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The 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial: Still with Us Today
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In March of 1925, the Tennessee legislature passed the Butler Act, which made it unlawful for university professors or public school teachers "to teach any theory that denies the story of divine creation as taught by the Bible." The law stated that the guilty could be fined not less than \$100 nor more than \$500. This was a fairly large sum, for the average pay for a Tennessee schoolteacher in 1925 was only \$634 a year.

A few months later the famous Scopes Monkey Trial began when John Scopes, a science teacher and part-time football coach, was charged with teaching evolution. William Jennings Bryan, the great orator and three time presidential candidate (the Billy Graham of his day), and Clarence Darrow, the great lawyer and agnostic, went head-to-head in a small Tennessee courtroom. For eight days the tiny town of Dayton became an amusement park, revival meeting and international media event. The trial inspired the 1955 play and 1960 movie "Inherit the Wind."

Scopes was found guilty and Tennessee later revoked the Butler act, but this was by no means the end of the story. The issues of the case (including separation of church and state, academic freedom, the tensions between religion and science, and the answer to the question: can a Christian believe in evolution?) are as pertinent today as they were in 1925.

A recent survey published in Scientific American stated that 45 percent of Americans believe God created the Earth in the past 10,000 years. There have been numerous lawsuits and much legislation to reduce or stop the teaching of evolution. One of the most famous was in 1999, when the Kansas state school board decided that teachers did not have to teach evolution. It was

not just evolution that disappeared from the list of topics young Kansans were expected to learn, however, but also the "Big Bang" and all references to the age of the Earth itself. The decision was later reversed.

In 1962, 40 years after the trial, Mr. Scopes said, "I believe that the Dayton trial marked the beginning of the decline of fundamentalism ... I feel that restrictive legislation on academic freedom is forever a thing of the past, that religion and science may now address one another in an atmosphere of mutual respect and of a common quest for truth." Have Mr. Scopes' thoughts come true? Is evolution given respect in our quest for truth?

In 2000, the Fordham Foundation published an appraisal of state science standards. That report gave 12 states a failing grade when it came to teaching evolution: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Draw your own conclusions.