podium with him were as interested in reform as he was. Like him, they had realized that the common people represented a large voting block, and the Chautauqua Movement offered direct access to their ears and their hearts, if not always to their minds.

Admittedly, not all the Chautauqua programs beyond the main one in New York adhered to rigorous standards of academic preparation for their chosen speakers. Portman quotes the program for the 1889 Chautauqua program in Northampton, Massachusetts:

The lecture platform for the present year needs no comments since it comprised such men as Geo. [sic] Makepeace Towle, Robert Nourse, C. E. Boulton . . . , J. H. Mansfield, Charles Parkhurst, Pleasant Hunter, C. T. Winchester, Alexander McKenzie, all with their D.D.'s and other honorable titles.\(^3\)

For the most part, Vincent and Miller, as well as their successors at Lake Chautauqua, appear to have selected their speakers more carefully, on the basis of academic preparation and social, political, or religious contributions to society.

**Chautauqua and the Church**

From the list of preachers and religious leaders who spoke at Chautauqua, it can be seen that the founders of the movement sought to incorporate in their programs the religious diversity that existed in America even at that time.

\(^3\)Portman, 207.
Although it might be argued that the flavor of religious speakers was predominantly Protestant, nevertheless those of other faiths were welcomed as well, especially if they were able to speak on a popular topic that extended beyond the boundaries of their own denominational interests. Hurlbut extols the virtues of this religious pluralism:

It is a great fact that for nearly fifty years the loyal members of almost every church in the land have come together at Chautauqua, all in absolute freedom to speak their minds, yet with never the least friction or controversy. And this relation was not one of an armed neutrality between bodies in danger of breaking out into open war. It did not prevent a good-natured raillery on the Chautauqua platform between speakers of different denominations. If anyone had a joke at the expense of the Baptists or the Methodists or the Presbyterians, he never hesitated to tell it before five thousand people, even with the immediate prospect of being demolished by a retort from the other side. 39

Morrison also notes that Chautauqua represented, from the religious side, an attempt by Protestants at a "new synthesis of the modern mind and the Christian faith." 40 He commends the founders of Chautauqua for combining their faith and vision with a rich program in the arts, in an attempt "to relate the totality of the Christian message to the totality of human experience." 41 Finally, he quotes Arthur Bestor, Sr., who served as President of Chautauqua for a time:

The Institution has stood for a conception of religion

39 Ibid., 34-35.
40 Morrison, 244-45.
41 Ibid., 246.
which includes . . . intellectual integrity, moral earnestness, appreciation of beauty and above all a social solidarity and obligation of service. Chautauqua has played an important part in breaking down the barriers between churches, . . . and in shifting the emphasis from a personal, individualistic salvation to the concept of 'The World the Subject of Redemption,' from the idea of the Kingdom of God as a remote society in another world to that of a social order to be realized in this.42

William Jennings Bryan would readily fit the religious mold, if indeed it existed, of the Chautauqua program. His particular brand of Christianity, with its emphasis upon social redemption based upon personal, individual conversion, proved attractive to the American common people, who turned out in droves to hear Bryan and others expound these topics. Chautauqua thus became a suitable vehicle for delivering this message to an audience that was always ready to hear it.

**William Jennings Bryan and Chautauqua**

Of all the Chautauqua speakers to hold forth, either at Lake Chautauqua or on the circuit, none was more popular than William Jennings Bryan. Wherever the Chautauqua program was found, it seemed, Bryan would appear; and the audiences loved him. Comparing him to other speakers on the program, Hurlbut says:

But the great audience assembled, packing the Amphitheater to its utmost corner, with a great ring of people standing around it, to hear William Jennings Bryan. On account of an afternoon lecture in Ohio, he sent word that he could not arrive until 8:45 in the

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42 Ibid., 238.
evening, and it was nine when at last he stood upon the platform. But he held the crowd in rapt attention to the end of his plea. . . . 43

The crowds waited on his every word, and Bryan responded generously to their need for challenge and encouragement. For years, he could be found every summer speaking somewhere on the circuit. Cherny describes his itinerary:

Every summer Bryan took to the lecture circuit, usually through the Chautauqua. . . . Before the 1920s, Chautauqua programs emphasized speakers over entertainment, and Bryan delivered more Chautauqua lectures than any other prominent figure. Nearly every summer for a quarter-century, he spent three months traveling the circuit, delivering 200-300 speeches each year in nearly that many small towns. He usually spoke twice a day on social, religious, educational, and political questions. 44

Oblivious to the summer heat, inclement weather, dusty roads, and midnight train rides to move from one speaking engagement to another, Bryan proclaimed his social, political and religious agenda before thousands of Americans each year through this unique vehicle of communication. He was warmly welcomed, not only by his audience but by the organizers of the Chautauqua programs as well. They could count on him to draw a large crowd and to make his appearance on the scheduled night, despite his late arrival at times because of prior engagements; and as Case notes:

He didn't drink, smoke, or swear. There was no fear of his going off the deep end over a village siren or a

43Hurlbut, 318.

member of the Gay Belles of the South that might travel on the same circuit. There were no secret games of penny ante nor any exchange of baudy jokes with the local raconteur. These faults belonged to lesser giants. Bryan had no hidden vices, even of the smallest.\textsuperscript{45}

Morrison adds that Bryan treated the Chautauqua program managers and tent crews with respect, and they could always count on his help if they needed it.\textsuperscript{46}

\textbf{Chautauqua As a Link with the Common Man}

Given his antipathy to the rich eastern elite of the country, it was natural that Bryan gravitated toward the Chautauqua program; for it was here that he found his kind of people, who represented to him the broader spectrum of American society. His wife, Mary Baird Bryan, notes that he "recognized Chautauqua as an opportunity for listening to and speaking to the mind of his country . . . ," and that the "lecture platform furnished him with a means . . . for presenting his thoughts and ideals to the public."\textsuperscript{47} This attentive public, moreover, returned to hear him time and again--sometimes hearing the same speeches that they had heard before. Morrison notes, for example, that Bryan delivered his most famous speech--\textit{The Prince of Peace}--in


\textsuperscript{46}Morrison, 186.

three thousand tent circuits over a period of twenty years.\textsuperscript{48} Hurlbut records the Commoner's own testimony, in an interview given to the \textit{Review of Reviews}:

The Chautauqua affords one of the best opportunities now presented a public speaker for the discussion of questions of interest to the people. The audience is a select one, always composed of the thoughtful element in the community, and as they pay admission, they stay to hear. I believe that a considerable part of the progress that is now being made along the line of moral and political reform is traceable to the influence of the Chautauqua.\textsuperscript{49}

Bryan deeply respected his audience, for in his mind, the common people were the real engine of reform in the country. Ashby notes:

No matter what unexpected delays or difficulties arose, he refused to complain or lose his temper. Invariably, he cared about his audience and spent hours after lectures talking with people, never seeming to notice shabby clothing and grizzled appearances.\textsuperscript{50}

In addition, he refused to insult the intelligence of his listeners by giving boring or stale lectures. Ashby describes his oratorical appeal:

No matter how many thousands of times he had given a particular lecture, he was always enthusiastic. Audiences never encountered a jaded Bryan, simply going through the motions. Standing before them in his oversized coat and baggy, wrinkled trousers, flicking his famous palm-leaf fan to keep cool, and consuming huge quantities of ice water, he spoke with a simple eloquence. . . This was his turf, far more than a Madison Square Garden. The people who showed up to hear him--as did some thirty thousand in Shelbyville,

\textsuperscript{48}Morrison, 187.

\textsuperscript{49}Hurlbut, 388.

\textsuperscript{50}Ashby, 108.
Illinois—were those with whom he felt a particular kinship.\textsuperscript{51}

Thus, it seems that whatever topic he chose to address on a given occasion, Bryan was assured of an enthusiastic and supportive audience. Whether those who heard him were as critical or discerning as they should have been may be debatable, but they almost always stood by their hero—the Great Commoner—and he rarely failed to meet their expectations.

Chautauqua and Bryan’s Personal Finances

For many years, Bryan was reimbursed for his Chautauqua appearances just as any other speaker on the circuit. In fact, he was at times more generous than necessary with the circuit organizers. Describing one segment of Bryan’s years in the Chautauqua program, Wilson comments:

\begin{quote}
His ‘regular’ fee was $250 for a ninety-minute address, but he paid his own expenses and declined to collect when attendance fell below one-half the tent-theater’s seating capacity. His gratis or benefit appearances for schools, churches, or other worthy causes, repeatedly totaled a third of his entire schedule, and during this period he declined to collect fees for appearances in Nebraska.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

Ashby adds:

\begin{quote}
He insisted that children pay no admission and that adult tickets be cheap. Although he was important enough to have received a guaranteed minimum payment for each performance, he relied upon a percentage of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{51}Ashby, 109.

the gate. He preferred constantly to test his power to draw an audience, rather than take for granted any stipulated sum. 53

Until he took a public office, critics paid little attention to Bryan’s work on the Chautauqua circuit, probably because so many other popular speakers plied the same crowds with their message and their wares. However, when he became Secretary of State in 1913 under President Wilson, his Chautauqua association quickly became a lightning-rod for the criticisms of his opponents. Sensing a conflict of interest, these opponents attacked Bryan for using his public office for personal gain. Williams records some of their charges:

For a member of the Cabinet to deliver a Chautauqua address or discuss great social and economic questions before his fellowmen in a democracy like ours would not seem to be a crime! Indeed it would seem to involve nothing offensive whatever, but the hue and cry which the Eastern press raised, made a din that could be heard around the world. The heavens were filled with the tumult and the shouting. Bryan had ‘disgraced’ his great office. He had descended to the role of a mere entertainer. ‘He must go home at once and stick to his desk.’ ‘America was losing caste before the nations.’ These were the yells that were hurled at Bryan . . . . Many of the papers frantically appealed to Wilson to stop Bryan, as if some terrible national disgrace were about to fall upon the country. 54

Admittedly, Bryan was a shrewd investor and had developed a considerable estate over the years of his public life. Ashby notes that by 1908, he was "worth at least two

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53 Ashby, 108.

hundred thousand dollars, and could earn a hundred thousand annually from Chautauqua tours, where ‘Bryan Day’ was the highlight.\textsuperscript{55} Nevertheless, he seemed definitely in line with the standard political practice of his day by accepting fees for his Chautauqua lectures. In fact, it might be argued that, by addressing Chautauqua crowds, he was actually staying in touch with more of America than many of his colleagues in Congress or the Senate. Nevertheless, his adversaries in government heaped severe criticism upon him because of it. Furthermore, they castigated him for identifying with what they considered to be a circus atmosphere, especially in the travelling Chautauqua programs. Ashby notes that "It seemed ridiculous for him to appear, as journalist Mark Sullivan later caustically wrote, with 'jugglers, female impersonators, and swiss yodelers.'"\textsuperscript{56}

Unmoved by all this criticism, Bryan continued to lecture on the Chautauqua circuit and to accept his fees with the stipulations and conditions as noted. In truth, the office of Secretary of State created certain financial demands which necessitated income beyond the salary appropriated for his position. In addition, Cherny notes that, by this point in his career, Bryan was engaged in numerous philanthropic endeavors; he was beginning to improve land that he had purchased in Florida for the purposes of

\textsuperscript{55}Ashby, 135,

\textsuperscript{56}Ashby, 146.
eventual retirement; he rented a summer home in Asheville, North Carolina; and he had to rent a home in Washington which was both suitable and properly staffed for diplomatic entertaining.\textsuperscript{57} Thus, Bryan had sought and obtained permission from the President to continue lecturing on the Chautauqua circuit; and he relinquished regular vacations in order to accomplish this goal. After leaving the office of Secretary of State, he responded to one of his literary critics:

What you say in regard to Chautauqua lectures dignifies a very unjust criticism engaged in by a very small portion of the public. The President approved of my Chautauqua work--which, by the way, occupied fifteen days in two years. I had less vacation than any clerk in my department; other secretaries were able to travel without criticism. I lectured at Chautauqua before I was nominated for the Presidency and afterwards. President Taft lectured at Chautauqua after he was elected; Vice President Marshall and Speaker Clark while they were in office. Nobody ever criticized them. It cost me over ten thousand dollars to serve the Government a little over two years.\textsuperscript{58}

While perhaps some might have justly criticized him because of the obvious socio-economic gap between his Washington lifestyle and that of his Chautauqua audiences, Bryan seems to have suffered unnecessary political reproach on this issue from his opponents.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the Chautauqua movement was doomed to be

\textsuperscript{57}Cherny, 151-52.

\textsuperscript{58}Bryan, \textit{Memoirs}, 289.
lost in the twentieth-century maze of two world wars; improved communication through radio, television, and computers; and the penchant of the American public for twenty-second sound bytes. Entertainment came to mean something more than travelling for hours over hot, dusty roads in cars with no air conditioning, to sit and perspire through the orations of those who brought to the public their solutions to the problems of the world. Circuit Chautauqua was the first casualty, as Harrison notes:

Travelling Chautauqua, which took to the road in 1904, had a glamorous and footloose life. It died in 1932 under the hit-and-run wheels of a Model-A Ford on its way to the movies on a new paved road. Radio swept it into the ditch, and the Wall Street crash and the subsequent depression gave it the coup-de-grace.59

Morrison adds that the interests of the audience changed--from serious debate to a need for entertainment as a relief from the heaviness of the Great Depression; and the Chautauqua organizers could not find or attract commanding speakers to address these new topics of concern. "By the end of the 1933 season," he writes, "the circuits had virtually vanished and the tents had been struck for good."60

The "Mother Chautauqua" at Fair Point, New York continued, so that in 1974, Morrison could describe it as an oasis and place of refuge in the desert of student protests

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60 Morrison, 190.
and societal violence that was then gripping much of America. Reflecting on the long history of this institution, he remarks that, "In a world wrenching with change, Chautauqua provided an example of institutional continuity which is at least a tribute to its holding power and its stout if sometimes bewilderingly complex pursuit of its inherited goals."  

Into Chautauqua--this still, small point in the center of a chaotic universe--strode William Jennings Bryan; and he commanded the hearts and minds of the people in a way that few others could. Perhaps it was the enduring nature of Chautauqua itself that attracted the Commoner to its platforms. Bryan always seemed either a step ahead of, or behind, the rest of society. In the Chautauqua audiences, however, he found people with whom he had forged an almost indissoluble bond, and who returned season after season to give rapt attention to speeches they had heard before but never tired of hearing again. Wilson notes:

The good people of rural and small-town America attended, shelled out their dimes and quarters, and found entertainment, inspiration, good company, and surcease from loneliness. The Chautauqua was America of its times, which endured until around 1915. It was rugged and repetitive, but in its distinctive American ways it was also good, even beautiful.

In the Chautauqua Movement, Bryan found the means to

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61Ibid., 227.
62Ibid., 228.
63Wilson, 267.
informally educate the people outside the traditional classroom. It would not be until the 1920s--five years after Chautauqua had ceased to exist as a viable educational and cultural force--that he would focus more specifically upon the educational curriculum in the context of the evolution debate. For the time being, however, he utilized the circuit in a non-formal educational sense.

Bryan also sought to entertain the people with his rhetoric, his humor, and his unmitigated criticism of the eastern financial power brokers. Finally, Chautauqua provided for him an emotional release from the pressures of political campaigns and his often unrewarded labor as Secretary of State.

Reflecting on Chautauqua's most famous speaker, Mary Baird Bryan could rightly comment:

His message was so simple, so passionate, so keyed to lofty issues, it never failed to find an eager response. . . . there is no doubt as to the purity and loftiness of the conceptions of government and character which he presented, and his audiences under Chautauqua tents showed no flagging in numbers or in enthusiasm in all the years.64

The Chautauqua circuit was at least partly responsible for keeping the name of William Jennings Bryan before the American public for decades, while others fell by the political and social wayside. Bryan was able to weather three major political defeats and still return to the public limelight as a popular speaker. On the Chautauqua circuit, his

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64 Bryan, Memoirs, 286-87.
audiences had heard him expound and develop his political, religious, social and educational ideas, and they never seemed to lose confidence that he would once again rise from the ashes of defeat and lead the forces of righteousness to victory.

Indeed, Bryan was a righteous man in many respects. He was possessed by a love for the Bible and religion that surpassed most, if not all, of his political colleagues. For this, he was often berated by the liberal press; but he was undeterred. His theological convictions served as the underpinning that enabled him to return to his enemies—even after suffering bitter and humiliating defeats—to fight again. Further, it was his religious and theological beliefs that exerted a strong influence upon the rest of his thinking, including his educational ideas. It will be the focus of the next chapter to discuss and evaluate Bryan’s theological belief-system.
CHAPTER IV

BRYAN'S ESCHATOLOGY AND HIS THEOLOGY OF THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

Introduction

Although Bryan never professed to be a theologian—certainly of the academic or theoretical variety—his writings nevertheless addressed questions of theological importance. Comparing his own interest in politics and religion/theology, for example, he says:

Government affects but a part of the life which we live here and does not deal at all with the life beyond, while religion touches the infinite circle of existence as well as the small arc of that circle which we spend on earth. No greater theme, therefore, can engage our attention.¹

Bryan preferred the term "religion," since it deals with the outworking of theological belief in life. Most of his theological work was practical, attempting to show how the principles and teachings of the Bible affect the way a person lives or behaves in society. Russell correctly describes Bryan's theological system, such as it was:

William Jennings Bryan was not a trained theologian, but he liked to speak on religion even more than on politics, and the world knew that he enjoyed doing the latter! As Bryan was progressive in his political-social outlook with few important exceptions, he was conservative in his theological beliefs, also with a

few important exceptions. Since he was not a theologian, he never set forth a systematic presentation of his religious ideas. A review of his books and speeches, however, indicates his major Christian emphases.²

Russell then describes eight major theological tenets held by Bryan:

1. The infallibility of Scripture
2. The divinity of Christ
3. The virgin birth of Christ
4. The vicarious atonement of Christ
5. The bodily resurrection of Christ
6. The improvement of man and society
7. The importance of serving others
8. The justice and retribution of God³

On the one hand, then, it is strange that Bryan should concern himself with something so esoteric as eschatology—the doctrine of last things. On the other hand, his approach to the application of theology in the life of the individual and in society has definite eschatological implications. In this sense, it can be said that he possessed a fairly definite eschatological perspective, although he never expressed it explicitly in print or in his speeches.

Furthermore, Bryan apparently never felt constrained to identify himself as a promoter of the "Social Gospel," as


³Ibid., 99-102.
Smith notes:

Bryan was not theologically trained, and so far as the record indicates he did not use the term 'social gospel.' He did, however, use the term 'applied Christianity,' and it is surprising how similar in this respect his vocabulary was to that of Washington Gladden and other well-known advocates of the social gospel. 4

With the prophets of this new brand of practical Christianity, Bryan took his stand against the social ills that he saw around him in America, especially those that affected the common man. Such a position involved considerable risk politically and religiously, for conservative Protestantism seemed to have little taste for change, as Hopkins notes:

Standing in the breach against the downfall of tradition was conservatism's defense against the threats of modern civilization. Despite noble achievements in missions, children's aid, and education of the freedmen, the ethic of orthodoxy had become a sterile union of individualism and formalism. Conservative Christianity . . . while a religion of charity and experience that sent the religious man out into the byways and hedges as well as to his closet in prayer, nevertheless failed to send him into the shop or factory . . . . 5

For Bryan, this failure constituted as great a moral crime as it did for the advocates of the Social Gospel, and he willingly came alongside their cause to help where he could.

This, then, is the religious/theological perspective of William Jennings Bryan--with its implications for the Social

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Gospel—which will be examined in this chapter.

**Millennialism in Theology**

Bryan seemed to be oblivious to most of the finer distinctions of the doctrine of eschatology, especially toward the differing positions concerning the millennium. Nevertheless, his speeches and writings reveal a definite inclination toward what is known as the postmillennial view. Boettner summarizes the general similarities and differences between the major systems of thought:

The essential presuppositions of the three systems are similar. Each holds that the Scriptures are the word of God and authoritative. Each holds to the same general concept of the death of Christ as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and as the only ground for the salvation of souls. Each holds that there will be a future, visible, personal coming of Christ. Each holds that every individual is to receive a resurrection body, that all are to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, that the righteous are to be rewarded in heaven, and that the wicked are to be punished in hell. The differences arise, not because of any conscious or intended disloyalty to Scripture, but primarily because of the distinctive method employed by each system in its interpretation of Scripture, and they relate primarily to the time and purpose of Christ’s coming and to the kind of kingdom that is to be set up at His coming.  

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**The Positions Compared and Contrasted**

Of the three major millennial perspectives, premillennialism is the eschatological position which holds that Christ’s second coming to this earth is predicted in Scripture to occur prior to His thousand-year reign on

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earth. The next major event in divine history, its proponents teach, is this second coming. It will be followed by a seven-year period of persecution—directed mainly against the nation of Israel but including Gentiles as well—at the conclusion of which Christ will return as the victorious King to bind the forces of evil and to usher in a thousand-year period of peace on earth. During the millennium, He will reign as a benevolent dictator, enforcing peace and allowing no permanent departures from His moral law. Immediately following the millennium, the forces of evil will be unleashed one final time, and they will unsuccessfully attempt once more to overthrow the rule and Kingdom of God. The ultimate spiritual battle will be fought and God will win, thus ushering in the eternal state comprising a new heaven and a new earth, in which evil will never again be present.

Boettner correctly notes that premillennialists take the word "millennium" literally, to indicate a definite thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, while a- and postmillennialists take the word figuratively, "as meaning an indefinitely long period, held by some to be a part, and by others to be the whole, of the Christian era."

As its name indicates, amillennialism denies a coming literal millennial kingdom on the earth. Proponents of this view hold that Christ will simply return to earth at His

7Ibid., 5.
Second Coming and will bring in the eternal state with no intervening period. The concept of a millennium is reinterpreted to mean a long period of time. In fact, man can be described as living in the millennium right now; and the almost two thousand years which have elapsed since Christ’s first coming demonstrate that the term millennium is to be understood more broadly than a definite chronological period of a thousand years. Through the use of a symbolic or allegorical method of biblical interpretation, the amillennialist is thus able to draw out his theological position. In any case, the chronological length of the period is less important to him than the basic fact of the Second Coming of Christ.

Like the amillennialist, the postmillennial theologian sees the thousand-year period as already in progress and possibly extending well beyond a literal thousand years. In addition, Erickson notes several other motifs of this view:

1. The Kingdom of God is a present reality, not a cataclysmic future event.

2. A conversion of all nations will occur prior to Christ’s return to the earth.

3. The Kingdom will grow gradually.

4. At the end of the millennium, there will be an apostasy and a flare-up of evil related to the work of Satan and the Antichrist.

5. The millennium will end with the personal, bodily return of Christ.

6. The Lord’s return will be followed by the resurrection of all—righteous & unrighteous—to be assigned to one of two permanent places: heaven or hell.
7. The Jewish nation will be converted (not found in all postmillennialist views). Postmillennialists can be seen as the classic "eternal optimists," who view society as improving, slowly but inexorably, toward a divinely glorious conclusion. Boettner gives ample evidence of such a positive view of historical progress:

The Millennium to which the Postmillennialist looks forward is . . . a golden age of spiritual prosperity during this present dispensation, that is, during the Church age, and is to be brought about through forces now active in the world. It is an indefinitely long period of time, perhaps much longer than a literal one thousand years. The changed character of individuals will be reflected in an uplifted social, economic, political and cultural life of mankind. The world at large will then enjoy a state of righteousness such as at the present time has been seen only in relatively small and isolated groups, as for example in some family circles, some local church groups and kindred organizations.

While he does not believe that the world will ever be free from all sin until Christ returns, Boettner nevertheless cites specific examples of the great spiritual advances that have been made in the world: Christian principles practiced in many nations, international philanthropy on the part of the United States, the wide translation and distribution of the Bible, Christian evangelical radio broadcasts, the multiplication of Christian institutions of higher learning, the establishment of local churches worldwide, and the

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growth in the total number of Christians. This evidence, he believes, suggests strongly that the world is moving in a Christianizing direction that hails the coming of the Lord at the conclusion of this glorious period of progress. It was to this view that William Jennings Bryan appeared to be drawn because of his own belief that the world was becoming progressively Christianized, especially through the moral and spiritual leadership of the United States.

**Bryan and Postmillennial Theology**

With regard to William Jennings Bryan, the most significant tenets of postmillennialism are those regarding the Kingdom of God as a present reality, the conversion of all nations prior to Christ’s return, and the gradual improvement of humankind in a Christlike direction. On the basis of these views, Bryan could easily interpret society as progressing in the direction of godliness, however slowly this might be taking place. Eventually, on this view, as the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed and the actions of people are brought into conformity with the principles of Christ, peace and righteousness will reign and the earth will be prepared for the return of its triumphant King. Erickson summarizes the postmillennial hope:

> One of the evidences that this gospel is succeeding is the improvement of the world. Not only are individuals being redeemed, but concomitantly and consequently the world is being redeemed as well. While there are

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10 Ibid., 38-45.
setbacks within the general trend and the progress is sometimes too slow and gradual to be noticeable, the trend is for good to advance and evil to decline. Ultimately this process will be completed; before Christ returns, we shall see a Christianized world.¹¹

Erickson notes that the postmillennial view is seriously compromised by worsening world conditions; the prophecies of Scripture which portray such deteriorating conditions; and the gradual elimination, by postmillennialists, of the clear distinction between good and evil in the world because of their highly optimistic world-view.¹²

Despite the fact that, even in Bryan's day, the world was getting worse rather than better, it was to this view of the future that he attached himself, whether consciously or by default from other views that argued against his own irrepressible optimism. No matter what men or circumstances might indicate, he saw his world getting better with each passing year; and not even the cataclysmic world conflict of A.D. 1914-18 could shake his belief that the world was becoming a better place in which to live and men were being formed more into the image of Jesus Christ. In a tone reminiscent of classic Christian liberalism and modern-day theological pluralism, he asserted:

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\text{Man is a religious being; the heart instinctively seeks for a God. Whether he worships on the banks of the Ganges, prays with his face upturned to the sun, kneels toward Mecca or, regarding all space as a temple, communes with the Heavenly Father according to the}
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¹¹Ibid., 64.

¹²Ibid., 71-72.
Christian creed, man is essentially devout.\textsuperscript{13}

Again, speaking before the Union League of Chicago in 1913, he stated:

\ldots tonight I come to bring to you a message of encouragement and of hope. To tell you that no matter along what line you have labored, no matter what reform has drawn out the interest of your heart, whether it was local or state or national or world-wide, that God is still on His throne and that the world moves forward. That back of every righteous cause there is an arm strong enough to bring victory to His side. Tonight I desire to bring before you briefly evidence in support of three propositions: First, that the world is advancing in intelligence. Second, that it is advancing in morals; and, third, that it is advancing in the study of the science of government. And if I can convince you \ldots that the world is making progress in these three important directions, there ought to be no room for pessimism in any heart.\textsuperscript{14}

Bryan went on to cite examples from India, Africa, Turkey, Russia and other nations which he had just visited, to demonstrate the truth of his proposition that the world is increasing in good and decreasing in evil. He then cited his most important witness to this change:

But the most startling piece of news comes from Germany. Some two years ago the emperor, speaking to the naval cadets at Vevey, dared to attack what he described as the traditional beer drinking habits of his people, and told these young men that in any contests that might arise the country must depend upon them, and that it could not do so unless their brains were clear and their nerves steady, and then he warned them that alcohol would rob their brains of clearness and their nerves of steadiness and in the same Fatherland he appealed to them to join total abstinence societies, and held up for their own example the total abstinence

\textsuperscript{13}Bryan, \textit{The Prince of Peace}, 2.

societies of the British navy.¹⁵

Bryan's clear implication in this passage is that even the Germans, who were at that time regarded as enemies of the world, were improving in their moral condition. Regrettably, the events of the next four years would argue much differently; but for Bryan, the world was advancing in intelligence, in morals, and even in government.

As he concluded his Union League message, he went so far as to proclaim the manifest destiny that belonged to the United States, to be a pathfinder and torchbearer for all mankind.¹⁶ Four years later, in the midst of the great conflict, he reaffirmed this conviction before a group of officers at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana:

I love this country. God has made us 'heir of the ages.' We are a 'city set upon a hill,' we can not hide our light. You are going to carry our names and reputations into the lands into which you may be sent. I am not afraid that you will not measure up to expectations. We shall not hear of any immoralities practiced by your men in foreign lands, or of brutality toward those who are helpless. I am confident that you will do nothing that will bring criticism upon our nation's name.¹⁷

However, lest his military audience should misconstrue the source of their ability thus to live circumspectly in cross-cultural and foreign circumstances, Bryan added:

... there is only one thing to build on. Let no one

¹⁵Ibid., 10.

¹⁶Ibid., 14.

tell you that you can build a moral code upon a materialistic foundation. It is not true; there never was one and there can not be one. There is only one basis upon which to build a moral code: and that is that, back of all and above all and beyond all is a God.\textsuperscript{18}

It is this theological truth that would carry Bryan through world war, three devastating political defeats, and his final battle with the proponents of evolution. Speaking of the future reign of Christ on earth as recorded in the Bible, he states:

I had been reading of the rise and fall of nations, and occasionally I had met a gloomy philosopher who preached the doctrine that nations, like individuals, must of necessity have their birth, their infancy, their maturity and finally their decay and death. But here I read of a government that is to be perpetual—a government of increasing peace and blessedness—the government of the Prince of Peace—and it is to rest on justice.\textsuperscript{19}

His undeclared postmillennial perspective also allowed Bryan to fraternize and even cooperate with Christians whose worldview was much more broad than that of the Fundamentalists with whom he became identified in his final years. As earlier evidence has suggested, he moved between major denominations rather freely and he saw value in many differing religious views.

Postmillennialism also interprets the working of God on earth as being accomplished through believers and unbelievers alike, as Erickson notes:

\ldots postmillennialism recognizes that the kingdom of

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19}Bryan, The Prince of Peace, 19.
God is broader than the church. Wherever the will of God is done, there the reign of God is present, even if only partially or fragmentarily. This may be true even when the one performing the act is not aware that he is doing God's will. He may not be consciously committed to God. This means that God may accomplish His will at least in part through non-Christian persons, agencies, nations, and ideologies. If He employed Babylonia and Assyria in Biblical times, He can do something similar in our day. This means that the Christian can and should work constructively with any person or agent who is acting with some part or aspect of God's kingdom. It also means that the kingdom is, to a large extent, an ethical kingdom. 20

Thus, in a speech commemorating Jefferson's birthday in 1911, Bryan seemed to indicate that the millennial kingdom was at hand. He cited the increase in general intelligence and intellectual capacity, rising educational standards, improved morality, the increase in the study of ethics, a greater sense of altruism, the spirit of brotherhood, the growth of democracy, the peace movement, the advancement of reason, and the control exerted by moral forces in the United States. 21 His postmillennial perspective contributed directly to his persistent optimism, politically and educationally. Indeed, it provided for him a world view which saw only the best in people and circumstances. One can understand, then, why he would throw his personal, religious, and political efforts so strongly into those programs that he thought would improve the condition of the world--especially those of the common people--and why he would be

20Erickson, Contemporary Options in Eschatology, 71.

attracted to many of the programs of the Social Gospel.

**Bryan and the Social Gospel**

Bryan's undeclared postmillennial perspective led quite naturally to his affinity for those who proclaimed the Social Gospel in the America of his day. While he did not espouse every doctrine or practice of this new movement, its commitment to the betterment of the common man appealed strongly to him.

**A Brief History of the Movement**

Growing out of late-nineteenth century classic theological liberalism, the Social Gospel--exemplified by theologians such as Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch--sought to move beyond traditional and theoretical religious dogma, to a more practical demonstration of the full moral and social powers of humanity. Advocates viewed societal reform as containing the essence of religious commitment, because this reform served to link their theology to ethics or practical Christianity.

Some advocates of the Social Gospel actually held to human perfectibility. Writing from within the context of perfectionistic theology, Smith claims:

Here . . . is offered an evangelical explanation of the origins of the social gospel. The thesis . . . is that, whatever may have been the role of other factors, the quest for perfection joined with compassion for poor and needy sinners and a rebirth of millennial expectation to make popular Protestantism a mighty social force long before the slavery conflict erupted
Although Bryan certainly identified with having compassion on needy sinners, and even though he possessed a millennial expectation as described above, it is doubtful whether he fully aligned himself with Christian perfectionism. Such a topic was probably more involved than he cared to investigate, for, as Willard Smith aptly notes, "... one occasionally gets the impression that Bryan was so busy writing, travelling, and lecturing that he did not have sufficient time to read deeply on any given subject."\(^\text{23}\) As will be seen, his brand of practical Christianity was too impatient for what he surely would have regarded as the splitting of theological hairs. It is true that his writings contain very little mention of sin and condemnation, and much affirmation of the positive and ethical side of man's nature. With the proponents of the Social Gospel, he seems to have viewed human perfectibility as at least a distinct possibility. Nevertheless, he recognized still more clearly the moral imperative contained in the demand for social reform; and he believed so strongly in man's potential for good that he could optimistically view such reform as holding the keys to the coming millennial kingdom. In this respect, he was


in good company with the likes of Gladden and Rauschenbusch.

Birth of the Social Gospel

Following the Civil War and Reconstruction, America moved forward rapidly through the processes of industrialization and urbanization. Capitalism brought a new prosperity to certain segments of society, while it chained others in perpetual poverty. As the frontier continued to expand westward across the nation, social and moral concerns seemed to disappear in the rush for personal wealth and corporate power. Hopkins summarizes this lapse:

The postwar moral reaction severely strained certain traditional ethical and social standards. Corruption in local, state, and national government was widespread and in many places unashamed, and business ethics suffered a similar decline. In an atmosphere of optimism and moral laxity speculation flourished until the panic of 1873 brought the sobering realization that progress could not be built on watered stocks or blueprints. The lesson was made painfully clear to the working classes by unprecedented unemployment and desperate poverty. Bread lines appeared in the city streets of a nation rapidly becoming the richest country in the world. But the kings of industry and finance paid little heed and an exaggerated individualism continued to ride roughshod over human rights. Even the volcanic eruption of working-class discontent in 1877 hardly checked them. 24

Into such a moral and social void, the Church could have been expected to move with compassion, comfort, and practical assistance. Instead, orthodoxy refused to shift its emphasis and clung instead to its cherished dogma, while the poor continued to multiply in the land. Eventually,

they could be ignored no longer, and a Christian response to their need was mandated, thus giving birth to the Social Gospel. As Hopkins notes:

Christianity could not long remain immune to influences that challenged its conceptions of man and of social reorganization and that threatened to replace traditional American culture with a materialistic civilization whose very genius was both a contradiction of and a threat to the Christian ethic. Protestantism's measured response was the social gospel.\(^{25}\)

The Social Gospel Movement was characterized by a practical Christianity more than a formal theology. Even its acknowledged theologian, Walter Rauschenbusch, admits:

Of my qualifications for this subject I have reason to think modestly, for I am not a doctrinal theologian either by professional training or by personal habits of mind. Professional duty and intellectual liking have made me a teacher of Church History, and the events of my life, interpreted by my religious experiences, have laid the social problems on my mind.\(^{26}\)

Rauschenbusch and his Social Gospel colleagues set about to address the social ills of America from within the context of a modernized Christianity. Together with Washington Gladden, Rauschenbusch constructed a practical Christianity which took God out of the pulpit—even out of the pew—and into the streets of America's growing cities; which de-emphasized the transcendence of God in favor of His immanence; and which sought to reinvigorate the nation with renewed social and moral concern. In this cause, they

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\(^{25}\)Ibid., 23.

enjoyed the support of William Jennings Bryan.

**Washington Gladden (1836-1918)**

Gladden was born and lived through the rise and maturity of the Social Gospel movement. Knudten outlines the development of this new socio-religious phenomenon:

The Social Gospel movement developed in four phases. The birth of the movement occurred during the first phase between 1865 and 1880, a period characterized by the attempt to delineate problems and issues. During the second phase, 1880-1890, preliminary efforts were undertaken to speak to these conditions. While the movement came of age between 1890 and 1900, maturity and public influence only emerged between 1900 and 1915.27

Gladden came into the world in Pottsgrove, Pennsylvania on 11 February 1836, twenty-four years before Bryan was born and well before the Social Gospel became formalized as a movement but during turbulent times in American history. The issues of urbanization, industrialization, immigration, and civil rights were beginning to boil in the cauldron of American society. The labor question, with which Gladden would become preoccupied for much of his career, was also rising to the surface of social concern.

Because of the untimely death of his father, Gladden spent his early years on an uncle's farm in Owego, New York, where he was forced to overcome limited educational opportunity. Handy notes:

Since his labor was needed on the farm, his education

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for years was limited to the winter term at the dis-
trict school. Happily, his uncle was an avid reader,
who gathered his family on winter evenings to listen
while good books were read aloud. As he grew older,
Gladden was asked to take his turn as reader. . . .
As a result of the habits thus nurtured, Gladden was
a voracious reader for the rest of his life. 28

One of the books that Gladden regularly studied and memo-
ized during these formative years was the Bible. He also
attended services at the Presbyterian church in Owego, and
although he never seems to have come to an intimate,
personal relationship with God, he nevertheless came to
understand the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.
For him, theology assumed the face of a religion that was
relevant to the needs of people. In his latter years, for
example, he would state:

These are the primal facts of society. We are born
into social relations. Existence is a social fact. My
conscious life, descending to me by ordinary genera-
tion, unites me to my kind, and issues can only issue,
from him who is the Author of all life--of whom every
fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named. Every
human being has the same parentage. The Father in
heaven is the Father of us all. 29

Gladden concluded that, if God is indeed the Father of us
all, and we therefore are brothers in our common humanity,
it stands to reason that we ought to treat one another with
the care and respect that is normally expected of family
members in their interrelations. He continues:

28 Robert T. Handy, ed. The Social Gospel in America:

29 Washington Gladden, Christianity and Socialism
(Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1914), 23.
The deepest and most central fact to be considered in all relations with my fellow man—whether he be employer or employee, teacher or pupil, client or customer, neighbor or foreigner—is that he is my brother; that we have a common Father; and that his welfare, his happiness, his honor, his manhood, ought to be as dear to me as my own.  

Or again . . .

The relation is there. It is the deepest thing in our lives. It is the one thing that Jesus came to make plain to us, and to help us to realize. All the human beings that I meet day by day in the street, in the mart, in the shop, in the office, in the drawing-room, in the kitchen, are the children of my Father. I owe to them, first of all, a brother's sympathy, a brother's help. The laborer who works for me, the mechanic at my forge, the hostler in my stable, the maid in my house, the shopgirl behind my counter, are the children of my Father. My constant question concerning them all must be, not, How much profit can I get out of them? but, How much good can I do them?

This deep concern for the social welfare of mankind marked Gladden's life and ministry, whether as a young printer's apprentice with the Owego Gazette (1852-1854), as a student at Williams College (1855-1859), as a public school teacher in Owego (1859-1860), as a pastor of several Congregational churches from 1860 through 1914, or as a writer and religious news editor. In all these stages of his life and development, he promoted altruism and the Golden Rule, not economic selfishness, as the basis of society. Furthermore, to those who might accuse him of being either too conservative on the one hand, or too socialistic on the other, he simply responded with the

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31 Ibid., 26-27.
biblical notion of the fatherhood of God and the consequent brotherhood of man. "Is the economic fact or the spiritual fact," he asked, "fundamental in human society? Are we competitors, or are we brothers?"³²

In answering this question, Gladden willingly gave his life as an example of personal morality lived out among people. He attempted to maintain a balance between his socio-religious convictions and the impetus which they gave to his demands for social change. Knudten summarizes his life:

Although Gladden did not hesitate to speak to social issues, he was not a social agitator. He remained a critic of the social order, refusing to identify himself with any party or faction. In theology he remained progressive, while not destructive, within the life of the church. Friendship of all men under the spirit of God remained basic to his thought. Gladden challenged redeemed men to practice immortality within their present life, thereby raising general social life to higher levels of Christian perfection. His moral crusade for church unity and world peace were attempts to put his mature beliefs into social practice.³³

The career and influence of William Jennings Bryan were coming into full bloom as Gladden’s declined; but the similarities between the two are recognizable. Both men held strong convictions about the Bible and its applicability to life. Both also held other people in high regard, especially the common people. Finally, both wrote prodigiously on religious topics.

³²Ibid., 57.

Bryan, however, was in some ways a more direct and confrontational social reformer than Gladden. He took the battle for social reform to the streets and to the ballot box, where he sought to overthrow those whom he considered insensitive to the needs of the people. He also looked beyond the church for social change. Yet, he possessed strains of Gladden's ameliorating religious concern, as can be seen in his attempts to bridge the gap between several denominations for the sake of social change; and he took the latter's views a step further. Whereas Gladden believed that the brotherhood of man means that people ought to treat one another with love and respect, Bryan believed that right Christian belief actualizes such feelings in people for one another. He states:

... Jesus gave a new definition of love. His love was as wide as the sea; its limits were so far-flung that even an enemy could not travel beyond its bounds. Other teachers sought to regulate the lives of their followers by rule and formula, but Christ's plan was to purify the heart and then leave love to direct the footsteps.³⁴

Whereas Gladden sought to maintain a balance between his religious convictions and his social action, Bryan threw himself wholeheartedly into the struggle for social change, believing that the Gospel which he espoused demanded nothing less of him.

Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918)

If Washington Gladden led the way into social Christianity by demonstrating its tenets through his life and ministry, Walter Rauschenbusch put this life into words and formulated the theological basis for the new movement. Born in Rochester, New York on 4 October 1861, he was the son of a professor of German at Rochester Theological Seminary. His father, Karl A. Rauschenbusch, had come to the United States in 1845 as a Lutheran missionary but was thereafter converted to the Baptist faith. In 1858, he was appointed to his position in the Seminary.

Young Walter's education was therefore both German and American in nature. In fact, as Handy notes:

[he] . . . actually began his formal education in Germany, where he lived during the later 1860's, and continued it in Rochester for ten years after his return. In 1879 a conversion experience led to his baptism on confession of faith. . . . In that same year he went again to Germany, where he studied at the Gymnasium at Gütersloh. After graduating in 1883 with first honors in classical studies, he traveled in Germany and studied briefly at the University of Berlin. He had decided to enter the ministry, and on his return to the United States was allowed simultaneously to complete his senior year at the University of Rochester and begin his studies at the Rochester Theological Seminary.35

Following a summer pastorate in Louisville, Rauschenbusch became firmly committed to this vocation. After his graduation in 1885, he accepted a call to the Second German Baptist Church in New York City, adjacent to a

depressed area known as Hells' Kitchen. It was here that his theology was first challenged by the extreme social problems that surrounded his congregation. He thus began a search for the social applications of the Gospel. His church, per se, did little to help him resolve his dilemma. "His social concern," Handy notes, "came less from within the church than from a confrontation with the condition of working people and with the secular reform movement." 36

Rauschenbusch soon became the founder and editor of For the Right, a working-class newspaper, then a pulpit voice for social change, and finally a writer and the formal theologian of the Social Gospel movement. What Gladden and others sought to put into practice, he sought both to do and to document. His goal was to wed theology and social concern anew. In his Theology for the Social Gospel, for example, he writes:

Any new movement in theology which emphatically asserts the union of religion and ethics is likely to be a wholesome and christianizing force in Christian thought. The social gospel is of that nature. It plainly concentrates religious interest on the great ethical problems of social life. It scorns the tithing of mint, anise, and cummin, at which the Pharisees are still busy, and insists on getting down to the weightier matters of God's law, to justice and mercy. It ties up religion not only with duty, but with big duty that stirs the soul with religious feeling and throws it back on God for help. The non-ethical practices and beliefs in historical Christianity nearly all centre on the winning of heaven and immortality. On the other hand, the Kingdom of God can be established by nothing

36 Ibid., 255.
except righteous life and action.\textsuperscript{37}

While this work--written a year before his death and representing the summation of his life of work and study--clearly depicts the concept of the Kingdom of God as a frame of reference for Rauschenbusch's world-view, the Kingdom concept was not a new development. As early as 1913, he discussed Jesus' views on the Kingdom:

This is the point on which scholars are most at odds. Was the kingdom in Christ's conception something eschatological, all in the future, to be inaugurated only by a heavenly catastrophe? Or was it a present reality? There is material for both views in his sayings.\textsuperscript{38}

He continues:

This, then, is our interpretation of the situation. Jesus, like all the prophets and like all his spiritually minded countrymen, lived in the hope of a great transformation of the national, social, and religious life about him. He shared the substance of that hope with his people, but by his profounder insight and his loftier faith he elevated and transformed the common hope. He rejected all violent means and thereby transferred the inevitable conflict from the field of battle to the antagonism of mind against mind, and of heart against lack of heart. He postponed the divine catastrophe of judgment to the dim distance and put the emphasis on the growth of the new life that was now going on. He thought less of changes made \textit{en masse}, and more of the immediate transformation of single centers of influence and of social nuclei. The Jewish hope became a human hope with universal scope. The old intent gaze into the future was turned to faith in present realities and beginnings, and found its task

\textsuperscript{37}Rauschenbusch, \textit{A Theology For the Social Gospel}, 15.

In the lives of the people who inhabited Hell's Kitchen, Rauschenbusch found ample evidence of the need of theology to address the "here and now" of daily existence.

Rauschenbusch felt strongly that the church in America had neglected one of her primary responsibilities—the amelioration of social evil through the practical application of the Gospel. He also believed that, through the abrogation of its social duties, the church had allowed business to become corrupt and to control the economy of the nation. He states:

This is the stake of the Church in the social crisis. If one vast domain of life is dominated by principles antagonistic to the ethics of Christianity, it will inculcate habits and generate ideas which will undermine the law of Christ in all other domains of life and even deny the theoretical validity of it. If the Church has not faith enough in the Christian law to assert its sovereignty over all relations of society, men will deny that it is a good and practicable law at all. If the Church cannot conquer business, business will conquer the Church.  

He goes on to charge that, while the social preacher is apt to overlook the importance of personal righteousness and eternal life, the evangelical preacher has for too long overlooked the importance of social righteousness and the kingdom of God on earth.  

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39 Ibid., 64-65.

40 Ibid., 316-17.

41 Ibid., 367.
On the one hand, it might be said that Rauschenbusch has substituted social for personal salvation, or earthly riches and poverty for the biblical concepts of heaven and hell. On the other, he correctly focuses his criticism upon a church that had become lax in its social duty and was consumed by dogmatic theology while ignoring the desperate needs of those in whose midst it dwelt. Of theological education, he says:

Theological professors used to lecture and write in Latin. There is perhaps no other language in which one can utter platitudes so sonorously and euphoniously. It must have been a sanitary sweating off of adipose tissue when theology began to talk in the vernacular. It will be a similar increase of health when theology takes in hand the problems of social redemption and considers how its doctrines connect with the Kingdom of God in actual realization. 42

For Rauschenbusch, as for Gladden, theological education was to be implemented in the crucible of life. While he did not despise the evangelical pre-millennarians who viewed the world as becoming worse and therefore the millennium that much nearer, he saw them as being in the grip of an historical pessimism which did not allow them to see and address the social needs at their doorstep. His writings and preaching called them to be preachers who would "have the prophetic insight which discerns and champions the right

42Rauschenbusch, A Theology For the Social Gospel, 17.
"The social gospel," he says, "seeks to bring men under repentance for their collective sins and to create a more sensitive and more modern conscience."

In his *Theology for the Social Gospel*, Rauschenbusch redefines the concept of sin. Rather than seeing it as man's failure to measure up to God's perfect standard (as the older evangelicals did), he sees it simply as selfishness. In the social context, this means that any failure of men to assist their needy brothers; or any act of men which detracts from the welfare of others, constitutes sin against God. He says:

God is not only the spiritual representative of humanity; he is identified with it. In him we live and move and have our being. In us he lives and moves, though his being transcends ours. He is the life and light in every man and the mystic bond that unites us all. He is the spiritual power behind and beneath all our aspirations and achievements. He works through humanity to realize his purposes, and our sins block and destroy the Reign of God in which he might fully reveal and realize himself. Therefore our sins against the least of our fellow-men in the last resort concern God. Therefore when we retard the progress of mankind, we retard the revelation of the glory of God. Our universe is not a despotic monarchy, with God above the starry canopy and ourselves down here; it is a spiritual commonwealth with God in the midst of us.

In fact, Rauschenbusch measured a Christian's spirituality,

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45 Ibid., 49.
not by the sanctity of his language, his soberness, or his
even temper, but by his willingness to align the purpose of
his life with that of God by serving and assisting others,
thus promoting the Kingdom of God on earth. If there is
such a thing as original sin, it is not the older, biblical
concept of inherited sin from Adam, but unethical social
traditions passed from one generation to the next.46 Like
Bryan, Rauschenbusch condemned those who promote such unethical traditions. He had few kind words for those who, in
his view, have become social parasites—a class of human
ticks who suck the social blood out of nations. His de-
scription of them is reminiscent of words used by Bryan of
the monopolies and industrialists of his and Rauschenbusch’s
day:

They have gained control of legislation, courts, po-
lice, military, royalty, church, property, religion,
and have altered the constitution of nations in order
to make things easy for the tick class. The laws,
institutions, doctrines, literature, art, and manners
which these ruling classes have secreted have been
social means of infection which have bred new evils for
generations.47

Unlike Bryan, however, Rauschenbusch believed that
socialism—with communal ownership of property—is the only
and ultimate answer to social inequality. He emphatically
states:

46Ibid., 60.

47Ibid., 81.
Socialism is the ultimate and logical outcome of the labor movement. When the entire working class throughout the industrial nations is viewed in a large way, the progress of socialism gives an impression of resistless and elemental power. It is inconceivable from the point of view of that class that it should stop short of complete independence and equality as long as it has the power to move on, and independence and equality for the working class must mean the collective ownership of the means of production and the abolition of the present two-class arrangement of industrial society.\(^48\)

Citing the family, the school, the primitive church, and even the State as institutions that are essentially communistic, Rauschenbusch advocated that modern Christianity should "strengthen the existing communistic institutions and aid the evolution of society from the present temporary stage of individualism to a higher form of communism."\(^49\)

By contrast, Bryan always believed that mankind, freed from social inequality and oppression by the ruling classes, would voluntarily choose a democratic form of government. In addition, his concept of the Kingdom of God appears to have differed from that of Rauschenbusch. For Bryan, the Kingdom of God would be denoted by an increase of righteousness on the part of humankind, followed by the visible implementation of the Kingdom by God on earth. For Rauschenbusch, the Kingdom appears to have been more nebulous--a natural consequence of the improvement of the human

\(^{48}\text{Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the Social Crisis, 408.}\)

\(^{49}\text{Ibid., 414.}\)
condition on earth. Had he lived longer, his views might have resulted in his viewing the communist state and God as being synonymous.

Both Bryan and Rauschenbusch, however, probably underestimated the corruptness of fallen human nature, and the essential self-centered character of humankind, which prohibits the free exercise of either godly communistic or godly democratic principles in society. Nevertheless, Bryan had more in common with Rauschenbusch, and thus with the Social Gospel, than might first appear; and this makes it all the more strange that the Fundamentalists should have welcomed Bryan into their camp in the latter years of his life, as he carried their standard against evolutionary thought.

**Bryan’s Interpretation of the Social Gospel**

**The Social Gospel and Fundamentalism.** In one sense, Bryan was a theological misfit for both the conservatives as well as the Social Gospel advocates. However, he seems to have been able to extract the best of both groups in his attempt to improve the lot of the common person. Smith writes of him:

In order to understand Bryan as a Christian reformer it is necessary to know and understand the social and religious background of his thinking. The influences of home, church and community in molding his thought and belief cannot be emphasized too much. He often referred to them. One of the curious things about him was his combination of political and economic
liberalism and religious conservatism.\textsuperscript{50} Smith does not believe that Bryan was a classic Fundamentalist; indeed, he sees a "wide gap between Bryan and the Fundamentalists on the need and desirability of social reform . . . ."\textsuperscript{51} On the other hand, as Smith also notes, Bryan shared with Fundamentalism its tendency to see life in terms of black and white, with no grey in between.\textsuperscript{52} Certainly, in his early years of political campaigning, he shared the views of those who would later become ardent Fundamentalists. Describing the Commoner's political activities in 1896, Wilson notes:

Bryan's campaign was directed at small-town America where the voters were not only suffering farmers but also pietistic Protestants who 'abhored corruption, harbored millennial dreams, and preferred moralistic crusades to pluralistic cooperation.'\textsuperscript{53}

Perhaps in part because of his first two major political defeats (1896, 1900), and possibly because he sought to reach a wider audience with his reform message, Bryan broadened his approach, so that by 1913 his brother Charles could describe and quote his speech at the fortieth anniversary of


\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., 14-15.

the Bethlehem Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, making note of his tendency to reach well beyond classic conservatism:

Secretary Bryan. . . told how, although he was an elder in the Presbyterian church, his wife had been a Methodist; how they frequently attended a Methodist church, and how their three children were, respectively, members of the Protestant Episcopal, Methodist Episcopal, and the Congregational church. ‘We have four grandchildren,’ he said, ‘through whom we hope to become connected with other branches of the church. So far as creeds are concerned, I am not apt to be tenacious or combative. But I am concerned about the fundamentals upon which our Christian church rests.’

Notably, Bryan was broadening his own beliefs and practice at the same time as The Fundamentals were being written as the standard defense of Protestant orthodoxy against theological liberalism.

A broadening of belief on certain issues, however, did not mean that Bryan was any less aggressive in fighting for those causes that he espoused as worthy, or whose time had come to be defended in society. In a less than positive yet appropriate analysis of Bryan’s belief-system, Levine notes:

As long as an issue remained on the periphery of Bryan’s interests he was able to view it with some degree of realism, to perceive many of its complexities, and often to deal with it relatively and fairly. But once the issue was joined, once he became convinced that the time for resolving it was at hand, his mind clamped shut and became incapable of perceiving subtle distinctions. This occurred not because Bryan was an opportunist but because his mind and temperament led him to view all important issues in terms of absolutes.

In the uncomplicated world in which he thrived, all decency and depravity were quickly separated and placed into easily recognizable compartments. Good was good and bad was bad and they never joined hands in the Nebraskan's simple universe.\(^5\)

Thus, Bryan could embrace many of the tenets of the Social Gospel advocates while also taking issue with them on subjects such as the evolutionary hypothesis, which many of them espoused. He would travel with them until the final focus of his life rested on the issue of Darwinian evolution in the public schools. At that point, he made an obvious break with the Social Gospel, in favor of a strict Fundamentalist argument for creationism and against evolution. Then the advocates of the Social Gospel would also separate themselves from him. For example, Arthur W. Stalker, pastor of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan, wrote to Bryan after the latter had spoken in that city. Stalker alternately complimented and criticized Bryan, first for his eloquence in speaking about Jesus, then for his attack on evolution:

I heartily wish, my dear Mr. Bryan, that you yourself appreciated the hold that you had upon the souls of the young people during your first fifteen minutes at the Hill Auditorium. I do not know a preacher who would not covet such power as you had while you were speaking of the leadership of Jesus and of the enlarging life through Him. I am one among very many who honor you greatly for your ability and service in the Kingdom of God. I am convinced also that I am one among an equal

number who are confident that your influence upon the thoughtful is lessened by your attacks upon science. Stalker would later be joined by many Social Gospel advocates in condemning Bryan for his Fundamentalist beliefs; but for the time being, the Great Commoner maintained his position in both camps.

The Social Gospel as Applied Christianity. Because of his strong support of social reform, Bryan actually had more affinity with the Social Gospel than he did with Fundamentalism. As Smith notes, he "believed that religion was not a mere cloak to be worn on Sundays, but a way of life to be applied seven days a week." The church, he held, has a responsibility to speak out on issues that concern the social welfare of its members. The lists of his social reforms previously cited bear testimony to this commitment.

Bryan never used the term "Social Gospel" to describe what he believed and practiced. Instead, his belief in applied Christianity is seen in many of his writings. As early as 1902, he castigated the conservative evangelical church for its lack of social action, by quoting approvingly a poem used by Social Gospel preachers to rebuke those


pastors who remain aloof from their congregations:

A parish priest of austerity
Climbed up in a high church steeple
To be near to God, that he might hand
God's word unto the people.

And in a sermon script he daily wrote
What he thought was sent from heaven,
And he dropped it down on the people's head
Two times, one day in seven.

In his time God said, "Come down and die,"
And he cried out from his steeple:
"Where art thou, Lord?" and the Lord replied,
"Down here among the people."\textsuperscript{58}

Bryan believed strongly in being out with the people, feeling with them in their struggles and constructing social programs and institutions that would relieve some of that struggle. Thus, his reform program over the years included the direct election of senators to insure that the voice of the common man was heard in the halls of government; guarantee of bank deposits to insure that the farmer's savings, earned by the sweat of his brow, would not be lost; a department of education to promote access to higher learning for all; and labor reform to reduce the work day, establish minimum wages, secure collective bargaining rights, and to settle labor disputes.

\textbf{The Social Gospel and Societal Reform.} Bryan also supported the various institutions that ministered to the

needs of people in the cities of America. Early in the century, he toured Jane Addams’ Hull House in Chicago. He later described it approvingly:

I was surprised to learn of the magnitude of its work. I learned that more than five thousand names were enrolled upon the books of the association; that mothers left their babes there when they went out to work, that little children received kindergarten instruction there, that young women found a home there and young men a place where they could meet and commune free from the temptations of city life. More than twenty young men and young women give their entire time to the work of this association without compensation. Similar institutions will be found in nearly all of the larger cities and in many of the smaller ones, and in these institutions young men and young women, many of them college graduates, give a part or all of their time to gratuitous work. Why? Because somehow or somewhere they have taken hold of an ideal of life that lifts them above the sordid selfishness that surrounds them and makes them find a delight in bringing life and light into homes that are dark. The same can be said of the thousands who labor in the institutions of charity, mercy and benevolence. 59

In this concern for the inner city, Bryan is clearly identified with Walter Rauschenbusch, whose experience next door to New York City’s Hell’s Kitchen had sensitized him in a similar way. In contrast to the latter, however, Bryan came to believe that the Church is the greatest and only hope for securing societal reform. Reviewing his Church association just prior to his death, he cited its influence in helping him to promote the securing of women’s suffrage, prohibition, international peace, and the reduction of the work day

from twelve to eight hours. Admittedly, he conceded that
the Church could have done more to effect societal change:

When we examine what the Church has done and is doing
the work seems very large, but it is small in compari-
son with the work which needs to be done and which
could be done if all who profess Christ’s name applied
His teachings to life. 60

For Bryan, at least part of the Gospel includes social
change and reform. It is more than just a revival of Chris-
tian principles—it involves service to one’s fellow man.
"The human measure of a human life," he said, "is its in-
come; the divine measure of a life is its outgo, its over-
flow—its contribution to the welfare of all." 61 Even in
the year of his death, as he reflected upon his own life of
service, he could state:

Service is the measure of greatness, and it is the
measure, also, of happiness. God has linked our happi-
ness to virtue and our prosperity to righteousness.
Christ, in revealing God to man, revealed the law of
service by which one can achieve greatness and secure
happiness. 62

While he applauded the efforts of the Fundamentalists and
others who sought a revival of religion in America, Bryan
also promoted a revival of the application of religious
principles in daily life, in order to reduce crime rates,
protect the innocent, eliminate corporate monopolies, and

60 William Jennings Bryan, Christ and His Companions


62 Bryan, Christ and His Companions, 195.
The Social Gospel and the Kingdom of God. Bryan also believed in the Social Gospel concept of the Kingdom of God and its corollary doctrine of the brotherhood of man. Where Gladden and Rauschenbusch could promote brotherhood as a divine "ought" in society, Bryan saw it as accomplished fact. Before the Union League of Chicago, he optimistically proclaimed:

... the sun is risen so high that the world is flooded with light. And I venture to say that this era of brotherhood foreseen and foretold is not merely coming, but that it is here. ... There is a better understanding of the doctrine of brotherhood than there ever has been before. There is more of a sense of kinship among men. There is more altruism on this globe than the globe has previously known, and more in the United States than in any other country of the world.  

In this comment, Bryan was apparently able to ignore the troubled world which was about to open up to him in his position as Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson. Perhaps more correctly, he was able to operate on two levels simultaneously: as the peacemaker who sought to avoid conflict between nations through peace treaties and cooling-off periods; and as a social reformer who believed that the need for such treaties must surely be at an end because of

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64 Bryan, "Mr. Bryan Before the Union League of Chicago," 10.
the increasing feeling of brotherhood among men. Bryan believed that, if only men knew the truth, they would invariably be drawn to practice it. Therefore, if all men are brothers in the Kingdom of God, how can they fight one another?

While Bryan symbolically beat swords into miniature ploughshares to distribute as paper-weight gifts from his office as Secretary of State, however, individuals and nations prepared themselves for war and thus demonstrated that "brothers" can indeed behave brutally toward one another. Neither Bryan nor the advocates of the Social Gospel had an adequate theological response to the First World War, for it refused to fit into the system of either one.

The Social Gospel and Moral Improvement. Another of Bryan's favorite themes, and one in which he again aligned himself with the Social Gospel, was the securing of a higher level of morality in America. Encouraging military officers in the discharge of their moral duty, he pleads:

I have yet to know a real failure in life that was not traceable to a breakdown in the moral conceptions of the man. Therefore, I improve [sic] this, my first and only opportunity to speak to you, to urge upon you the moral responsibility that rests upon you, entrusted as you will be with the bodies, minds, and souls of men.65

For Bryan, the development of this moral responsibility is

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directly linked to a personal relationship with God. As man begins to understand his own finiteness and sinfulness in the infinite universe; and as he realizes his own severe limitations in light of the vastness of the universe that he inhabits, Bryan says that he is forced to consider the weight of his sins and the presence of the sinless One. This, in turn, develops a sense of morality in him. 66

Although the Social Gospel advocates tended to diminish somewhat the personal role of God in favor of social action which demonstrates godly qualities, Bryan never lost this sense of intimacy and personal communion with the Creator of the universe. Furthermore, he was able to link this more esoteric dimension of God to the practicalities of daily life, which places him back alongside the Social Gospel once more. Evaluating the moral implications of materialism, for example, he states:

*From the press, the pulpit, the college, the Chautauqua platform and the home, is coming a healthy protest against the measuring of life by a pecuniary standard. The change in the ideal means a revolution in the life, whether the change takes place in the individual or the group. An increasing number of our people realize that there is a higher end in life than the making of money--that money is only a means to an end. They also realize that money, while a good servant, is a heartless master.* 67

Armed with this belief, Bryan could easily stand alongside


Social Gospel preachers and reformers who advocated fewer profits for the large industrialists, better working conditions for the laborers, and programs which would somehow insure a fair standard of living for all Americans. Bryan believed that an enlightened conscience would not only carry out laws which were designed for the betterment of the human condition, but that it would go beyond the letter to fulfill the spirit of the law as well. In this way, morality would continue to develop in the people.\textsuperscript{68}

\textbf{The Social Gospel and Communism.} Finally, Bryan tended both to agree and disagree with the Social Gospel theme of a communistic society. While he decried the unlimited wealth of the Rockefellers and other influential Americans, he also reserved the right of people to amass wealth in proportion to the amount of service that they render to society. He states, for example:

\begin{quote}
... if one desires to collect largely from society he must be prepared to render a large service to society; and our schools and colleges, our churches and all other organizations for the improvement of man must have for one of their chief objects the enlargement of the capacity for service.\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

In almost the same breath, however, he claims that because of the almost limitless possibilities of service available

\textsuperscript{68}Bryan, \textit{The Price of A Soul} (New York: Funk and Wagnall's, 1914), 38.

\textsuperscript{69}Ibid., 11-12.
to a person, one's earnings correspondingly may have no upper limit.\textsuperscript{70} Ironically, he thus inadvertently condoned the excesses of multi-millionaire tycoons, as long as they engage in some sort of philanthropic endeavors.

The reason for this inconsistency may lie in Bryan's own propensity to amass a small fortune in savings and land, both in Nebraska and Florida. In any case, on this point he seemed to differ quite radically from the Social Gospel advocates, who desired a more communitarian approach to the ownership of wealth and property.

Likewise, Bryan vacillated on the question of centralized government. On the one hand, he claimed that a democratic society is built from the bottom (the people) up.\textsuperscript{71} On the other, many of his reforms, such as government ownership of railroads, demanded a strong, centralized government for appropriate implementation. Smith notes this discrepancy:

Since the Nebraskan was a professed follower of Thomas Jefferson who had much to say about the dangers of centralization of governmental power, he found himself in the dilemma of favoring reforms which only a strong central government could carry out. This, of course, was a dilemma never fully resolved . . . .\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{70}Ibid., 16-17.

\textsuperscript{71}Bryan, "Mr. Bryan Before the Union League of Chicago," 12.

\textsuperscript{72}Willard H. Smith, "William Jennings Bryan--Christian Reformer," 11.
In fact, the dilemma was made all the more acute during the last few years of Bryan's life, as he actively sought legislation that would prohibit the teaching of evolution in the public schools of Tennessee, Florida, and other states. It could even be said that this desire to legislate morality through the dictates of a centralized government gave him the basis for his prosecution of John Thomas Scopes. On the one hand, he would argue that the voice of the people demanded that evolution not be taught in the public schools; on the other, he would feel a need to enforce this demand through legislation, thus contradicting his belief that men were improving in their morality and the ability to coexist as brothers in the Kingdom of God.

Conclusion

William Jennings Bryan was, therefore, an undeclared postmillennialist who viewed the Social Gospel as a convenient vehicle for the effecting of social change both in America and in the world beyond her shores. His unbridled optimism about improving world conditions certainly put him at odds with pre-millennialists, who saw conditions as becoming worse, with the only hope being the return of Christ to the earth. Instead, Bryan saw the possibility of improvement in society; and he linked arms with advocates of the Social Gospel like Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch, in an effort to apply his Christianity on the
streets of American cities and among the farmers in the cornfields of Nebraska.

For Bryan, the Kingdom of God meant that all men exist in some kind of a common brotherhood, with mutual responsibility for the welfare of one another. This meant that he was willing to forego certain theological arguments in favor of a broader application of Christianity to societal problems. It also meant that he was later willing to take up Fundamentalist causes because they represented both a defense of his personal faith in God as well as a means for effecting a higher level of morality in the people.

Had Bryan been an ordained minister, his theology might have been given more concrete form with regard to the millennial perspective. However, it might also have diminished his capacity to campaign for social reform. Because he straddled the theological fence between conservatives and liberals--between orthodox Fundamentalism and the Social Gospel--Bryan was able to espouse many of the tenets of the latter while remaining true in spirit to the conservative point of view. His weekly Sunday School lessons, which were clearly based upon Scripture; and his works such as The Fruits of the Tree and Christ and His Companions, amply demonstrate his conservative theology.

As an undeclared postmillennialist and advocate of many Social Gospel reforms, Bryan naturally had an interest in
education. Although many of his advanced degrees were honorary, he nevertheless had completed both his undergraduate work as well as his degree in law. He thus knew the value of a good education, and he sought in his later years to protect public education from the inroads of destructive philosophy. He firmly believed that the Kingdom of God and brotherhood of man were to be taught and implemented in the public schools of the nation. Hence, his willingness to take up the banner of the Fundamentalists in their fight to keep the Bible in education and evolutionary teaching outside of it. This theme will be examined in the following chapter.
CHAPTER V

BRYAN AS EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHER, PHILANTHROPIST AND PRACTITIONER

Introduction

William Jennings Bryan is not generally known for his views on education. In fact, he has at times been caricaturized as an anti-intellectual who spoke first on certain topics and read about them later. Ashby describes Bryan's final years:

Convinced that organizations such as the National Education Association and the American Library Association were 'poisoning young minds' by deliberately extending 'anti-Christian propaganda' into the schools, he declared in 1921 that 'the supreme need of the day is to get back to God.' 'To your tents, O Israel!' he cried.1

Such statements, coupled with his later vociferous attacks on Darwin and evolutionary theory, certainly did little to eliminate the anti-intellectual image of Bryan.

On the other hand, Wilson notes that he read widely on a variety of topics and even had his list of essential reading clearly outlined:

Directly after his sixty-first birthday he had drawn up a list of ten books or writings in what he considered the order of their influence on his life, thought, and conduct: (1) the Bible; (2) writings of Thomas Jefferson; (3) essays of Tolstoy; (4) The Fact of Christ (by

Late in his life, Bryan wrote an article on the subject of "Study" for J. Eugene Thompson of Colgate University. He describes the importance of intellectual stimulation for the student:

Study is a letter of introduction to all that Man has recorded on the written page. It gives to all of us the companionship of books and the incomparable benefit of the valuable experience of others. It acquaints us with History, and with passing events; . . . Study has its direct advantage in the store of wisdom to which it leads us. It confers an indirect benefit, also, in that the habit of study gives us a constant control over our minds that counts mightily in every walk of life and leads to ultimate success.  

Furthermore, his wife, Mary Baird Bryan, describes her husband as "a staunch defender of higher education," who also taught her law in conjunction with her studies at the Union College of Law. At least in his early career, then, Bryan appears to have read widely.

After his death, the fact of a college being named in

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5 Ibid., xxiv.
his honor should have secured Bryan's place in educational history. Nevertheless, he continues to be known more for his political and religious rather than his educational beliefs; and the myth of his intellectual obscurantism remains.

A review of the literature, however, reveals that Bryan thought much about education. To the end of his life, this subject was of great concern to him. In fact, some of his most memorable statements on the subject were made during the Scopes Trial in 1925, just prior to his death. For him, the issue at stake was not only the content of education in Tennessee but, by implication, in all schools of the nation. By prosecuting John Scopes, Bryan would seek to defend the right and responsibility of parents—not legislators or professional educators—to determine the content of their children's education.

Bryan would have been the first to claim that the Scopes case was not of provincial magnitude alone. He believed that education must be democratically controlled and guided, both at home and abroad. The elected officials of any state or governmental agency have as one of their official responsibilities the representation of the views of the people regarding the content of their children's education. For this principle, Bryan was willing even to die, as the stress of the Scopes Trial and his subsequent demise clearly demonstrate.
Bryan's convictions about democratic forms of education may also be seen in his *Letter To A Chinese Official*. In this work, he responds to what he perceived to be the charges of a Chinese official, but which eventually proved to be the second-hand account of a British subject who supposedly had a conversation with such an official about conditions in America. Nevertheless, Bryan eloquently states the case for American education, as a model for other nations to follow. Comparing the American and Chinese systems of education, he says:

Our schools are open to both boys and girls; yours, such as you have had in the past, are open to comparatively few of the boys; our schools have brought their students into contact with all nations, all ages and all climes through the teaching of history, geography, and literature; yours have been narrow, shallow and provincial in their courses. Our schools have led their students into all the storehouses of knowledge and have put them in possession of the intellectual wealth bequeathed by all the great minds of all the world; yours have been content to teach the sayings of a few sages and a few poems that have received the imperial sanction.6

Obviously, Bryan's perception of the Chinese educational system was very negative and possibly only a caricature of reality at the time; but his view of American education in contrast is instructive. For him, it was the source of untold blessing to millions of American youth and held out the same promise to those of other lands. In fact, the export of this education to other nations was part and

parcel of his view of Americanism. He saw the United States as having a worldwide responsibility to acculturate other peoples, with education serving as the engine of that acculturation process. Clements even quotes Bryan as stating that we should "teach the natives to live as we do." He goes on to say of him:

Although he argued for governmental restraint, he strongly supported the efforts of legitimate businessmen, missionaries, and teachers to export American culture, economic values, and political systems to Latin America. The missionary or teacher overseas, he believed, served as a perpetual example to the natives of the superiority of the nation's commitment to the ideal of service to the rest of the world. 7

Bryan sincerely believed that, with such a moral example before it, the world could not help but be influenced to follow in America's footsteps.

It was this same belief that helped to shape Bryan's millennial views of world peace. Summarizing the views of Bryan, Alfred Thayer Mahan, and Walter Lippman on war, Tarlton says that Mahan believed that war could not and should not be eliminated; but unnecessary wars could be avoided through realistic national preparedness. Lippman believed that war could be prevented by identifying the factors which cause it and then eliminating them through political, educational, and economic modernization. Bryan, on the other hand, desired to prohibit war, and he would

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guarantee this prohibition through the moral and intellectual uplifting of humankind.⁸

Of course, Bryan also believed that education and religion must go into foreign lands hand-in-hand. The world peace which he envisioned was one which eventually would be dominated by the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. Education, however, could greatly assist in this outcome. Clements summarizes the Commoner’s views on this relationship:

Not only would educated men recognize that might and right were not necessarily synonymous, but religion would help to harness their brutal, belligerent instincts while bringing to the fore loving and charitable emotions. The connection between religion and education was, in Bryan’s view, essential. ‘Head and heart should be developed together.’ Education would enable an individual or nation to perform tasks skillfully, but only religious faith could ensure that the tasks chosen would be beneficial to the world rather than selfish and destructive.⁹

Bryan, therefore, possessed a high view of the value of education, especially as it could be utilized in conjunction with a fundamental change in the heart of people, in order to effect a change in society. The following chapter will examine his role as educational philosopher, philanthropist

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⁸Charles D. Tarlton, "The Styles of American International Thought: Mahan, Bryan, and Lippman," World Politics 17(4) (1965): 585. As Secretary of State in the Wilson administration from 1913 to 1915, Bryan attempted an interventionist policy which, on the one hand, contradicted his earlier views about American colonialism abroad but, on the other hand, supported his belief that American education must be exported in order to benefit the world. He was criticized severely in some circles for this apparent shift in policy.

and practitioner, especially in the last years of his life as he sought to stem the tide of Darwinism in the public schools and to reclaim the youth of America for God. In the technical or academic sense of the term, Bryan was not an educational philosopher. As will be seen, however, he commented broadly—in written and oral form—on education as it related to his many other political and religious themes. In so doing, he made direct statements and inferences regarding educational philosophy.

Bryan As Educational Philosopher

The Purpose of Education

Although he did not seek to expound educational philosophy per se, Bryan held tenaciously to certain suppositions about the nature and ends of education. He believed that education must serve a larger purpose than simply expanding the intellectual capacity of the student; it must expand his heart as well, resulting in service to others. In The Price of A Soul, he summarizes this theme as it relates to the compensation that a teacher receives from his or her work:

The purpose of education is not merely to develop the mind; it is to prepare men and women for society’s work and for citizenship. The ideals of the teacher, therefore, are of first importance. The pupil is apt to be as much influenced by what his teacher is as by what the teacher says or does. The measure of a school can not be gathered from an inspection of the examination papers; the conception of life which the graduate carries away must be counted in estimating the benefits conferred. . . .

The teacher comes in contact with the life of the
student, and, as our greatest joy is derived from the consciousness of having benefited others, the teacher rightly counts as a part of his compensation the continuing pleasure to be found in the knowledge that he is projecting his influence through future generations. The heart plays as large a part as the head in the teacher's work, because the heart is an important factor in every life and in the shaping of the destiny of the race. I fear the plutocracy of wealth; I respect the aristocracy of learning; but I thank God for the democracy of the heart. It is upon the heart-level that we meet; it is by the characteristics of the heart that we best know and best remember each other.\textsuperscript{10}

In elevating the preparation of the heart as well as the mind, Bryan was not denigrating the importance or influence of the school upon the development of the student. Rather, he was attempting to point out that preparation of mind and heart must constitute dual purposes of the educational process. He states:

Our most fertile soil is to be found in the minds and the hearts of our people, and our most important manufacturing plants are not our factories, with their smoking chimneys, but our schools, our colleges and our churches, which take in a priceless raw material and turn out the most valuable finished product that the world has known.\textsuperscript{11}

As early as 1908, Bryan had stated his belief that education was of primary importance to society:

Intellectual training is . . . necessary, and more necessary than it used to be. When but few had the advantages of a college education, the lack of such advantages was not so apparent. Now when so many of the lawyers, physicians, journalists, and even businessmen, are college graduates, we cannot afford to enter any field without the best intellectual

\textsuperscript{10}Williams Jennings Bryan, \textit{The Price of a Soul} (New York: Funk & Wagnall's, 1914), 55-58.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 68-69.
At the same time, in his later years, the intensity of Bryan's conviction about head and heart preparation increased, inversely proportional to the decrease in morality that he sensed in American society. Writing just two months prior to his death, he cites several examples of this decline: two college graduates caught in the act of burglary; two students convicted of murder; and the president of a scientific association being prosecuted for homicide. He then states:

Great intellects are dangerous to society unless properly directed. Something must be done to enlarge the moral rudders of the intellectual ships which we are building in our schools or they will be wrecked on the larger temptations of this age.13

For Bryan, intellectuality and morality are inextricably linked; education without moral development is doomed to create criminals and social misfits who ultimately will lose interest in education itself. He states:

If our schools train men and then leave them to prey upon society, we are going to find a decreasing interest in education. What we need just now is to cultivate a moral purpose in our students which will make them employ their talent and their training for the benefit of society rather than against it. In other words, ethical development must accompany intellectual development or our country will find itself at the mercy of a lot of well-educated criminals trained at


As early as 1922, however, he gave indications of his fear that morality had been neglected and intellectualism had gone awry. Writing in *The Commoner*, he noted the danger of a mind unguided by the moral or spiritual:

A trained mind can add largely to the usefulness of life when it is under the control of the spiritual in man, but it can wreck any human being, even civilization itself, if it is allowed to exercise authority.\(^{15}\)

Conversely, Bryan seems to have been in agreement with the principles enunciated later by Lawrence Kohlberg, who believed that three criteria combine in helping the individual to make moral decisions. Arbuthnot and Faust summarize his views:

For a decision or principle to be considered 'just' or 'morally right' it must be one on which all rational, disinterested moral individuals would agree. The criteria for a moral perspective on an act or decision are (1) *prescriptivity*, that it derive from an internal sense of duty, (2) *universalibility*, that everyone in a given set of circumstances would be able to perceive the ethical dictates of the act, and (3) *primacy*, that moral considerations be weighed before nonmoral ones (Kohlberg, 1971).\(^{16}\)

With his undaunted faith in the common person, Bryan believed that people who are once made aware of the moral


imperatives in life—which come from the Bible—will inevitably follow the dictates of their enlightened conscience to do what is right.

For Bryan, then, education functions to prepare both the mind and heart of the person, not just as an end in itself, but for the purpose of making him both a better person and a better servant of others. In other words, education is valuable for training in citizenship and for allowing its recipient to deal with life. "Education," he says, "is intended to make a citizen useful to his country as well as successful. It makes its possessor the heir of the ages and enables him to judge . . . the future by the experience of the past."17

The Value of Universal Education

As the advocate of the common person, Bryan naturally promoted universal education in America and, by logical extension, in the rest of the world. Speaking to the Union League of Chicago, he notes:

The American ideal is that there shall be an open school before every child born into the land, and that every child shall be urged to make the largest possible use of these opportunities freely furnished. And this is not only our ideal, but it is the ideal toward which the whole world is marching, our nation leading the way.18


Again, speaking to a group of students at the university in Waseda, Japan, he reiterated his belief that every person in the world deserves the highest education that he or she can receive, as long as it includes the education of mind and heart in tandem.19

Evidence of Bryan's sincere interest in universal and international education is seen in his many observations relating specifically to education, made as a consequence of his world tour in 1905-06. Especially in countries such as Russia and Cuba, he promoted education as a means of societal improvement. Of Russia, he states:

De Tocqueville some fifty years ago predicted a large place for Russia among the nations of Europe and my visit to the great empire of the northeast convinced me that Russia with universal education, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion and constitutional self-government would exert an influence upon the destinies of the old world to which it would be difficult to set a limit.20

Of Cuba, Bryan would state that "the public schools must place education within the reach of every child and thus fit all for more intelligent participation in the affairs of the government."21 Of particular concern to Bryan, in this regard, was the education of the masses in Cuba in order to prepare them for citizenship and for free and intelligent

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21 Ibid., 168.
participation in matters of government.\textsuperscript{22}

Not only did Bryan advocate international education, he also believed in the value of exporting American education abroad. In a letter to the Honorable Finis E. Garrett, for example, he makes the following recommendation with regard to education in the Philippines:

I respectfully submit that we ought to have at Manila . . . a university fully prepared to give to the educated Filipinos and students from China and other parts of the Orient the best possible statement of the principles of free institution and the fundamental things in the civilization which we are developing. I know of no greater service that we can render to the peoples of the Orient than to place before them the ideals that have guided us and the principles upon which we have built.\textsuperscript{23}

Admittedly, Bryan appears, in this letter, to be advocating little more than the extension of American colonialism at the expense of Oriental education and culture. In fact, in the same document he advocates the establishment of a university in Puerto Rico, for the purposes of drawing young men and women from Latin America who, "without leaving the Spanish surroundings with which they are familiar, could acquaint themselves with all that is best in our life and customs . . . ."\textsuperscript{24} While such statements appear to contradict much of what he says about truly international

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 175-76.


\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.
education in *Under Other Flags*, it must be remembered that Bryan would have viewed the Philippines and Puerto Rico in different terms than he would the rest of the world. These two nations came under the direct influence and control of the United States as a result of international conflicts and, probably in Bryan's view, the export of American education into their domain would have been beneficial in resolving the clash of cultures brought about by American intervention in their national and cultural life. In any case, he regarded the United States as essentially a moral nation whose schooling reflected this morality. The extension of an American version of schooling would, by extrapolation, also extend this morality to other nations which were not as advanced as America in these areas.

**The Value of Public and Private Education**

Bryan strongly advocated public education, as will be seen through his support of several institutions of higher education, especially state universities where the common person had a greater opportunity of gaining admission. Addressing the Ohio Constitutional Convention in 1912, he stated:

> In a republic where the authority rests upon the will of the people, popular intelligence is essential to good government, and the state, in self-defense, must reduce to a minimum the area of ignorance and illiteracy. . . . To condemn a child to ignorance in a land of
intelligence is even more cruel than to maim him.25

If ever the common person was to gain access to the halls of power, Bryan believed that it would be through universal public education that the goal would be achieved.

However, he desired to leave room in the educational scheme for private education as well, where religious instruction would serve as the basis for all other educational pursuits. In the same speech to the Ohio legislators, he continues:

While you provide for free education, so that there will be a school door open to every child, you, I doubt not, will find it consistent with your own views, as well as advantageous to the state, not to discourage the private schools and colleges where religious instruction can be entwined with intellectual training. . . .26

Four years later, writing in The Commoner, Bryan’s views had solidified to the point where he viewed private Christian education as almost the only option for the serious Christian or morally-inclined student. He writes:

Religious tests can not be applied in institutions supported by public taxation, and, as a result, we find that irreligion is being taught under the guise of philosophy. Professors who would rebel against the application of biblical tests to themselves, have no hesitation in undermining the faith of students who come from Christian homes by attacks upon the Bible and its teachings. The college period, therefore, instead of qualifying the student for life on a high plane and with the promise of big results, sometimes shatters his ideals and sends him out with the instability of the


26Ibid.
agnostic or with the sneer of the infidel.  

Bryan may have been anticipating the rise of secular humanism at this point. If so, his fear that prayer, Bible reading, and references to God would one day be completely removed from public schools, appears to have been well founded and prophetic.

At first glance, Bryan also appears to be denying the validity of public higher education as a whole, but a closer investigation of his article reveals his plan to constitute the Christian college as a junior or intermediate school, designed to solidify the Christian rearing of a young person before exposing him to possibly agnostic or atheistic philosophies at the university level. His reasoning is as follows:

... generally, life's impulses and purposes become fixed in strength and direction while the student is nearing the end of the high school period, or during the earlier years of the university course. If the Christian college can take the student at this time and exercise a sympathetic supervision... the foundation will be laid upon which to build a substantial character.

Why not, then, include the Christian college in our school system by making it a junior or intermediate school instead of a finishing school?...

Such an institution would take the student over the line between the high school and the university, the place where so many drop out. By the time the student finished such an academy, he would be within two years of a university diploma and would then be likely to complete his education.  

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28 Ibid.
Bryan clearly envisioned a two-year junior college at this point, although by the time of the Scopes Trial, his views would have changed to envision a college-preparatory high school or academy for boys.

Bryan thus sought to wed public and private education in such a way that the religious/theological convictions of students and their parents would not be compromised. This concern for theological purity would intensify during his latter years, culminating in the Scopes Trial in 1925. In the meantime, he would continue to advance the causes of both forms of education.

The Value of the Small College

In correlation with his dual concerns for public and private education, Bryan also advocated the value of the small college as compared with the large university. Perhaps in part because of his opposition to the large trusts and corporate magnates in America, he wished to keep education from becoming a monopoly. Shortly after the turn of the century, he had detected a tendency toward centralization and consolidation on the part of many colleges, manifested chiefly by the larger donations that were increasingly given to larger schools. He then offered the following defense for small colleges:

Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Cornell, the Chicago and Stanford universities, and others of this class, have received enormous gifts. But is there not the danger that the cause of education may be injured rather than aided if the great institutions become so strong as to
destroy the small college? There is no doubt that the large colleges and universities have advantages in the way of libraries and apparatus that the small colleges cannot afford, but has not the small college, on the other hand, certain advantages over the larger institutions?29

In this and a later (1906) edition of The Commoner Condensed, Bryan enumerates six advantages that the small college offers over against the larger university:

1. A larger number of students from a given area are likely to attend a small college, since it will be located in their region.

2. The small college offers more personal friendship and fellowship, with less likelihood of cliques forming among the student body.

3. The small college professor knows his students more intimately, thus allowing for the exercise of the power of in loco parentis, and of his communicating his ideals more clearly to his students.

4. A small college education generally costs less.

5. The small college keeps students closer to their home, thus allowing parents and student to visit more often.

6. The small college, if under Christian direction, gives more serious consideration to ethical culture30

Despite his defense of it, however, Bryan had to admit that the "small Christian college, with its lofty aims and its noble purposes, is engaged in a struggle for existence."31 Lacking sufficient endowments, such a college, even in Bryan's day, was forced to walk a financial


30Ibid; see also William Jennings Bryan, The Commoner Condensed vol. 5, 240.

tightrope by increasing tuition to cover its costs, which then placed enrollments in jeopardy. Nevertheless, he firmly believed that this institution fulfilled a unique and necessary role in American higher education. Further, he believed that it was not necessary that one type of education should result in the extermination of the other. "There is room in this country," he maintained, "for both the large college and the small college. . . . It is not necessary that a war of extermination should be waged between them." 32

Bryan recognized quite clearly that the small, Christian college cannot compete with the larger, research institutions. He states:

It might as well be understood that the small Christian college can not rival the big institutions as a finishing college. Each of the denominations, of course, has one or more large institutions with a prestige equal, or nearly equal, to the prestige of the state institutions, but this is not true of the majority of the denominational schools. They are attempting to do what they cannot do, and, because they attempt the unreasonable, they are falling behind in the race. 33

His goal, therefore, was to establish smaller institutions where the student would be taught both intellectual and moral content, thus providing the base for moving to the senior institutions for completion of the educational program. He did not expound, however, on the curriculum that


should be taught at this higher level, or whether he viewed research as an integral component of education. Had he thought through his theology more carefully, he would have realized that much of the theological liberalism which he opposed came from the great research universities of Europe. This should have motivated him to develop a more complete philosophy of higher education. His interest, however, still lay more with the common people, most of whom would not be able to take advantage of higher education in the fullest sense.

Education as Vocational Preparation For Service

A fifth aspect of Bryan's philosophy of education relates to its usefulness in preparing students for a life of service to others. He infers that education is only as good as it prepares people for useful vocations. He states:

There is but one measure of greatness--namely, service--and service is the measure of happiness also. Only those find life worth living who devote themselves conscientiously to some work which satisfies the conscience and contributes to human welfare.  

He then describes eleven vocations that he considers worthy of a young man or woman of his day: agriculture, mechanical science, the building trades, merchandising, law, teaching, banking, railroading, journalism, medicine, and the ministry. While it might be questioned whether even Bryan saw

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34Ibid., 327.
the need for more than a technical education in some cases, in others the need for higher education is clearly inferred. In all cases, however, it is certain that he viewed these vocations as useful for the advancement of modern American society and human welfare in general. Concluding an address on the commencement season in colleges, he notes that no life "can be barren or unfruitful if one goes forth strong in body, trained in mind and filled with a determination to add as largely as circumstances will permit to the welfare of society."

In this view of education and service, Bryan was in step with most of the mainline religious denominations--Protestant and Roman Catholic alike--who view service to others as an integral component of a complete Christian life.

**Education and Religion/Theology**

As much as he advocated the existence of both public and private education, Bryan also believed that there must be more than just religious freedom in education. Religious instruction, he held, must underlie all education if the latter is to be effective for the good of society. As an undeclared postmillennialist, Bryan believed that the world is improving, or has the potential for such improvement, if only men can be brought to see the truth. Having seen the

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truth, he was convinced that they would follow it obediently and unerringly. Education was therefore a key to opening people's eyes to the truth about the world in which they live, about morality, and about God.

However, if the spiritual aspect of man--which is affected by religious instruction--proves to be deficient, then the whole person will be deficient as well. He declares:

You never know what a man is until you measure him in units of spiritual power. Measure him in units of horsepower and he is not as strong as some beasts. Measure him in units of intellectual power and you soon reach his limitations, but measure him in units of spiritual power and there is no ratio than can describe the difference between man at his best and man at his worst. 37

The charge of anti-intellectualism might well be laid at Bryan's feet because of comments like these. The dichotomy that he raised here between the intellect and morality would appear again, with the difference contrasted even more starkly, at the Scopes Trial. Nevertheless, his deep concern for the moral welfare of students, measured by their spiritual capacity, is clearly seen.

If Bryan was concerned about morality in public education, he was just as concerned that the future leaders of the church in America should have their theology affirmed and their spiritual vitality increased through the

educational process, rather than having them denied and diminished. In one of his last books, he outlines what he considers to be the primary need of the church in the twentieth century:

What the Church especially needs, today, is to have its educated boys and girls return from the institutions of learning with their spiritual enthusiasm increased, so that with consecrated hearts and minds they can become the religious leaders of their respective communities. As it is, many if not most return with their interest in the Church lessened or destroyed.  

Bryan's concern, therefore, with public education in his day, was that it tended to decrease the level of spiritual sensitivity in students. While filling the student's mind with knowledge, he felt, it emptied his heart of religious devotion. As long as such a state persisted, the kingdom of God and the brotherhood of man could not become reality in American society. Furthermore, Bryan even detected in his church peers a bold intolerance of religious freedom of expression. Addressing the theological modernists in the church, he says:

The conservatives are not responsible for any lack of harmony in the church; they stand for that which has been the accepted doctrine of the church for centuries. The only discord we have is that created by the very gentlemen who object to anything being said on the Bible side. . . . they deny the fundamental principle of our government as well as our church, namely, right of the majority to rule. A large majority in all the evangelical churches stand squarely for the orthodox interpretation of the Bible, . . . .

Why not allow free discussion by those who believe the Bible as well as by those who discredit it? It is

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38William Jennings Bryan, Seven Questions In Dispute (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 149.
a new intolerance that these brethren preach—the most intolerant intolerance ever manifested. 39

Bryan's answer to this disturbing problem of the loss of spirituality in churches and schools was to advocate Bible instruction in the public educational system, in such a way that it would not infringe upon anyone's religious liberty. Commending the Florida legislature which, in 1925, had ordered the reading of the Bible in school each day, he agrees with those who would take the concept another step:

... the reading of the Bible a few minutes each day is not sufficient. The Bible needs to be taught, as school lessons are taught, by teachers who are free to interpret, explain, and illustrate them. Because of the differences among religious people, such training cannot be done satisfactorily by instructors in our public schools; we must, therefore, provide some other way of teaching the Bible in the schools.

... Each denomination or group of denominations desiring to give religious instruction in the schools should be given equal privileges with every other denomination or group, the time and place to be fixed by the school board. ... The Protestant churches will probably act together in one or two groups, the Catholic church will probably provide its own instructors, and the Jewish population will provide instruction for the children of that group. Parents will determine the service which their children will attend, a parent's request being sufficient to protect any child from any religious instruction to which the parents object. 40

Such a plan, according to Bryan, would have the advantage of providing necessary religious instruction without additional public expense, while safeguarding religious liberty in both

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40 William Jennings Bryan, "Bible Instruction In Schools," 1-2.
ways—providing it for those who so desired and allowing for its exclusion by those who opposed it. Admittedly, the plan was overly simplistic, since it did not provide for anything more than religious instruction for three major religious groups—Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. It failed to take into consideration the numerous branches of Protestantism or the many other religious groups that were yet to be formed in America, and who would also demand equal time for instruction of students. Nonetheless, Bryan saw in this plan, which never was implemented in Florida or elsewhere, the possibility of providing the means for the achievement of his philosophy of religious education for all the youth of America. In so doing, the next generation of political, religious and economic leaders could be prepared to carry on the multifaceted work of society, built upon a godly base. Education, as has been noted earlier, may be defined as the vehicle through which a culture transmits its social, political, educational, moral and religious structures to the next generation, and in so doing, perpetuates itself. In his crusade to inject biblical instruction into the public education system, Bryan was at least being faithful to the religious and moral components of this definition.

Bryan As Educational Philanthropist

Bryan was not just a theorist in education, he also took an active part in promoting the concept, as his support of various educational institutions demonstrates. He sought
to support college students; he actively opposed educational funding by corporate giants; he provided various types of support to several educational institutions; and he concluded his life by providing for the college education of his children. In all these ways, Bryan demonstrated that he recognized the necessity of carrying his ideas about education into daily life.

Bryan’s Support of College Students

Even before he and his wife had visited Japan as part of their world tour, Bryan was confronted with the financial need of an international student from the village of Kagoshima, Japan, who was seeking an American education. Wilson relates the story:

One evening Yamashita showed up at the Bryan door and explained his mission, in halting English. The Bryans opened their home to the youth and helped him gain admission to the local university. Neighbors and townsmen were duly impressed, though not all favorably, by the Bryans latching onto a 'yellow boy.' Yamashita would stay for five years, complete his schooling, and return to his native village as a school principal.41

In their Memoirs, Mrs. Bryan adds that they had both sought to discourage Yamashita from coming to the United States, since they had three children of their own who required finances for education. Undeterred, the youth had made his way to America and the Bryan doorstep in Lincoln, where he was taken in and provided with educational assistance. The

Bryans' gracious gesture was duly recognized in Yamashita's village several years later, when they visited there. Bryan records the event:

In the country, fifteen miles from Kagoshima, I was a guest at the home of Mr. Yamashita, the father of the young man who, when a student in America, made his home with us for more than five years. Mr. Yamashita was of the samurai class, and since the abolition of feudalism has been engaged in farming. He had invited his relatives and also the postmaster and the principal of the district school to the noon meal. . . . Along our way at more than one crossroad, groups of people gathered, bringing me gifts . . . in appreciation of the help that we had rendered to young Yamashita.42

With such an experience in his life, it is little wonder that Bryan sought to help other needy students, especially those in America, to gain the college education that they sought. In July 1903, he first published an article in The Commoner, entitled "A College Education." Here he revealed a plan to provide a college education for every young man or woman who would apply for college scholarship assistance to The Commoner. In what amounted to an early version of the later College Work-Study Program sponsored by the federal government, he proposed that serious students should apply to The Commoner for assistance, whereupon they would be given work during the summer months to pay their tuition and other college costs. He outlined the plan as follows:

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The Commoner ascertained the cost of tuition, cost of room rent, board, fire and lighting (these are the necessary expenses of college life) from a number of colleges, and is able to make an offer to the readers of The Commoner that should interest any young man or young woman who desires to secure a college education.

There is not an ambitious boy or girl reader of the Commoner who cannot earn the money for a college course. The money can be earned this summer for next winter’s course, and during each succeeding summer for the succeeding winter until the course is completed.43

Bryan opened the offer to male and female students but laid more stress on boys since, he reasoned, many parents preferred to send their daughters to boarding schools, which were more expensive than regular public education. His interest at this time was not to fund private education as much as it was to provide a broad opportunity for higher education to every young person who desired it.

By September of 1903, Bryan published another article in The Commoner, in which he listed eleven colleges—all generally Protestant Christian—that had been or would be contacted to arrange for some type of work-study arrangement:

Beloit College
Defiance College
Ewing College
Kentucky Wesleyan College
Lincoln Academy
McKendree College
Mount Angel College
Nebraska Wesleyan College
Washburn College
Westminster College
Whitman College

Beloit, WI
Defiance, OH
Ewing, IL
Winchester, KY
Lincoln, NB
Lebanon, IL
Mount Angel, OR
Lincoln, NB
Topeka, KS
Fulton, MO
Walla Walla, WA

Tuition costs at these institutions ranged from twenty-seven to fifty dollars (presumably per year), while enrollments varied from one hundred forty eight (McKendree College) to seven hundred (Nebraska Wesleyan University); and faculty numbered between thirteen and forty.\(^{44}\) Thus, Bryan was seeking to enroll students in colleges that were well established and could offer a high quality of education for that time.

Regrettably, it is not clear from the literature whether Bryan's college-assistance plan ever succeeded. After 1903, no further mention of it is found in *The Commoner*, which may indicate that he was not able to negotiate suitable financial arrangements with the colleges listed. His plan, as with so many others that he initiated along the way, may have been premature. College financial aid and work-study programs would only be developed many years later, but they would achieve the same purpose that Bryan outlined in his own scheme. At least in his day, he was demonstrating that educational philanthropy could be broadened beyond the kind of direct financial aid that he and his wife had provided for Yamashita.

*His Opposition To Funding By Corporate Giants*

As much as Bryan wished to see students helped in

financing their college education, he rejected the concept of funding for schools by trusts and corporate magnates. In keeping with his political anti-trust plank, he vigorously opposed any attempts by individuals or corporations to control the direction of a college through financial or philanthropic leverage. Attacking John D. Rockefeller in this regard, he notes:

He has so long accustomed himself to putting money-making above ethical considerations that he can bankrupt a competitor through the rebate system, bribe a college with a donation or evade a court summons with equal complacency.\(^{45}\)

He charges that college presidents and professors have, through the inducement of potentially large endowments from such individuals, been persuaded to change their views to comply with their major donors. Where such benefactors represented corporate interests, Bryan vehemently opposed them. No college can properly educate the new generation of youth, he maintained, "so long as it tries to shape the course of its instruction to please the unscrupulous exploiters who infest the commercial highways and plunder the passersby."\(^{46}\) Citing the receipt of a million-dollar gift from the Rockefeller family to Yale University, he predicted that never again would the President of that institution advise turning away a donation of this size, no matter what

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the ultimate cost might be to the university.  

So strong was Bryan’s opposition to accepting corporate donations that, as a Board member for Illinois College, he did everything in his power to cause the college to follow the same course. He recognized that the alternative to a few, large corporate gifts was many smaller gifts from individuals. Even in his day, philanthropic appeals to the masses yielded meager results at best. Of the supporters of Illinois College, he complains:

As a member of the board of trustees I have opposed accepting money from the trusts and have appealed to the public for aid for it. But a few--very few--have responded. The total amount received as a result of the appeal has been less than $1000. The failure of the masses to support the small colleges is liable to be construed as indifference to the insidious efforts now being made by the trusts to subsidize our colleges. Nothing would so much encourage the colleges to refuse tainted money as an outpouring of contributions from those who want to keep our institutions of learning free from pollution.

Bryan cared little whether the small gifts arrived at a rate suitable to keep the college afloat financially; in principle he could not bring himself to allow the acceptance of any relationship with the trusts.

Thus in 1907, while serving as president of the Board of Trustees for the College, he tendered his resignation because the rest of the Board desired to allow the College President, Charles Henry Rammelkamp, to apply for both

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48 Ibid.
Carnegie and Rockefeller grants.49 Citing the danger of the strangulation of truth in that institution, he wrote to the Board from Hong Kong:

Our college cannot serve God and Mammon. It cannot be a college for the people and at the same time commend itself to the commercial highwaymen who are now subsidizing the colleges to prevent the teaching of economic truth. It grieves me to have my alma mater converted into an ally of plutocracy, but having done what I could to prevent it, I have no other recourse than to withdraw from its management.50

In resigning, he regretted that he had already made a firm commitment of $2,500 by transferring notes over to the College, which could not now be revoked.

The fact that the Board unanimously accepted Bryan's resignation seems to indicate that his view of the danger of large corporate gifts was definitely a minority position, although he indicates that several other board members had resigned a month earlier for the same reason. It may also indicate that his charge was true, namely, that once a large gift is made, the concerns of smaller donors are quickly forgotten.

His Financial Assistance to Education

Despite his disagreements with Illinois College over corporate funding, Bryan obviously became vitally involved


with that institution as well as several others during the course of his career. His early attempts at establishing the college work-study program surely must have put him in contact with each of the schools listed in *The Commoner*; but he also touched sixty-two other colleges and universities through the settlement of the Philo S. Bennett estate.

Bennett, a Connecticut businessman, had visited Bryan in Nebraska in 1900 and asked him for assistance in drawing his will. He had significant educational interests, as evidenced by his desire to establish a library at Salem, IL; to establish prizes for scholarship in the study of government at twenty-five institutions; and to establish financial aid for needy boys and girls around the country. In his will, he designated $1,500 for the first purpose and $10,000 for each of the remaining three. Bryan was selected as executor of the estate and was to receive a $50,000 gift from Bennett, to be used either for his own purposes or for further educational and charitable works as he desired. He was also to select the institutions which would be recipients of the science grants and boys' scholarships, while Mrs. Bryan was to select those for the girls' aid.

The will was contested with regard to the three $10,000 items as well as the $50,000 bequest to Bryan. When it was settled by the courts, the $10,000 grants were upheld but the grant to Bryan was denied. The ultimate gifts to the colleges and universities ranged in amount from $400 to
Ironically, these gifts included institutions such as Harvard and Yale, which Bryan would later accuse of accepting tainted money from the trusts. In any case, his influence must have been widely felt throughout the educational community at the time. That he received not a little criticism from his political opponents over what appeared to be a conflict of interest is attested by his self-defense:

Mr. and Mrs. Bryan, of course, received no compensation for distributing these funds but they are richly rewarded for the little they have been able to do by the consciousness that they have aided a friend to make a valuable contribution to his own and subsequent generations. The Bennett case has given Mr. Bryan a great deal of annoyance and some of the republican papers have maliciously misrepresented the facts, but it is over and the money secured for educational purposes will prove a continuing blessing to thousands of boys and girls, while the annoyance will soon be forgotten.  

In fact, in a letter to the mayor and city council of Salem, Bryan later admitted that even in the construction of the library in that community, he had the leading interest. Describing Bennett's disposition of his assets in the will that he helped him draw, Bryan states:

After remembering a number of charities and making certain educational bequests he had a small sum left, and I suggested to him that he join me in the building of a library at Salem. This he gladly assented to, and the will contained a bequest of $1,500 . . . to be given to the City of Salem for the erection

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52 Ibid., 257.
of a library. 53
Bryan matched Bennett's amount, and the library was completed in 1908. However, this failure to deal at arm's length as attorney for Bennett and executor of his estate certainly did little to diminish the appearance of a conflict of interest on Bryan's part.

As with political defeats, Bryan was able to absorb the court challenge, the subsequent loss of the $50,000 bequest, and his opponents' criticism with relative ease, based on the rationale that these negative aspects were overridden by the educational good that was accomplished through the grants.

On a less controversial plane, Bryan also became involved with several other institutions of learning. Although little is known of his activities there, he apparently served for a time as a member of the Board of Trustees of the American University in Washington, D.C. Bishop John H. Hamilton, Chancellor of the institution, wrote to him at one point:

I want to thank you again for the interest you have taken in the University and I assure you that the gentlemen associated with you in the Board of Trustees appreciate, more than you can know, your presence at our meetings. 54


Exactly when Bryan became a Trustee, and how long or effectively he served, is not indicated in the literature.

In the 1920s, as he came into increasing conflict with Darwinian theory in public education, Bryan became more intensely involved with founding or supporting schools and colleges. Evidently, he even interacted at the high school level. A letter in his personal papers indicates that he was invited to speak at the commencement exercises of the Oakland Township High School (Oakland, IL) in 1921. Zerny Jackson, a student there, wrote to him:

During my Sophomore and Junior years I became very skeptical in my religious belief but, thanks to your influence chiefly in the "Prince of Peace," I have nearly overcome it. Others in the class are still agnostic and doubtless could be benefitted by your utterances, should you consent to deliver this address.55

That same January in 1921, Bryan received a letter from Charles F. Horner of Kansas City, Missouri, recommending Miami as "a wonderful place for a successful school of any kind."56 Horner seems to have gleaned an impression from various newspaper reports that Bryan was considering this idea, and he offered financial assistance if the latter desired it.

Again in that month, a letter arrived from Alexander


McGill, Department of Mathematics of the Dade County (Florida) Agricultural High School, inviting Bryan to grant consent to using his name in forming the "William J. Bryan Literary and Debating Club." 57

Another Florida institution, however, seems to have consumed the majority of Bryan’s educational efforts during his last few years. While continuing his political efforts despite his declining influence, and while teaching an outdoor Sunday School in Miami that attracted thousands each week, he also developed a strong interest in the University of Florida, as Wilson notes:

... even while accepting modest fees for blurbing Miami, he was carrying forward a much more extensive and strenuous effort without the request or prospect of any fees at all. This was his effort to win badly needed financial aid for the deplorably neglected University of Florida, then a down-at-the-heels men’s academy lost in the pine woods and grass bogs of Gainesville. 58

Wilson notes that Bryan was successful in raising these funds on behalf of the University. 59

Bryan’s interest in the University of Florida was sparked, at least in part, by the development of a close relationship with its president, Albert A. Murphree. Proctor notes the similarities which drew these men together:


59 Ibid., 405.
1. Their Southern Baptist-Methodist roots (although Bryan's ties with the Presbyterians were stronger).

2. They were both deeply religious and attended church and Sunday School regularly.

3. They both participated in individual prayer and Bible Study.

4. Both had active leadership roles in their own local churches.

5. Both had inflexible attitudes regarding right and wrong. They saw issues as clearly delineated between right and wrong.

6. Both were religiously intolerant (although Bryan seems to have been more tolerant than many).

7. Both were insistent on rooting out sin from society, especially from the schools and colleges.

Murphree insisted on mandatory chapel attendance twice per week, with Scripture reading and prayer included in each service; and Bryan heartily concurred. The President also made membership in some evangelical church mandatory for all faculty.

In 1923, Bryan was asked by President Murphree and George S. White, General Secretary of the University of Florida YMCA, to serve as chairman of the fund-raising campaign for a new student religious-activities building on the campus. Bryan gratefully accepted the challenge and set out to raise $179,000 for this purpose. Although the campaign was largely unsuccessful--approximately $80,000 of a

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61 Ibid., 3-4.
total of $179,000 was raised by the summer of 1925—he was lauded for his efforts and awarded the honorary Doctor of Laws degree at commencement in July 1923. Later, the main lounge of the Florida Union building was named in his honor.62

Finally, Bryan also became involved in the founding of another Florida institution, the University of Miami. As Smith notes, he was involved with an influential group that helped to found the University of Miami at Coral Gables, FL. Miami was important to him because of its ties to Latin America. As early as 1916, in fact, he had been looking at this city as a potential center for Latin American education and trade. Two months after his death, the cornerstone of the new university was laid, and Bryan was eulogized as one of the two principal advocates of such a university in the Miami area.63

Thus, through his direct financial support, his work as executor of the Bennett estate, his fund-raising efforts, his religious ties with President Murphree of the University of Florida, and by allowing the use of his name for educational purposes, Bryan demonstrated a firm commitment to the promotion of education in the United States.

62Ibid., 4-8.

Bryan and the Education of His Children

Bryan's interest in education, wedded as it was to his theology, prompted him to provide educational bequests for his grand-children and great grand-children after his death. First he made generous provision for his wife, then ordered that the remainder of his estate, after all other expenses and bequests contained in his will were cared for, be divided equally among his four children. In one of these additional bequests, however, he directed:

Sixth: I give and bequeath unto each of my beloved grand-children and great grand-children, now living or that may be born before the final distribution of my estate, the sum of two thousand dollars, said sum to be used for the education of the child, . . . .

The granting of two thousand dollar bequests in a day when tuition was only a fraction thereof sufficiently attests to the value that Bryan placed on the higher education of his descendants. Furthermore, it represented the partial fulfillment of his ultimate philanthropic intent with regard to education, and it clearly demonstrated his belief that the common person, when given the facts—as education presumably gives him—will do the right thing, especially if his heart is guiding his head. In the same document, he would make yet another bequest that would provide the seed money for the initiation of an institution of Christian education—

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Bryan's key for training the hearts of young people in righteousness so that their knowledge might be applied correctly.

**Bryan As Educational Practitioner**

While it might be argued that his philanthropic activities on behalf of education constituted him as an educational practitioner, this designation is more readily applied to Bryan because of his strenuous efforts, during the last half-decade of his life, to eradicate evolutionary teaching from public education and, failing that, to establish Christian education as an alternative to what appeared to him to be a decadent educational system.

**His Crusade Within Public Education**

As the Reformers did in the church centuries before him, Bryan sought first to work within the public education system, purging it of what he considered to be harmful and dangerous teachings, especially those advocating Darwin's evolutionary hypothesis. In the midst of his defense of Fundamentalism, the Commoner concluded that evolutionary theory, as taught first in college classrooms but more recently in grade schools as well, presented the greatest threat to conservative theology and devout religious practice. Armed with the information contained in books such as Leuba's *The Belief In God and Immortality*, Kellogg's *Headquarters Nights*; and Kidd's *The Science of Power*, Bryan was
convinced that an insidious crusade was being launched in American public school classrooms, to rid them of godly belief and teaching and to replace it with godless, evolutionary theory. Into this battle—perceived or real—he strode with his characteristic flourish and zeal.

What he so rigorously opposed was not the teaching of evolution per se, but the teaching of it as fact. Smith notes:

Bryan was not opposed to the teaching or the study of evolution as a theory or hypothesis, but he did strongly object to teaching it as a proved fact. Certainly it was not to be taught as a fact in public schools. And he thought that administrators of private Christian schools should not want to permit it to be taught there either. . . . He was concerned that readers, especially students, should have been able to 'get both sides' of the controversy.  

However, Bryan was not as open to both sides obtaining a hearing with the student as one might suppose. Because of his belief in majority rule, and because he believed that the view of the majority always takes precedence over the minority opinion, he quickly moved to a position of absolute intolerance toward the proponents and teachers of evolution. In *The Commoner* in early 1920, he wrote:

The greatest menace to the public school system of today is, in my judgment, its Godlessness. We have allowed the moral influences to be crowded out. . . . We have gone too far in allowing religion to be eliminated from our schools.  

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He goes on to point out that, if religious neutrality is constitutionally demanded in public universities, then it must be a true neutrality, which means that public school teachers are neither asked to teach religion in class nor are they allowed to attack the Bible in those same classrooms.\textsuperscript{67}

Had Bryan contented himself with this latter position, he might have achieved his objective of true educational-religious neutrality. In the same article, however, he throws down the gauntlet to the evolutionists by stating:

\begin{quote}
The time has come when we are justified in saying that no man or woman shall be put in charge of the teaching of children who does not believe in God. One who does not believe in God cannot conceal atheistic views in teaching the children, and the harm which such an one will do them spiritually is infinitely greater than any good done them intellectually.\textsuperscript{68}
\end{quote}

Pushing the point, Bryan went on, in 1922, to draw plans to have the State of Florida legislate against teachings contrary to the Bible. Although charged with stifling academic freedom of conscience and curtailing academic freedom, he insisted that the Fundamental majority—\textit{for so he viewed them—}had the right to make such demands, even in public education. "The hand that writes the paycheck," he declared, "rules the school."\textsuperscript{69} Sensitive to such a charge,

\textsuperscript{67}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{68}Ibid.

however, he strongly defended his position that called for theological purity in education:

As soon as the methods of these atheists, agnostics, and Darwinists were exposed they raised a cry that freedom of conscience was being attacked. That is false, there is no interference with freedom of conscience in this country and should be none. . . . The atheist has just as much right to deny God as the Christian has to believe in God; the agnostic has just as much right to profess ignorance in regard to God's existence as the Christian has to profess his faith in the existence of God. The right of conscience is not menaced in this country, it is inviolable. . . . .

Let it be understood that there is no attack either upon freedom of conscience or upon anyone's right to teach religion or irreligion. The real issue is whether atheists, agnostics, Darwinists and evolutionists shall enjoy SPECIAL PRIVILEGES in this country and have rights higher than the rights of Christians. 70

Bryan goes on to claim that, since Christians build their own colleges for the purpose of teaching Christianity to their children, the atheists, agnostics, and Darwinists should do the same. He seems to lose sight of the fact, however, that such an argument just begs the very question at issue, namely, "Who shall control the curriculum of the public school?" If both Christians and non-Christians withdraw from the public sector in order to teach in their own politically or theologically correct institutions, who will be left in public education? Bryan never seems to provide a satisfactory answer to this question; in fact, it may have never occurred to him.

In this argument, though, he was at least being true to the tenets of his own faith. He could not conceive that the

70 Ibid.
acquisition of knowledge could be divorced from faith in God, for the two were inseparably intertwined. In his most famous anti-evolution article, "The Menace of Darwinism," he states:

There is that in each human life that corresponds to the mainspring of a watch—that which is absolutely necessary if the life is to be what it should be, a real life and not a mere existence. That necessary thing is A BELIEF IN GOD. . . . Without religion, viz., a sense of dependence upon God and reverence for Him, one can play a part in both the physical and the intellectual world, but he cannot live up to the possibilities which God has placed within the reach of each human being. 71

If belief in God is necessary for a true understanding of the world, Bryan would argue, then anything that threatens such belief threatens and weakens humanity. Agnosticism, atheism, and Darwinism posed such a threat for him, and he therefore sought all means to oppose and eradicate them. Given a choice between head and heart, in the face of what might be regarded as irrefutable scientific evidence by some, Bryan would confidently declare:

It is better to know the Rock of Ages than to know the ages of the rocks; it is better for one to know that he is close to the Heavenly Father than to know how far the stars in the heavens are apart. 72

In the face of such argumentation and logic, and in light of the fact that his opponents seemed to be winning the battle for the schools and the minds of students, it would not be

72 Ibid.
long before Bryan advocated the construction of schools where the values of Christianity could be taught without opposition, and where unbiblical teachings could be avoided entirely.

His Plans For A Christian Institution

During the last weeks of his life, as he diligently prepared for his prosecution of John Thomas Scopes in Dayton, Bryan conceived of a plan for establishing a fundamental Christian college or university in that community. He marshalled the support of his friend and wealthy Florida realtor, George F. Washburn, to finance the construction. Writing to Bryan on 13 July, Washburn states:

This is the psychological moment to strike while the country is aroused . . . If you favor the movement you may announce that I will be one of twenty five men to give ten thousand dollars each for the first quarter of a million dollar fund towards building the first fundamentalist university in America . . . .

Washburn must have had second thoughts about the idea, for on 24 July, the day prior to Bryan's death, he began to pull away from Dayton as the site for the new institution. Citing the intense heat of Tennessee, lack of accommodations in the community, the fact that Fundamentalists in other states might want their new university in a different location, and the need for Bryan to keep himself unencumbered by the burdens of building a new university, Washburn suggested

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that they defer the decision regarding location until some type of national organization of Fundamentalists could be formed and the issue debated at that level. 74

By this time, Bryan had already surveyed a possible site for a school in Dayton. The Los Angeles Times, reporting on 31 July, just six days after his death, notes:

Last Friday, about forty-eight hours before his death, he summoned Sue and Herbert Hicks, F. E. Robinson and one or two others of his associates and went with them to a large hill in South Dayton, which had been suggested as the site of the college. The party walked up this hill in the broiling sun and all over the site, Mr. Bryan occasionally stopping and pointing out where driveways should be built, where athletic fields should be, and studying the ground generally with apparently a settled intention of leading the plan to establish the college at that spot. 75

In his last will and testament, signed and notarized just twenty days prior to his death, Bryan made his own bequest for this same institution. While not designating the location for it at that time, he clearly indicates the purpose of his gift:

I would like it used to establish an academy for boys which shall be under the control of some unit of government of some evangelical church, Presbyterian preferred, but not absolutely necessary, so that it can be controlled by a religious organization. I would like to have it cover the junior and senior years of high school and the freshman and sophomore years of college--those being the years when the student most


needs religious supervision.\textsuperscript{76}

Although what eventually transpired in Dayton was a full-fledged, four-year university, Bryan's intent in his will was clear. Had the university concept come to fruition in his day, he no doubt would have changed his will to fund it.

While the school that he envisioned did not come into existence during Bryan's life, five years later William Jennings Bryan University was founded, on a different hill but still in Dayton, Tennessee, as a memorial to the tireless educational efforts of its namesake.

Conclusion

William Jennings Bryan was therefore not just a politician and reformer but a theologian of sorts and an educator as well. His theology of the Kingdom of God and the Brotherhood of Man, as well as his beliefs about the training of the heart as a guide to intellectual growth, combined to make a definite impact upon his educational ideas. Convinced that the common person, once knowing the truth, would follow its dictates and order his society in keeping with biblical principles, he first sought to provide funding and guidance to education through his various philanthropic endeavors. Later, sensing that something was amiss in the public educational system, he sought to purify it by rooting agnosticism, atheism, and Darwinian evolution from its

\textsuperscript{76}Bryan, "Last Will and Testament," 7-8.
curriculum and classrooms. Failing in this endeavor, he turned to the establishment of private Christian education as the alternative means for bringing in the Kingdom of God.

Had he lived beyond Dayton and the Scopes trial, Bryan might have found himself defending a form of Fundamentalism that was severely restricted in its worldview and which would seek more to condemn its opponents than to provide a logical, intellectually respectable defense of its theology and practice. On the other hand, he might well have realized that Fundamentalism, as it was then developing in America, was too restrictive theologically and intellectually for his reform-minded approach to life. In all likelihood, another burning issue would have crossed his path and he would have attached himself to it.

Exactly what Bryan would have done with the college in Dayton or with Fundamentalism in general is not known. Prior to his death, however, he was to have one last, major battle with Darwin and his kind. In the stifling heat of July 1925, in a quaint southern county courthouse in Rhea County, Tennessee, he fought his last, and what many consider to be, his greatest battle. The famous Scopes trial pitted Bryan—as the Bible expert—against Clarence Darrow and atheism. It will be the purpose of the final chapter to examine this clash of worldviews in detail.
CHAPTER VI

THE SCOPES TRIAL: EDUCATION AND BRYAN'S THEOLOGY IN CONFLICT

Introduction

With his strong interest in theological, religious, and educational issues, especially as they affected the children of America; and considering what appears to have been his penchant for single-issue conflicts--whether political or religious--it is not surprising that in the last year of his life Bryan found yet another issue on which to take his stand. Unknown to him or the world at the time, this would be his last stand, and the one by which much of the world would erroneously remember him.

As he watched the public schools of the nation turning in an increasingly secular direction, Bryan realized that, just as he had done earlier with issues such as colonialism, the monetary system, and anti-trust legislation, he now had an opportunity to stake his claim on still another critical issue in the life of the American people, but this time with potential consequences that touched the very fabric of society. The issue of what would be taught in the public schools of the land suddenly loomed large in his mind, and he set out to defend the children of America from the inroads of godless atheism as demonstrated by the
evolutionary teachings of Charles Darwin.

The idea of combat with the forces of godless atheism was not new to Bryan, as Hibben notes:

No one who has observed Bryan's mental habits closely will be astonished to notice that he saw the 'error' of Darwinism at forty, but put off speaking on the issue for twenty years. For one thing, he did not feel that the question had reached an acute stage until 1920. By that time he detected the pernicious doctrine at work on the faith of the masses. In earlier days it had been the property of the intellectuals, then of the college educated, finally it reached the public school teachers and through them Tom, Dick, and Harry.¹

When Bryan finally noticed the impact that the teaching of evolution was having upon young people, he strode into the fray and began to gather material for the battle. Personal testimony from those who had been affected by Darwinism constituted an important source of evidence for him. Zerny Jackson, for example--the student from Oakland, Illinois who wrote to him in 1921--explained the grave danger that Darwinism had posed for him and others:

I was reared in a very stringent manner religiously, but a High-school course in Biology (under an agnostic instructor), along with a secondary knowledge of History and General Science, almost caused me to lose my faith in God. Your writings have not only caused my faith to be restored, but have made me see the real danger and deceptiveness of Darwinism and kindred teachings. I appreciate the great work you are doing along this line.²

Jackson indicated that several acquaintances of his had been


likewise affected by Darwinism or were interested in the subject, and he requested that Bryan send him literature treating this topic.

Thus, as the early twenties progressed, Bryan's interest became singularly focused upon the "Menace of Darwinism," as he termed this alleged threat to the morals and religious devotion of American youth. It was natural, therefore, that when the opportunity for a public battle on the issue presented itself, he would gladly accept it. Indeed, he devoted the last years of his career in writing--both editorially and in book form--almost entirely to promoting the validity of Christianity over against Darwinism and the evolutionary hypothesis. For example, in preparation for the publication of one of his final works, Seven Questions in Dispute, he instructed his editor and publisher to clearly depict on a cartoon or frontispiece the steps that lead a person from Christianity to atheism. He told him:

Make stairs leading from one story to another and mark the stairs 'Evolution.' Let 'Bible Curiosity' be written upon the floor of the upper story. Then have the steps made as follows: First step down, 'Bible not infallible'; second step down, 'Man not made in God's image'; third step down, 'No Miracles'; fourth, 'No Virgin Birth'; fifth, 'No Diety [sic]'; sixth, 'No Atonement'; seventh, "No Resurrection'; eighth, "Agnosticism." On the floor of the lower story write 'Atheism.'

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Indeed, the book was published with the frontispiece almost exactly as Bryan had suggested; and in the work, he seeks to demonstrate that "the three persons who are most affected by modernism are the student, the preacher who substitutes education for religion, and the scientist who prefers guesses to the Word of God." On this last point, Bryan would argue vociferously with the scientific and academic communities of the nation, in his own published works, and finally with Clarence Darrow in the hot and steamy courtroom of Dayton, Tennessee, where he would take his final stand against godless evolutionary theory.

It will be the purpose of this chapter to examine this concluding episode in the life of William Jennings Bryan. Pretrial issues and events will be discussed, followed by an examination of the trial itself and its aftermath in the lives of all who had a personal stake in it.

Framing the Battle Plan: Pretrial Issues and Events

Even before the trial loomed on the horizon, legislation had been drafted by conservative Florida Fundamentalists in an effort to eradicate the teaching of evolution from the public schools in that state. Tennessee would soon follow, with bills drawn by state legislators who received strong support from Bryan. From a practical perspective, therefore, the trial would serve as a logical outcome of

"Ibid."
these and other considerations that moved the creation-evolution argument along. However, below the practical level lay the more important philosophical issues that would be argued in Dayton, whose outcome in the trial would in part determine the direction of the controversy for years to come.

**Practical Considerations**

**Anti-evolution legislation.** Intellectually, Bryan might not have been willing to attack Darwin and the evolutionists just for the sake of argument. He was, after all, neither a scientist nor a formal educator, although, as noted earlier, he possessed very definite educational theories. What stimulated him to join the cause against evolution in the schools, however, was the impact that it appeared to have on the minds and hearts of young people. Williams notes:

Bryan became aroused and finally alarmed over the steady loss of faith in the Bible and Christian truth. Fathers and mothers, pastors, Sunday School teachers, and church people generally crowded up after his lectures to tell him that their children were losing faith. Others besought him to meet their children in private conference. Still others expressed hope that he would lecture where their children were going to college. . . . . Bryan took the position that evolution was an unproven theory and, at best, an hypothesis of Darwin and his succeeding followers; that, stated in its Darwinian terms, it overthrew the Bible and Christian faith, and that it was undermining the youth of the country and destroying the church and revealed religion.5

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Williams notes, further, that this public outcry from his loyal followers quickly solidified into a political principle, which allowed him to go on record as objecting to the teaching of the doctrine of evolution in any public school. He initially admitted that the doctrine could be taught as theory, but not as truth. However, the force of his objections to any form of evolutionary belief would soon crowd out any openness that might have existed to its being taught alongside the biblical theory of origins. 6

As with so many of the causes he had espoused during his career, Bryan soon sought legislative action to secure the implementation of a non-evolutionary policy in public education. In 1923, he threw his weight behind such an effort in his home state of Florida. France describes the developments of the Florida anti-evolution law:

When the legislature convened in April 1923, there was considerable public support for anti-evolution legislation. With behind-the-scenes guidance by Bryan, Representative S. L. Giles of Franklin County on April 17 proposed a resolution which declared, 'that it is improper and subversive to the best interests of the people of this State for any professor, teacher or instructor in the public schools and colleges of this State, supported in whole or in part by public taxation, to teach or permit to be taught atheism, agnosticism, Darwinism, or any other hypothesis that links man in blood relation to any other form of life.' 7

Notably, this legislation failed to mention the distinction

6 Ibid., 451.

7 Mary Duncan France, "'A Year of Monkey War': The Anti-Evolution Campaign and the Florida Legislature," Florida Historical Quarterly 54 (February 1975), 158-59.
between teaching evolution as fact and teaching it merely as theory. Furthermore, the act constituted an opinion only, since it carried no penalty for non-compliance. Two years later, when Florida fundamentalists realized that the law had failed to discourage the teaching of evolution in the schools and colleges of their state, they were ready to draft more rigorous measures. However, as France notes, these efforts died in committee while the events of Dayton, Tennessee overshadowed them. 8

Meanwhile, fundamentalist Christians were also agitating against evolutionary teaching in their schools. Early in 1925, John Washington Butler--a Tennessee farmer turned legislator--drafted a bill to prohibit the teaching of evolution in the public schools of the State. It read, in part:

Section 1: Be it enacted by the General Assemble [sic] of the State of Tennessee; that it shall be unlawful for any teacher in any of the Universities, Normals, and all other public schools in the State which are supported in whole or in part by the public school fund 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. 9

Butler, however, went a step further than the 1923 Florida legislation, in that he added a penalty for non-compliance:

Section 2: Be it further enacted; that any teacher

8Ibid., 159-60.

found guilty of a 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. ¹⁰

The proposed law was not without its opponents in
Tennessee; nevertheless, Butler managed to rally sufficient
conservative support to obtain its passage by the lower
house on 28 January 1925 by a vote of 71 to 5. ¹¹ As the
bill went before the Senate for consideration, Senator John
A. Shelton wrote to Bryan, asking for his counsel on the
final form that it should take. ¹² Bryan was quick to take
exception to the penalty provision, noting his reasons in a
response sent to the Senator:

The special thing that I want to suggest is that it is
better not to have a penalty. I suggest this for two
reasons: in the first place, our opponents, not being
able to oppose the measure on its merits, are always
trying to find something that will divert attention,
and the penalty furnishes the excuse. . . . The second
reason is that we are dealing with an educated class
that is supposed to respect the law. It will be easier
to pass the bill without a penalty attached. If the
declaration made by the Legislature in the form of a
law without a penalty is not obeyed, a penalty can be
added by a subsequent legislature. ¹³

Despite Bryan’s suggestion, the bill was passed on 13 March

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ray Ginger, Six Days or Forever? (Boston: Beacon
Press, 1958), 4-5.

¹²Shelton to Hon. William J. Bryan, 5 February 1925.
Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Papers of William
Jennings Bryan.

¹³Bryan to Hon. John A Shelton, 9 February 1925.
Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Papers of William
Jennings Bryan.
1925 and signed into law by Governor Austin Peay on 21 March. The stage was set for a confrontation between conservative evangelicals and evolutionists. The battle front would be the public schools of Tennessee, while the chief antagonists would be William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow, with John T. Scopes serving as the catalyst.

The law challenged. Shortly after the Tennessee anti-evolution law was passed, various individuals and groups began to agitate for a test case. Wilson notes:

. . . there were reports that the constitutionality of the act would be challenged; the American Civil Liberties Union had reportedly indicated its willingness to serve as challenger. Several publications for teachers bitterly condemned the legislation, while greater numbers of church papers, particularly in Protestant folds, lauded it. Both the New York Times and the Christian Science Monitor deplored the 'monkey law' and branded it an historic impediment to the progress of public education.14

After an initial attempt at a test case failed in Chattanooga, several businessmen in Dayton happened upon a plan that would both test the new law and bring untold publicity to this tiny community just thirty-five miles to the north. In his Memoirs, John Scopes recalled the events at F. E. Robinson's Drug Store in Dayton that precipitated the famous trial:

Past the screened double doors at the front was the

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fountain and at a nearby table were half a dozen men in
the midst of a warm discussion. In addition to Doc
Robinson, there was Mr. Brady, who ran the town's other
drugstore; Sue Hicks, the town's leading lawyer, who
had been arguing for the Butler law; Wallace Haggard,
another attorney, whose father owned the leading bank
and was 'Mr. Dayton'; a fellow who worked at the post
office; and George Rappelyea. . . . 'John, we've been
arguing,' said Rappelyea, 'and I said that nobody could
teach biology without teaching evolution.' 'That's
right,' I said, not sure of what he was leading up
to.15

What Rappelyea was leading up to was a test of the new
anti-evolution law in the Rhea County Court, located in
Dayton. While Scopes later admitted that, had he known the
notoriety that he would gain in a few weeks, he might have
demurred from participating in the trial, he quite readily
agreed to Rappelyea's plan and that same afternoon--7 May
1925--he was "arrested" and charged with violating the new
statute. This set the stage for the main characters--Bryan
and Darrow--to be called by lawyers for the prosecution and
defense respectively, to assist in trying the case.

Bryan's invitation to be part of the Scopes trial came
from the Executive Committee of the World's Christian
Fundamentals Association. In a telegram sent to him on 12
May 1925, the Committee formally named him as their attorney
for the trial and requested his written acceptance. A day
later, the Committee sent a second telegram, this time
expressing joy in the fundamentalist camp over Bryan's

15John T. Scopes, Center of the Storm: Memoirs of John
acceptance of the challenge. Darrow, on the other hand, volunteered his services to the chief counsel for the defense, John Randolph Neal. Scopes notes that Darrow and Dudley Field Malone cosigned a telegram in which they offered their services without charge. He also felt that, had Bryan not joined the prosecution team, Darrow might have refrained from the trial as well:

Because Bryan had, for several years past, devoted his considerable energies to religious and anti-evolution writing and speeches, people were beginning to suspect he would turn the Dayton trial into an old-fashioned tent revival. With Bryan in the fray, Darrow was keen to be included.

The scene was thus set for a courtroom battle that would send repercussions throughout the nation and even across the seas. The issues were at least three-fold: State of Tennessee v. John T. Scopes, Christianity v. Darwinian evolution, and William Jennings Bryan v. Clarence Darrow. Recalling earlier days of cooperation between the latter two opponents, Hibben notes:

As they fought at Dayton it seemed fabulous to remember that Darrow had ever supported Bryan. A heaven-sent opportunity for William Jennings to battle against a worthy opponent for God and Genesis.

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17 Scopes, Center of the Storm, 66-67.

18 Ibid, 67.

19 Hibben, The Peerless Leader, 390.
Bryan’s readiness for the challenge. Many wondered at the wisdom of Bryan accepting the challenge of a duel in Dayton. He had not tried a case in court for over two decades, because his political and religious pursuits had otherwise occupied his time. Furthermore, his physical condition was such that some wondered whether he possessed the stamina required for the trial. Williams writes:

In vain did some of Bryan’s close friends plead with him to stay out of it. They pictured his age; they pointed out that he had had two or three spells of weakness after some of his great speeches during the previous year; they pictured the heat of Tennessee in July, the strain of the conflict, but most of all they pictured the ridicule that would come to him, the abuse, the misrepresentation, the gibes that would be flung at him; frankly, most of them hated to see Bryan go into the trial and would have given much if he had refused as he might gracefully have done and have given Mrs. Bryan’s health and his own age as reasons for staying out of the contest.20

Reasons for accepting the challenge. Bryan, however, was not about to be dissuaded from the legal challenge to legislation that he had influenced. He had a personal interest in the outcome as well as a desire to protect the children of Tennessee and the nation from the evils of Darwinism. This was reason enough to overlook his own lack of legal preparation, his strained physical condition, and his wife’s failing health. In fact, he had been seeking an opportunity to bring the evolution issue to public light in a greater way as early as 1923. In one of his many editorials, he states: "The only thing that Christians need

20 Williams, William Jennings Bryan, 460-61.
to do now is to bring the enemies of the Bible into the open and compel them to meet the issue as it is."\(^{21}\)

For the American Civil Liberties Union, the reason for the trial was clear—to test the constitutionality of the new law and hopefully to have it overturned, either in Rhea County, the Court of Appeals, or the Tennessee Supreme Court. For Scopes, the reason was similar, namely, to test and eradicate what he considered a bad law which threatened academic freedom in the public school classrooms of the State.\(^{22}\) Ironically, he would be prosecuted by the very man who had spoken at his high school graduation in Salem, Illinois just a few years earlier. In an editorial in the Guide To Salem, an unknown author describes this irony:

Both Bryan and Scopes were raised in Salem, years apart. Bryan was born here in 1860 while Scopes' [sic] entered the world about 40 years later. When William Jennings Bryan joined in the prosecution of John Scopes for teaching evolution, it was not the first time that the two crossed paths. Six years before the famous Scopes Monkey Trial . . . Bryan returned to his alma mater--Salem High School--to deliver the commencement address to the class of 1919. In that class was John Scopes.\(^{23}\)

Finally, for Clarence Darrow, the trial was an opportunity to demonstrate to the world what he considered to be the intellectual and fundamentalist obscurantism that had


\(^{22}\)Scopes, Center of the Storm, 4.

become Bryan's trademark in his declining years. He would pepper the Great Commoner with questions of logic that the latter had deftly avoided answering earlier; and in the process, he would elicit from him an admission as damaging as any he had ever made. From a practical point of view, the trial at Dayton was indeed a watershed for all the participants.

**Philosophical Issues**

As important as some of the practical considerations regarding the Scopes trial may have been, the philosophical issues which underlay the conflict were of even greater magnitude. What first seemed like a publicity stunt and a simple test of a new statute in the hills of the South quickly mushroomed into issues of worldwide importance: the rights of majority and minority groups in society; interpretations of the First Amendment establishment clause, with implications for academic freedom in the classroom; Christianity versus evolution, the place of theistic evolution, and definitions of truth. All of these would be fought out in the Dayton courtroom; in newspapers, books, and other media; and in the classrooms of America's schools and colleges for many years following the trial.

**Majority and minority rights.** Throughout his life, Bryan stood for the rights of the common man, whom he regarded as being the majority voice in America. The large
trust magnates and bankers of the east, while in control of the wealth of the nation, did not constitute the larger percentage of the population for him, and he thus turned consistently to those whose voice he felt should be heard above the rattle of gold and silver or the din of Wall Street traders. This majority, he felt, was still predominantly Christian and, if they but knew the truth, they would follow it religiously. Thus, the evolutionary teachings of Darwin and his followers must be countered with an attack from orthodox Christianity, in order to preserve the basic tenets of the people's faith.

For Bryan, the solution to the issue lay in determining which group is the majority and what that majority desires for the education of its children. As Birchler notes, Bryan saw the ballot as the ultimate weapon in the hands of the people to resolve the problem. Logically, he reasoned that, since the majority of Americans were Christians, educational policy should be governed by Christian, and not atheistic or evolutionary, tenets.

Bryan held firmly to freedom of speech and conscience, but only at the individual level. He notes the limitation on this freedom at the collective level:

The individual has a right to think for himself, to believe what he likes, and to express himself as he pleases. But freedom of conscience and freedom of

24Allen Birchler, "The Anti-Evolutionary Beliefs of William Jennings Bryan," Nebraska History 54 (February 1975), 549.
speech are individual rights and belong only to individuals, as individuals. The moment one takes on a representative character, he becomes obligated to represent faithfully and loyally those who have commissioned him to represent them. A man has no more right to misrepresent a church than he has to misrepresent a political party or to misrepresent a business firm that has conferred authority on him—no more right to embezzle power than to embezzle money.\(^{25}\)

He continues:

The majority has a right to rule; the minority must acquiesce in the decision rendered, or withdraw and set up its own organization with its own creed or principles or platform—three words that have substantially the same meaning. No evangelical church has ever endorsed the modernist side of any of the issues now before the Church. Until the modernist side is endorsed, the modernists, and not the orthodox members, are responsible for any discord that may enter the Church.\(^{26}\)

Several flaws existed in Bryan's reasoning on this point. First, he was unclear as to the membership of the Church. He obviously felt that conservative, evangelical Protestants properly define "Church," but he neglected to address the many Roman Catholics and other groups that also constituted the "Church" of his day, and whose opinions he was obliged to consider in any discussion of issues as large as evolution in the public schools.

Secondly, he overlooked the fact that, even in many evangelical churches of the 1920s, evolution had been debated and discussed for several decades. What he likely meant was that, in fundamental evangelical churches, the


\(^{26}\)Ibid., 153.
modernist side of the issue had not been given serious consideration, which was probably true. However, his conclusion that "no evangelical church has ever endorsed the modernist side of any of the issues" clearly appears to be erroneous, and therefore his majority-wins argument was fallacious.

For Bryan, the step between the rule of a religiously conservative "majority" and the implications for public education was a small but direct one. In a speech prepared prior to the Scopes trial and delivered at Coconut Grove, Florida, he comments:

> The first question to be decided is: Who shall control our public schools? We have something like twenty-six millions of children in the public schools and we spend over one billion and seven hundred thousand dollars a year upon these schools. As the training of children is the chief work of each generation, the parents are interested in the things to be taught the children.\(^{27}\)

If conservative Protestant Christians were truly in control of the Church, as Bryan reasoned they were, then his conclusion that they should also be in control of the schools might have been valid, except for First Amendment considerations regarding freedom of religion, freedom of speech and, by implication, academic freedom.

**First Amendment issues.** At the heart of the Scopes trial lay the issue of freedom of religion, speech and the

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press as defined by the first amendment to the constitution of the United States of America. This amendment states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.\(^{28}\)

During the earlier phase of Bryan’s contest with the evolutionists, he seemed to interpret this amendment to mean that both biblical creationism and evolution should be taught in the classroom, with equal time and emphasis given to both. Presumably, the student would then be free to choose which view to believe; but it is doubtful whether he believed the student to be capable of making such a choice, unless it could be assured that he would choose the biblical account as truth and evolution as false. Instead, as time went on and the intensity of the struggle increased, Bryan came to believe that only by legislating Christianity into the school curriculum, and evolution out, could the Christian morals of the students be saved. Speaking to the West Virginia State Legislature in 1923, for example, he declared:

> It is my purpose to show you how religious faith and Christian ideals are being undermined by teachers who believe that man is a descendant from the brutes and who, in our public schools and colleges, are substituting the Darwinian hypothesis for the Bible account

of man's creation.\textsuperscript{29}

Rather than arguing the merits of teaching both Christianity and evolution in the classroom; and in place of discussing who decides what is placed into the public school curriculum, Bryan persisted in arguing that the evolutionists were the minority in American religious life and therefore must concede to the demands of the religiously conservative majority. In so doing, he soon began to argue in a circular fashion and to make demands on public education that contravened the First Amendment establishment clause. For example, in his \textit{Seven Questions in Dispute}, he calls on agnostics and atheists--whom he equates with evolutionists--to build their own educational institutions:

> Christians are required to build their own colleges in which to teach Christianity; why should not atheists be required to build their own colleges in which to teach atheism? And the same question can be applied to agnosticism, or to any other kind of teaching objectionable to the taxpayers. . . . Why should a few people demand pay from the public for teaching a scientific interpretation of the Bible when teachers in public institutions are not permitted to teach the orthodox interpretation of the Bible?\textsuperscript{30}

Again, Bryan simply assumed that the "taxpayers" who objected to evolution and agnosticism were the majority of conservative, evangelical Protestants whose cause he was defending. That there could be hundreds of thousands of taxpayers who either felt that evolution was not an issue or

\textsuperscript{29}William Jennings Bryan, "Science vs. Evolution," \textit{The Commoner} Vol. 23, No. 4, April 1923, 3.

\textsuperscript{30}Bryan, \textit{Seven Questions in Dispute}, 156-57.
who believed in it strongly, apparently did not cross his mind. In fact, addressing the constitutional issue directly in *The Commoner*, he stated in early 1923:

> Our constitution very properly prohibits the teaching of religion at public expense. The Christian church is divided into many sects, Protestant and Catholic, and it is contrary to the spirit of our institutions, as well as to the written law, to use money raised by taxation for the propagation of sects. In many states they have gone so far as to eliminate the reading of the Bible, although its morals and its literature have a value entirely distinct from the religious interpretations variously placed upon the Bible.  

Such fallacious reasoning was apparently overlooked by many of Bryan's supporters, but it did little to enhance his intellectual respectability before his opponents; nor did it strengthen his statement elsewhere that "religion does not need the support of government to enable it to overcome error." Instead, in the last years of his life, he seemed intent on promoting American Christianity through the legislative process. In fact, in a letter to a Florida legislator less than a month before he was asked to serve in the Scopes trial, he suggested legislation requiring compulsory Bible reading in the schools of that state, while allowing the excusing of a child from such a requirement upon written protest by the parents. He felt that this would protect Jewish and Catholic children from compulsory

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religious exercises which might contravene their own beliefs. He said nothing in this letter about protests from agnostic, atheistic, or other parents.33

In summary, Bryan held that belief in God is essential and foundational not only to the Christian--defined, in this case, as a conservative evangelical Protestant or fundamentalist--but to civilization as a whole. In the pages of The Commoner, he clearly states his logic on this point:

The first truth in this matter is that belief in God is the foundation not only of religion but of civilization, because civilization rests upon morality, morality rests upon religion, and religion rests upon belief in God. The second truth is that belief in God being essential, attacks upon it should be answered by those interested in the maintenance of civilization. Third, it is likewise true--a self-evident truth--that those who believe in God and who think a belief in God essential to civilization have a right to determine what shall be taught to their children by those who draw salaries from the public treasury.34

Such fallacious reasoning could easily result in the restriction of both religious and academic freedom in the classroom, which is what the Butler Bill in Tennessee effectively accomplished. In the name of Christianity and the protection of the morals of society, it prohibited the exposure of Tennessee school children to views which contradicted those held by themselves or their parents. In


so doing, it violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment which it sought to defend.

Decades later, another symposium would be held on this topic, again in Dayton, Tennessee. Conducted by the Rhea County Historical Society on 18 May 1974, it sought to evaluate current Tennessee textbook law with respect to equal time being given to creation and evolution texts. One of the contributors to the symposium was Dr. Robert O’Bannon of Lee College—a conservative evangelical liberal arts college located in Cleveland, Tennessee, a few miles from Dayton. O’Bannon’s statement indicates that the issue of equal treatment of creationism and evolution in the classroom was as alive then as it had been in Bryan’s day. He states:


O’Bannon argued from the point of view that Christian belief had become the minority position in Tennessee classrooms,

rather than the majority view that Bryan felt it to be, but the issue of religious and academic freedom remained the same after half a century.

Christianity vs. evolution. When Bryan finally determined that Darwinian evolution constituted an implacable and pernicious foe to Christianity, he set out to clearly identify it as such and to eradicate it from the public school system. He defined evolution as follows:

'Evolution' is the word used by scientists to describe the hypothesis which LINKS ALL LIFE TOGETHER AND ASSUMES THAT ALL SPECIES ARE DEVELOPED FROM ONE OR A FEW GERMS OF LIFE BY THE OPERATION OF RESIDENT FORCES WORKING FROM WITHIN. 36

In the same article, Bryan accused science of being composed mostly of unproven hypotheses which, in his view, are of no practical value unless demonstrated to be true. He also admitted that, according to his definition of terms, "evolution" and "Darwinism" are synonymous; and although he conceded that most modern evolutionists discard Darwin's family tree and even some of his laws and scientific explanations, he charged them with clinging to the scientist's basic conclusions. "They are, therefore," said Bryan, "more unreasonable than Darwin." 37

Elsewhere, Bryan outlined three major objections to Darwinism in addition to his charge that it was only an


37 Ibid.
educated guess at the origins of life:

1. It has not one syllable in the Bible to support it.

2. It has not one fact in the universe to substantiate it.

3. It forces its adherents to resort to fanciful explanations of the forms of life that man now finds on the earth.\(^38\)

In sarcastic tones, he cited numerous examples of evolutionary explanations, from Darwin and modern evolutionists, to show the ridiculous nature of the theory: the superiority of man's mind to that of woman, the evolution of man as a hairless animal, the evolution of the eye from light waves beating upon the skin and the ear from air waves, and the growth of the human leg from a wart that appeared on the belly of an animal. "Evolution," he remarked, "seems to close the heart of some to the plainest spiritual truths while it opens the mind to the wildest guesses advanced in the name of science."\(^39\) For Bryan, it would take as much faith to believe in Darwinian evolution as it does to believe that the biblical account is true; in fact, evolution demands more faith. At the same time, it presents a much greater threat to young minds than the Bible ever could. Citing Darwin's own testimony that his scientific investigations had rendered him incapable of knowing whether God exists, Bryan asks:


\(^{39}\)Ibid.
If Darwinism could make an agnostic of Darwin what is its effect likely to be upon students to whom Darwinism is taught at the very age when they are throwing off parental authority and becoming independent? Darwin's guess gives the student an excuse for rejecting the authority of God, an excuse that appeals to him more strongly at this age than at any other age in life.  

Bryan thus committed his energy and influence to eliminating Darwinism and evolutionary theory from the minds and hearts of students.

He also sought to counter a Christianized variation of Darwinism known as theistic evolution, which he believed was doing even more harm than evolution itself. He states:

... the man I am afraid of is the theistic evolutionist, who says he believes in God, but leads the student who trusts him and follows him back step by step, until God is out of sight. He deceives the student; he tells him he does not have to give up God; that evolution is God's plan and a more sublime plan. And yet, when he gets to the beginning of evolution he has put God so far away that He has no influence on the life. I regard theistic evolution as simply an anesthetic which deadens the pain while atheism removes the religion.

In his "Darwinism in Public Schools," Bryan concluded that theistic evolutionists actually are atheistic evolutionists, since they derive their facts from the latter and only differ from them as to the actual origin of life.

Finally, in "Science vs. Evolution," he virtually banished evolutionary theory from the realm of science and called

40 Ibid., 3.


42 Bryan, "Darwinism in Public Schools," 2.
upon God and the people as witnesses to the validity of scriptural claims over against evolution:

Those who defend the faith of the fathers have a triple advantage over the evolutionists; they stand upon the revealed will of God; they are supported by the established truths of science, and they are working in harmony with the principles of popular government.  

Armed with these beliefs—which he viewed as irrefutable truth--Bryan strode into the Rhea County courthouse in 1925, ready to do battle with the infidels.

**Definitions of truth.** Fundamentally, Bryan and the evolutionists were in disagreement as to what constitutes truth or fact. For Bryan, the issue was not that of two truths in conflict, but of truth in opposition to the guesses of the scientists. He states:

> Christianity has no reason to fear any FACT that science can discover because truths never conflict. Christianity has no reason to fear any scientific theory supported by FACTS. Christianity is not opposed to science; it welcomes light from every source and it appreciates the real work done by science. Science is classified knowledge and knowledge is power. When science builds upon facts it is invincible. Science has given us remedies for diseases--remedies for yellow fever and typhoid fever recently--but is built upon facts; . . . It is the scientific guessing, UNSUPPORTED BY FACTS, that Christianity rejects; it is the guessing of so called scientists that is today a menace to Christianity and civilization.  

Elsewhere, he cites Alexander Graham Bell's invention of the telephone; agricultural science; and the various uses of

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water and air as evidences of material facts that have allowed man to improve his condition in life. He contrasts these, however, with the unsupported hypotheses of Darwinian evolution. Then, in a bold claim for religious/theological truth, he states:

Religion is scientifically established; it is as necessary a part of man as his blood and his bones. To starve his soul is as unreasonable as to starve the mind or the body. Let us have TRUTH from every source, but GUESSES that revolutionize a philosophy of life have no more claim upon the mind than they have upon the heart.45

For Bryan, truth is established through the use of a priori reasoning rather than through evidentialism. Had he argued along these lines apologetically, he might have made a good case for the validity of biblical truth claims over against those of the evolutionists, recognizing that some of the differences between them might be reconcilable and others irreconcilable. Instead, he chose to throw down the gauntlet and to reject outright any claims to truth that the evolutionists brought forward, categorizing them all as mere guesses. At this point, he opened his views to the academic and intellectual challenge which would come from Clarence Darrow during the trial, and to which Bryan would have no reply except to angrily denounce all evolutionists as outright enemies of the Bible. He would be forced into circular reasoning, as the following argument illustrates:

The Christians are not asking that religion be taught in our public schools; they are protesting against the teaching of IRRELIGION in the public schools. They are not asking that any man shall surrender his opinion or violate his conscience; they are only asking that teachers who are atheists and agnostics shall either obey their employers or else build schools of their own for the spread of unbelief. If we are to have a neutrality in religion in our schools it must be a true neutrality, not a sham neutrality that ties the hands of Christians and turns education over to members of the 'Ancient and Honorable Species of Apes.' Those who look to the jungle for their ancestry can teach this doctrine to their own children if they wish but they ought not to be allowed to make monkeys out of all children.  

For Bryan there was no truth in life that could be construed as purely nonreligious. Truth was being taught, either from a religious or an irreligious basis, but in either case it had religious implications. Accordingly, it might be questioned whether he truly defended the separation of church and state or the constitutional prohibition of the teaching of religion at public expense. He seems consistently to have avoided or missed the issue of what should constitute the curriculum of the public school and college, choosing instead to rely upon the argument that, since the majority of the population was "Christian" according to his definition, then biblical truth ought to prevail in the classroom rather than the unsupported hypotheses of the evolutionists. He would have disagreed vehemently with the later conclusions of Stephen Jay Gould, who held that "Whatever Darwinism represents on the playing fields of

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nature ... [it] implies nothing about moral conduct." On the contrary, Bryan believed that Darwin's theories had everything to do with the morals of society. However, his circular reasoning would lead him into great difficulty during the Scopes trial, and ultimately it would turn public opinion against him and the Fundamentalists whom he represented.

The Trial: Battle for the Mind and Heart of America

As Scopes, Bryan, Darrow, and the other antagonists in the trial assembled in Dayton in early July 1925, the atmosphere in the town was almost circus-like. Newspaper photographs show that the community had turned out in force for the spectacle that all planned to see. Banners were hung out announcing the impending victory of the proponents of the Bible, impromptu shops were set up around the Rhea County courthouse to capitalize on the crowds, and more than one hundred newspaper reporters crowded into the tiny community, to transmit what would amount to more than two million words of copy which would find their way around the world. As a recent resident of Dayton, John Scopes viewed the scene with an air of disdain:


From the beginning to the end of the test case Ringling Brothers or Barnum and Bailey would have been pressed hard to produce more acts or sideshows and freaks than Dayton had. The curious of all complexions and descriptions and persuasions poured in to become a part of the drama that H. L. Mencken had christened the Monkey Trial. A showman like P. T. Barnum would have gloated over the possibilities that Dayton offered and called it a natural. 49

Viewing the scene from a reporter's perspective, Ragsdale notes:

Aside from the expectant air Dayton could have been any one of a hundred towns in the South of the mid-twenties. Men dressed in shirt-sleeves and lightweight trousers; those from the country often wore blue shirts and overalls with an occasional wide-brimmed, flopping straw hat. There were a few flappers with knee-length dresses and bobbed hair, but most women dressed more sedately. Those from the farms often wore sunbonnets. 50

Scopes recalls even Judge Raulston, who presided over the trial, as declaring: "I'm jist a reg'lar mountaineer judge." 51 Thus, it appears that a sleepy Southern community, which previously had not concerned itself with much of the outside world, suddenly was invaded by that world and transformed for a few weeks into a world stage, on which was fought the battle for the heart and mind of America.

The Real Struggle

On the surface, the case against John Scopes was

49 Scopes, Center of the Storm, 77.

50 Ragsdale, "Three Weeks in Dayton," 40.

simple: Had he or had he not violated a statute of the State of Tennessee by teaching a theory of origins other than that found in the first three chapters of the book of Genesis? On this question he was arrested, arraigned, and finally forced to stand trial. In their memoirs, Mrs. Bryan later recalled this simple approach to the case:

The question involved was purely a legal one, namely, had Scopes violated the law, and the efforts of the opposition to make the case hinge on the truth or lack of truth in the theory of evolution were out of place. . . . Mr. Scopes' defense was defeated at every point and the decision of the court a triumph for the Tennessee statute. 52

Before the trial had progressed far, however, all had to admit that its implications superseded the simple violation of a statute. Furthermore, both Bryan and Darrow appear to have had critiques aimed at each other, which they desired to air publicly through the trial. Darrow had previously published a list of fifty-five questions in the Chicago Tribune, which he had challenged Bryan to answer publicly. 53 Since Bryan had failed to answer them, Darrow would seek an opportunity during the trial to elicit the answers from him under oath.

Bryan, on the other hand, had his personal agenda as well. Toward the conclusion of the trial, after arguing vociferously that everyone must focus on the simpler issue

52 Bryan and Mary Baird Bryan, Memoirs, 483-84.

53 "Darrow Asks W. J. Bryan To Answer These," Chicago Tribune 4 July 1923, 1,12.
of Scopes' alleged violation of the Tennessee statute, the Commoner agreed to take the witness stand when called by the defense because, he said:

These gentlemen . . . did not come here to try this case. They came here to try revealed religion. I am here to defend it, and they can ask me any question they please.\(^5^4\)

A few moments later, Darrow caustically noted to Bryan: "You insult every man of science and learning in the world because he does not believe in your fool religion."\(^5^5\)

These statements serve to reveal the underlying motives that both men had in using the trial as a public forum of debate. Although Attorney-General Stewart, for the prosecution, would attempt to have the court stop the ensuing tirade of questions by Darrow and the damaging admissions by Bryan that would follow, Judge Raulston allowed the questioning to continue, arguing that it was permissible in light of the fact that the jury had been excused for this period.\(^5^6\)

**Bryan As Bible Expert**

Throughout the first six days of the trial, the case against Scopes had been tried rather routinely, with a few notable exceptions. On the first day, the case and its


\(^{55}\)Ibid.

\(^{56}\)Ibid.
participants for prosecution and defense were introduced, and the jury was selected; on the second and third days Darrow attempted to quash the indictment against Scopes and objected to prayer in the courtroom; on the fourth day, Raulston overruled Darrow's motion, heard Scopes' plea of innocence, and began testimony for both the prosecution and defense. On the fifth day, however, an intense argument raged over the desire of the defense to admit testimony by several scientists who had been brought to Dayton in order to present the case for evolution. The jury having been excused for this period, Darrow clearly stated his purpose in bringing men of science to Dayton:

We expect to show by men of science and learning—both scientists and real scholars of the Bible—men who know what they are talking about—who have made some investigation—expect to show first what evolution is, and, secondly, that any interpretation of the Bible that intelligent men could possibly make is not in any conflict with any story of creation, while the Bible, in many ways, is in conflict with every known science, and there isn't a human being on earth believes it literally.\(^57\)

In response, Attorney-General Stewart appealed to the wording of the Tennessee statute itself, in an attempt to return to the simple question of whether Scopes had technically violated the law:

The act states that [sic] should be unlawful, that this theory that denies the divine story of creation, and to teach instead thereof that man descended from a lower order of animals, with that expression, and they have admitted that Mr. Scopes taught that man descended from a lower order of animals, the act under what we insist

\(^{57}\text{Ibid., 146.}\)
is a proper construction thereof, would preclude any evidence from any scientist, any expert, or any person, that there is no conflict between the story of divine creation, as taught in the Bible, and proof that a teacher tells his scholars that man descended from a lower order of animals.\textsuperscript{58}

After further heated discussion between the two sides, Bryan's son--William Jennings Bryan, Jr.--rose to address the court on the admissibility of the expert testimony. He pointed out that the real issues of the trial had now been revealed:

It is, I think, apparent to all that we have now reached the heart of this case, upon your honor's ruling, as to whether this expert testimony will be admitted largely determines the question of whether this trial from now on, will be an orderly effort to try the case upon the issues, raised by the indictment and by the plea or whether it will degenerate into a joint debate upon the merits or demerits of someone's views upon evolution.\textsuperscript{59}

Young Bryan went on to point out that the kind of evidence being brought forward through the scientific witnesses constituted nothing more than their opinions about evolution and the Bible, and courts generally regarded this kind of "expert" testimony with great caution. After further heated debate, court was recessed until the afternoon.

When the court reconvened, Bryan, Sr. attempted to return the argument to the simple facts of the case, namely, whether Scopes had violated the law. "This is not the place," he noted, "to try to prove that the law ought never

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., 147-48.

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., 150.
to have been passed in the first place. The place to prove that, or teach that, was the legislature."\textsuperscript{60} He went on to make an impassioned speech in behalf of biblical Christianity and against evolution, after which the counsel for the defense responded in kind.

By the end of the day, no decision on the inclusion of the expert scientific testimony had been reached; but the next morning, Judge Raulston ruled against its being heard by the jury, although allowing it to be read into the record of the proceedings in the event of a later appeal.\textsuperscript{61} After an intriguing interlude during which Clarence Darrow made caustic remarks about the court, the trial was recessed for the weekend. When it reconvened on the following Monday, Darrow was immediately cited for contempt by Judge Raulston. Then the testimony of the scientific experts was read into the record.

At this point--with proceedings having moved outside to the courthouse lawn because of the danger of the courtroom floor collapsing due to the large crowd assembled inside--the defense, in a surprise move, called on William Jennings Bryan as an expert witness for the Bible. Bryan should have resisted taking the stand, as his fellow-counselors urged him, but he insisted on testifying, for the purpose of demonstrating to the court and the world that the defense

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 171.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 201-09.
attorneys were in Dayton for the sole purpose of discrediting the Bible and fundamental Christianity. He was unaware that a trap had been laid for him, and he was about to fall into it.

**Bryan's Damaging Admission**

As Darrow began his examination of Bryan as an alleged biblical expert, he first had the witness acknowledge that he had read, studied, and taught extensively on the Bible. Bryan admitted: "I have studied the Bible for about fifty years, or some time more than that, but of course, I have studied it more as I have become older than when I was but a boy." Darrow then asked whether Bryan believed that everything in the Bible should be interpreted literally, whereupon the latter replied:

> I believe everything in the Bible should be accepted as it is given there; some of the Bible is given illustratively. For instance: 'Ye are the salt of the earth.' I would not insist that man was actually salt, or that he had flesh of salt, but it is used in the sense of salt as saving God's people.

Having established that Bryan acknowledged at least some figurative material in the Bible, Darrow then peppered him with questions about the literal sense of passages which speak of: Jonah and the whale, the sun standing still, and the Noahic flood. In each case, Bryan gave a preliminary answer that defended the literal nature of all three

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62 Ibid., 285.

63 Ibid.
occurrences, but on further examination he was forced to admit that he lacked answers to the scientific aspects of each phenomenon.  

As Darrow and Bryan debated the historicity of the biblical account of a global flood, the defense counsel led Bryan into the trap that he had set for him. He began by asking how Bryan knew the date of the flood. When the Commoner cited Bishop Usher's calculations as his authority, Darrow immediately challenged him with the scientific evidence indicating the existence of life on the earth much earlier than 5000 years ago. Bryan, probably sensing that he was being herded into a logical corner, sparred verbally with Darrow regarding the date of the flood and the dates of ancient civilizations. Darrow elicited an admission that Bryan had studied very little about ancient forms of civilization, the latter citing the Bible as the only historical book that he really needed. Their interchange on this point revealed a significant weakness in Bryan's case:

Q--You have never in all your life made any attempt to find out about the other peoples of the earth--how old their civilizations are--how long they had existed on the earth, have you?
A--No, sir, I have been so well satisfied with the Christian religion that I have spent no time trying to find arguments against it.  

Still luring Bryan into his trap, Darrow asked him if he thought that the earth was only four thousand years old,

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64Ibid., 285-88.
65Ibid., 293.
whereupon Bryan quickly responded: "Oh, no; I think it is much older than that." 66 A final series of questions and answers completely entrapped the unsuspecting Bryan:

Q--Do you think the earth was made in six days?  
A--Not six days of twenty-four hours.  
Q--Doesn't it say so?  
A--No, sir...  
Q--You think those were not literal days?  
A--I do not think they were twenty-four hour days.  
Q--What do you think about it?  
A--That is my opinion--I do not know that my opinion is better on that subject than those who think it does.  
Q--Do you not think that?  
A--No. But I think it would be just as easy for the kind of God we believe in to make the earth in six days as in six years or in 6,000,000 years or in 600,000,000 years. I do not think it is important whether we believe one or the other...  
Q--The creation might have been going on for a long time?  
A--It might have continued for millions of years. 67

With these admissions, Bryan sprung Darrow's trap on himself. The defense counsel would note for the court that, in admitting that the world could be millions of years old, Bryan had contradicted his earlier testimony that he believed Usher's calculations about a young earth to be correct. The implication was clear that, having admitted to the possibility of an extended period of creation--even by God--Bryan was opening the case for an evolutionary process of development. Indeed, he had just argued himself into the position of a theistic evolutionist--a view that he had thoroughly repudiated prior to the trial. As the day

66 Ibid., 298.
67 Ibid., 298-99, 302-03.
concluded, Darrow would remark to Bryan before the court: "I am exempting you on your fool ideas that no intelligent Christian on earth believes." What his friends had feared might happen became reality, and the ridicule and opprobrium of his enemies again became Bryan's lot to bear, although only for a short time.

Effectively, the trial was over. On the eighth day, counsel for the prosecution and defense returned to court, where Bryan expected to deliver a closing argument that would blast evolution one more time in public; but he missed the opportunity when Scopes' defense team closed all argument by admitting their client's guilt on the technical charge of violating the anti-evolution statute. In a symbolic gesture, Judge Raulston also struck Bryan's testimony of the previous day from the record, but the damage was irretrievably done.

The Aftermath: Winners and Losers

The case of Darrow, Arthur Garfield Hays, Dudley Field Malone and the rest of the defense team had been made before the world. Their real agenda had been implemented, as they had lured Bryan and the Fundamentalists into discrediting themselves through poor logic and damaging admissions. All that remained was for Scopes to appeal to the Tennessee Supreme Court, where Judge Raulston's decision to impose a

68 Ibid., 304.
fine was overturned but the anti-evolution statute was ruled to be constitutional. Later, Attorney-General Stewart declined to take the case further and the charge against Scopes was effectively dismissed. While the anti-evolution statute would remain in force for many years to come, the victory in Dayton appeared hollow at best. The attempt of the Fundamentalists to legislate Christianity into the lives of the public school children of Tennessee had been technically sustained, but the moral victory they had hoped for was not won. Even John Scopes was able to take the moral high ground in the only comments he made during the entire proceeding, just prior to the imposition of sentence by the judge:

Your honor, I feel that I have been convicted of violating an unjust statute. I will continue in the future, as I have in the past, to oppose this law in any way I can. Any other action would be in violation of my ideal of academic freedom—that is, to teach the truth as guaranteed in our constitution, of personal and religious freedom. I think the fine is unjust.

Whereupon, Judge Raulston imposed a fine of one hundred dollars and court costs.

Bryan quickly prepared his undelivered closing argument for publication, in which he again hurled his best charges at the evolutionists, with the eloquence that had marked his long career as politician, orator, and spokesman for the people. Again, however, he evaded or missed the

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69 Williams, William Jennings Bryan, 463-64.
70 Ibid., 313.
critical issue of the First Amendment establishment clause, as he pled for the victory of Christian over non-Christian forces:

It is for the jury to determine whether this attack upon the Christian religion shall be permitted in the public schools of Tennessee by teachers employed by the State and paid out of the public treasury. This case is no longer local; the defendant ceases to play an important part. The case has assumed the proportions of a battle-royal between unbelief that attempts to speak through so-called science and the defenders of the Christian faith, speaking through the Legislators of Tennessee. . . . If the law is nullified, there will be rejoicing wherever God is repudiated, the Saviour scoffed at and the Bible ridiculed. 71

The law was indeed upheld, but the ridicule continued.

Bryan, however, escaped hearing most of the criticism because of his untimely death just five days after the conclusion of the trial. Having completed the transcript of his closing argument in Chattanooga on Saturday, 25 July 1925, he and his wife, Mamie, traveled to Winchester, the home of Judge Raulston and Attorney-General Stewart. Mrs. Bryan returned to Dayton that night, leaving her husband to make yet another speech in Winchester and then to return to Chattanooga to make final editing changes on the transcript before making his way back to Dayton for the night. The next day he preached a sermon in Dayton, ate his noon meal, and lay down for a nap. He died in his sleep. 72


72Ibid., 486.
Conclusion

Bryan's death by no means ended the debate regarding the constitutionality of the anti-evolution statute. It would be argued in other southern states like Kentucky, Florida, and Arkansas for decades, as Fundamentalists continued their struggle to legislate the curriculum of public schools. In Arkansas, for example, Judge William Overton would rule, in 1982, that the "Balanced Treatment for Creation-Science and Evolution-Science Act" (Act 590), was unconstitutional. In a lengthy decision, he stated:

The preservation of the community from divisive conflicts; of Government from irreconcilable pressures by religious groups, of religion from censorship and coercion however subtly exercised, requires strict confinement of the State to instruction other than religious, leaving to the individual's church and home, indoctrination in the faith of his choice.\(^{73}\)

Overton argued from the issues of creation-science as being not science but religion; and from the first amendment prohibition against unnecessary entanglements of the church and state. On this basis, he concluded that the creation-science (anti-evolution) law in Arkansas promoted the religion of creation-science in public institutions and was thus unconstitutional.\(^{74}\) As the debate has continued through the succeeding decades since the Scopes Trial, the issue of curricular content in public schools has never been


\(^{74}\)Ibid., 941.
fully resolved. Nor have the questions been answered fully, namely: "What constitutes science and religion, and where is the line of demarcation between them?" Again: "Is science amoral, or does it of necessity say something about morality and a belief in God?" Gould holds that we "do not find our moral values in the actions of nature." He therefore believes that Bryan was in error when the latter attacked Darwinism as promoting a savage mentality among men. Bryan, however, argued strongly that morality had everything to do with science, and that science taught apart from a recognition of the Creator was in fact not science at all, but mere guesswork.

The theology of William Jennings Bryan was thus inextricably connected to his educational beliefs. Sensing that the nation was turning away from a belief in God, as evidenced by the increase in young agnostics and atheists, he determined to combat the forces of godlessness not just through preaching and rhetoric, but through the legislative system of the country. As with his prohibition amendment, the country was to demonstrate clearly that morality cannot be legislated and structured through a school curriculum. Rather, it must be inculcated through a lifestyle—of parents to children, of Christians to non-Christians, on an individual basis. He had said:

Government affects but a part of the life we live here

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and does not deal at all with the life beyond, while religion touches the infinite circle of existence as well as the small arc of that circle which we spend on earth.\textsuperscript{76}

Had Bryan been content to leave government and religion in their separate spheres, as the First Amendment sought to do, he might have avoided the embarrassment and empty victory of Dayton.

Bryan As Theologian and Educator

William Jennings Bryan never professed to be either a theologian or a professional educator. Nevertheless, he held strong views in both areas, and he used his platform with the common people of America to promote the attainment of a better kind of person and a better life, through education based on biblical principles. Most often, he promoted a non-formal and practical education--the kind offered by the daily experiences of life. Furthermore, it was an education that was guided and driven by his intense commitment to God. In this sense he can be designated as a theological educator.

While he avoided discussions about the timing of the second coming of Jesus Christ, Bryan believed that Christ would indeed return to the earth when His people--Christians who believe and obey His teachings--would have propagated the Gospel message to the ends of the earth. By implication, Bryan probably also believed in the possibility of converting sufficient numbers so that the majority of people alive at Christ's return would be believing Christians.

In the meantime, the preparation for the return of Christ involved the gradual improvement of people and
conditions of life, until He could come and set up His earthly, millennial kingdom. This position constituted Bryan an undeclared postmillennialist in his theology, although he never sought to characterize himself as such—he was usually too busy working out the practical aspects of his theology to be concerned with the finer points of eschatology.

In addition, Bryan sought to use education as one of the means of perfecting humanity and for spreading the Gospel to the ends of the earth in his generation. As he demonstrated by his peace initiatives while Secretary of State, he believed that, if people could be brought to the realization of what is right and moral in life—which, for him, meant adherence to biblical values and principles—they would naturally follow the correct course. This belief gave him his indomitable optimism and contagious enthusiasm. He never tired of fighting courageously for that in which he believed. At sixty-one years of age, when others might be considering retirement in a few years, he could still ask:

> What kind of fight may we call good? That which employs all the energy and utilizes all the opportunities to raise oneself to the maximum of efficiency and then uses the entire strength for the advancement of that which is the highest and the good.¹

That Bryan threw himself unstintingly into the task of

¹William Jennings Bryan, *The Commoner*, vol. 21, no. 12 (December 1921), 8.
improving people and reforming society is amply demonstrated by a review of the various legislative enactments and reform movements which he influenced. Cornelius lists at least thirty-two of them, including the sixteenth through nineteenth constitutional amendments; legislation for the working person—workman's compensation, minimum wages, and the eight-hour work day; tariff reform; food processing laws; government control of banking; the formation of the Departments of Health, Education, and Labor; and many more. His unabated energy for reform also propelled him into the center of the fundamentalist-modernist and creation-evolution controversies, culminating in the Scopes Trial and his death shortly thereafter.

Bryan inherited from his father the belief that people's religion and theology ought to have a direct impact on their daily lives. Accordingly, both Silas and William Jennings sought to become involved in the practical affairs of society, using their faith in God as a basis for effecting social change. The younger Bryan carried this belief into the educational realm, where he sought to formulate laws that would insure a God-oriented focus in the classrooms of American public schools. Apparently ignoring the

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First Amendment issues regarding freedom of religion and separation of church and state, he first sought to inculcate biblical values directly into school classrooms, for he believed that the majority of American parents still loved and respected God; therefore, their views as the majority should be adhered to by the schools. His goal was to train the hearts of young people in godliness so that their intellect would follow accordingly and their lives would be virtuous. The public school was thus a fitting place for this dual educational process. Naively, he seemed to believe that, if the overriding purpose of education was God-directed, the actual curriculum was of little importance. His silence on curricular issues at least allows for such a conclusion.

Bryan also sought to promote distinctively Christian higher education, as evidenced by his campaign in *The Commoner* to provide education to serious and needy students. The majority of the institutions with which he sought to affiliate in that campaign, and to which he planned to send students, were smaller, denominational schools with a distinctively Christian atmosphere. Furthermore, his choice of Dayton, Tennessee as the future site of a Christian, college-preparatory school gives evidence that he had an interest in both public and private education. He believed that students who were biblically well-grounded at the
earlier educational levels would be able to withstand the negative influences and challenges to their belief-system that would come in a public college or university.

Had Bryan developed this particular aspect of his educational philosophy more thoroughly, he would have realized that Christian young people need not be isolated from the secular world and its educational institutions. Rather, they need to be both grounded in their biblical convictions and then tested in the crucible of life. Bryan correctly recognized--based upon his own early life in Salem, Illinois--the value of the home in the forming of a child’s belief-system. What he progressively lost sight of, however, is that convictions are only as good as their ability to withstand scrutiny and opposition.

In order to protect the beliefs and convictions of Christian young people, Bryan appears to have moved toward the Fundamentalist right, which held that separation from secular society was to be preferred over dialogue with it. Reacting to the testimony of young people who claimed that they had nearly lost their religious faith in college, he sought to insulate them from atheistic and agnostic attacks on their belief-system until such a time as they would be able to emerge unscathed from the battle. He concluded at one point that two years in a Christian junior college would suffice for this purpose.
As this belief in the value of separation from the world was strengthened in Bryan--especially during the last months of his life--he became an object of intellectual ridicule. Writers like H. L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis lampooned him through editorials and the use of fictional works such as *Elmer Gantry*. With obvious reference to Bryan, Lewis writes of the mid-twenties in America:

It was at this time that the brisker conservative clergymen saw that their influence and oratory and incomes were threatened by any authentic learning. A few of them were so intelligent as to know that not only was biology dangerous to their positions, but also history--which gave no very sanctified reputation to the Christian church; astronomy--which found no convenient Heaven in the skies and snickered politely at the notion of making the sun stand still in order to win a Jewish border skirmish; psychology--which doubted the superiority of a Baptist preacher fresh from the farm to trained laboratory researchers; and all the other sciences of the modern university. They saw that a proper school should teach nothing but bookkeeping, agriculture, geometry, dead languages made deader by leaving out all the amusing literature, and the Hebrew Bible as interpreted by men superbly trained to ignore contradictions, men technically called 'Fundamentalists.'

While no one would have criticized Bryan as a hypocritical profligate like Elmer Gantry, the implications for Fundamentalism were clear--this particular belief-system left itself open to intellectual obscurantism by refusing to confront issues raised by theological modernists, atheists, and agnostics. Through his identification with Fundamentalist

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causes, and especially through his damaging admission about the length of the creative process and his angry outbursts at Clarence Darrow during the Scopes Trial, Bryan turned the focus of this charge upon himself.

Had he thought through the issues more carefully, Bryan could have avoided the ridicule that he received, both during his lifetime and posthumously. On the one hand, he could have evaluated the educational process and curriculum of American public schools and made suggestions for constructive change. He could have argued out the implications of the First Amendment for Christian education in a public school setting, and again made constructive suggestions for retaining biblical beliefs in the classroom without trampling the individual rights of non-Christians. Indeed, he made an effort in this direction through his suggestion that Bible study be made mandatory in school, with exceptions being granted to those parents who objected. However, he could have pursued this idea, until it was either implemented or a better plan was introduced. Had he lived beyond Dayton, he might have continued in this direction, although his views were by this time so entrenched that he probably would have been unable to change them.

On the other hand, Bryan could have avoided the issue of Christian education in the public schools by concentrating instead on the construction of an intellectually
respectable, biblically-based system of Christian education, which would serve as an alternative to parents who feared the spiritual damage that their children might sustain in public schools. Indeed, his final plans for the preparatory school in Dayton appear to have been evolving in this direction. It can only be guessed whether he would have pursued such a plan, or whether Coletta’s view of him would have proven to be the most accurate and final one:

Bryan’s religious belief was simple, sincere, courageous, and anti-intellectual in the tradition of such evangelical preachers as Theodore Frelinghuysen and George Whitefield in the eighteenth century; Charles Grandison Finney and Dwight L. Moody in the nineteenth; and Billy Sunday and Billy Graham in the twentieth. He appealed to the disinherited in religion as well as in politics, with his support coming from the southern parts of the country, which showed the greatest amount of illiteracy among whites. Conversely, to much of the North and East he was a straightlaced moralist and Fundamentalist who wonderfully exemplified persistent intolerance to new intellectual currents.4

That Coletta’s view of Bryan is only one of many--and perhaps a minority position at best--is attested by the tributes that Bryan received during his lifetime and after his passing. Describing Bryan’s funeral, the Los Angeles Evening Herald noted the honors that he received in Dayton and at the service in Washington:

The tribute to Bryan, the thousands who have trooped by his casket and the whole circumstances of his passing

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constitute a unique chapter in American history. Never before has a private citizen been accorded such honors, such homage in the capital. The capital has given to the Commoner a tribute such as is ordinarily reserved only for Presidents.  

James E. Freeman, Bishop of Washington at the time of Bryan’s death, perhaps more adequately summarized the feelings of much of the nation about the Great Commoner:

Although we did not see eye to eye on some questions, nevertheless we had a deep and tender affection for each other. He preached for me one day at Epiphany, my former parish Church, and it was a notable utterance. His genius as a preacher was really very remarkable. Even those who differed from him on political and scientific questions had the profoundest regard for his utter sincerity.

With high conscience, he lived the life of a Christian disciple. I think there is widespread unanimity of opinion that he was one of the commanding figures of our generation, and when his life service is summed up it will be readily disclosed that the dominant element in his nature was a profound and unfailing [sic] religious conviction.

William Jennings Bryan was a complex human being, as evidenced by his interest in religion, theology, politics, education, and the needs of the common person. All of these interests, however, were guided by his deep and unabashed devotion to the God he served. His own statement to the delegates of the Democratic National Convention in 1904 could well be his epitaph:

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5Los Angeles Evening Herald, Friday, 31 July 1925.

You may dispute whether I have fought a good fight, you may dispute whether I have finished my course, but you cannot deny that I have kept the faith.7

Areas For Further Research

A number of topics suggest themselves for further research with regard to Bryan. First is his perceived and actual relationship to the Fundamentalist cause. He is not quoted by many Fundamentalist writers, probably because of his association with the Social Gospel movement, his ecumenical perspective, and the Fundamentalist distinctive of ecclesiastical and personal separation from the "world." Bryan's desire to unite all the common people under God seems to contradict such a separationist viewpoint, yet he was able to mingle freely with many in that theological camp, even to the point of becoming their leader in the creation-evolution crusade. His philosophical differences with the Fundamentalist movement ought to be evaluated, especially those noted by Szasz.8

A second area of research ought to address the impact of Bryan upon the intellectual life of America. He has been characterized by many as an intellectual obscurantist who


first made up his mind on a subject and then may or may not have read much about it by others. Especially after he entered the frenzied world of politics, he does not seem to have read as widely as he should. A study of his intellectual impact on American life would be instructive.

Thirdly, more thorough research could be done on Bryan's actual impact with regard to the thirty-two areas of legislative change and social reform outlined by Cornelius. The study should address the number of these reforms that Bryan initiated, and how many could be shown to be popular causes to which he attached himself for political or other purposes.

Fourthly, a corollary to the preceding study would be an evaluation of Bryan's use of theology, the Church, Chautauqua, the common people, and the political process itself as instruments for the promotion of his private agenda. Such an evaluation might well result in nothing more than psycho-history; nevertheless, Bryan appears to have been driven at times by forces almost beyond his control, to the extent that he made unwise decisions at critical moments. An evaluation could be done of the ultimate ends that he sought to achieve through his use of these social, ecclesiastical, and political organisms.

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Cornelius, "William Jennings Bryan, the Scopes Trial, and Inherit the Wind."
A fifth area of concern relates to Bryan's view of the role of centralized government in relation to his agenda for societal reform and his commitment to the common people. His view, for example, that "the hand that writes the pay-check rules the school,"\(^{10}\) could easily be abused in the hands of a strong central government, even if that government stood for the biblical principles that Bryan espoused. An evaluation of his philosophy of political science as it relates to education might yield significant results.

Finally, a study could be conducted of Bryan's personal finances as they related to the common people. He died a wealthy man, certainly by the standards of the lower and middle classes of America, and possibly by those of the upper class as well. A study of his legislative and other reforms in light of his increasing wealth, as well as his educational philanthropy, would be useful in determining how sincere he was in many of his reform efforts. His financial security may have been another area which, although it conflicted in some ways with his belief-system, Bryan simply refused to acknowledge or discuss.

These areas of additional research serve to demonstrate the complexity of the subject of this dissertation. Bryan himself acknowledged that "... there is a wide difference

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between the desire to live so that men will applaud you and the desire to live so that God will be satisfied with you."\textsuperscript{11} Despite his failures and weaknesses, it must be said that William Jennings Bryan received the applause of men and satisfied his Creator as well.

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

February 27, 1995
Date

Gerald L. Gutek
Director's Signature