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“The Origins and
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Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion focuses on the Scopes trial which happened in Dayton, Tennessee in the summer of 1925. The trial took place over a Tennessee law that barred the teaching of evolution in public schools. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) wanted to challenge the law. A young teacher named John Scopes agreed to help the ACLU. The so-called "trial of the century" brought together the famous politician and speaker, William Jennings Bryan, who led the anti-evolution campaign, and Clarence Darrow, who was a successful defense lawyer. The two men, along with their teams of counsel members, went against each other in the trial with the law being upheld by the prosecution.

Edward Larson divides his book into three sections: events leading up to The Scopes Trial, The Scopes Trial itself and the events following the Scopes Trial. Larson begins by detailing the intellectual leaps that led to Charles Darwin's theories on evolution, followed by the rise of Christian fundamentalism and its rejection of the concept on religious and ethical grounds. Larson writes, “Fossil discoveries provided persuasive new evidence for human evolution and as such provoked a response from antievolutionists.” The global climate at the turn of the century leads religious groups to associate Darwinism with irresponsible cruelty in the shape of World War I. Finally, with Darwinism removing God from the picture, the Tennessee state legislature made it

unlawful to teach Darwinism within public schools. Shortly after, a group of citizens from Dayton decide to "test" the law, using John Scopes as their guinea pig. The ACLU provided a press release in which they offered to challenge the Tennessee law. Within the press release the ACLU stated, "We are looking for a Tennessee teacher who is willing to accept our services in testing this law in our courts. Our lawyers think a friendly test case can be arranged without costing a teacher his or her job. Distinguished counsel have volunteered their services. All we need now is a willing client." (Lawson, pg 83) The administrators of urban school systems within Tennessee did not want to test the law. However, Dayton wanted attention for their "struggling community" (Lawson, 83) and accepted the ACLU press offer. Dayton was converged on by the two groups who opposed each other in this argument; "the populist majoritarianism and traditional evangelical faith versus science secularism and modern concepts of individual liberty." (Lawson, pg 83)

Many of Scopes' supporters, and many of William Bryan's enemies, Larson shows, believed in the middle ground. They believed that the Bible and evolution are compatible. Evolution could be seen as God's method of creation, and the Genesis account of creation taken as a fable. However, the middle ground was virtually lost in the larger debate when Clarence Darrow took over as the head of Scopes' defense team. Darrow was anti-religious and anti-Christian. Larson points out that Darrow was a radical determinist. This meant that Darrow believed that everything, including every human act, is caused by something and that there is not real free will. He did not even understand evolution, according to Larson, but jumped on it to support his social views and "to undermine popular religious faith." Darrow "called himself an agnostic," Larson writes, "but in fact

he was effectively an atheist. According to Larson, Bryan understood evolution better than Darrow, and saw it only as a hypothesis and not a proven theory. Bryan believed that tax payers had the right to control the content of their children's education. Bryan, like Darrow, did not believe in the middle ground. He tried to get Christians to see that Darwinism took God out of the equation completely. In addition, Bryan was a man who wanted peace and believed that Darwinism could be partly blamed for war.

Darrow encouraged his client to readily admit his violation of the Tennessee law, but argued that the law violated the constitutionally mandated separation of church and state. In addition, Darrow wanted Scopes to claim that the law violated his academic freedom to express his professional views. Darrow argued further that evolution in the minds of many ministers and theologians was consistent with some interpretations of Scripture. Bryan urged the prosecution to fight its battle on constitutional grounds. As mentioned before, Bryan believed that communities were justified in setting curriculum standards in tax-supported schools. However, he was overruled by his colleagues who chose to argue science and religion. According to Larson, Bryan's biggest mistake during the trial was allowing Darrow to call him as an expert witness on the Bible. Under questioning, Larson explains that Bryan came across to many as old, tired and foolish. In the end he disappointed even his supporters by admitting that some biblical events should not be taken literally. This translated to many that it is our right to pick and choose what we consider as fact or literal from the Bible, including Genesis.

The outcome of the proceedings was never in doubt. The judge made clear to the jury that the law's constitutionality or efforts to support the validity of Darwin's theory

were not relevant. The only issue in question was whether or not Scopes had presented evolution as fact, and he had admitted as much. The teacher was found guilty and fined \$100 for his offense. Later, on appeal, the Tennessee Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the law, but reversed Scopes' conviction on the technical point that the fine had been extreme.

In the third section of his book, Larson details the related events that have taken place since 1925 and the familiar arguments that continue to surface in relation to the issues that were at hand during the Scopes Trial. Lawson points out that some observers, then and later, proclaimed the Scopes Trial as the turning point in the struggle between rural fundamentalist values and those of science. From the longer view, the trial might better be regarded as an opening scene in an ongoing American drama. Both sides of this trial went to Dayton feeling confident that "a full airing of the issues would aid its cause" (Lawson, pg 229) In addition, each side left Dayton confident that it had achieved its goal. However, Lawson points out that discussion did not resolve the disagreement; that "each side so deeply believed in its position that further information simply increased its vehemence." The Scopes trial encouraged both sides. In most southern and western states where fundamentalists held political power, the law upheld antievolution. However, in the North, efforts to outlaw the teaching of evolution were met with resistance and defeat. Lawson brings the issue of creationism vs. evolution up to current time pointing out that the number of people who believe in creationism have increased since the 1950's. The issues raised by the Scopes trial "embody the American struggle between individual liberty and majoritarian democracy, and cast it in the timeless debate over science and religion." (Lawson, pg 265)

I fully enjoyed Lawson's award winning book on The Scopes Trial. As an elementary school teacher, I teach all subjects. My interest in science, not history, is what really attracted me to Lawson's account. In addition, I minored in theology in college so the debate around evolution has always been one of interest to me. I teach evolution within my science curriculum. A huge part of our fourth grade curriculum deals with plant life and in fifth grade, animal life. We discuss and visit the evolution of plants and animals and how they adapt and have adapted. I have been presented in the past with questions from students on creationism. For example, last year we were discussing how life started on our planet and some of the newest scientific evidence around the subject. Briefly, I went over some of the new evidence found that suggests we evolved from bacteria that came to our planet in water on meteoroids. I was asked by a student, "What about God? I thought He made us." Although the question did not catch me off-guard, I was at a loss for how to answer that question. I simply stated that if you believe that, then He did. I try to expose to my students how evolution can happen right in front of us. I focus them on the fact that we are always making progress and learning and growing and that is a form of evolution.

I did find Lawson's book challenging to follow as I am not a history major. However, I was not lost on his big ideas and the way that he laid the groundwork into the trial caught me up with the historical events surrounding the trial. His descriptions of the key players within the trial, painted a wonderful picture for me. I knew next to nothing about Bryan and Darrow, but after reading Lawson's account I feel as though I have a deep understanding of both. In addition, Larson was able to convey to me how each of the lawyer's personalities added to the "entertainment" of the trial. I was able to

understand the motives behind both Bryon and Darrow. I recommend this book for anyone interested in the intersection between politics, science and religion. It is a perfect foundation for the understanding of the continuing debate that exists between science and religion.