



**from William Jennings Bryan, "Darwinism in the Public Schools,"  
*The Commoner* 23 (January 1923), 1-2.**

By the end of World War I, William Jennings Bryan already had run for President three times, served as Secretary of State and in the United States Congress, and become America's most famous public speaker. Convinced that the Darwinian theory of evolution was a cause of the war and a threat to the future of American democracy, he took up the challenge of removing its teaching from the public schools, transforming evolution into a political issue and giving the antievolution movement its most famous voice.

Now that the legislatures of the various states are in session, I beg to call attention of the legislators to a much needed reform, viz., the elimination of the teaching of atheism and agnosticism from schools, colleges, and universities supported by taxation. Under the pretense of teaching science, instructors who draw their salaries from the public treasury are undermining the religious faith of students by substituting belief in Darwinism for belief in the Bible. 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 literature have a value entirely distinct from the religious interpretations variously placed upon the Bible.

Quietly and unnoticed, the enemies of the Bible have been substituting irreligion for religion. Having excluded the teaching of religion, they are daily teaching that which cannot be true if the Bible is true. They do not always openly attack the Bible, but that which they teach is built upon the theory that the Bible is untrue. Many of these teachers are atheists, and do not believe in either a personal God or a personal immortality, as Professor Leuba, of Bryn Mawr, shows in his book, "Belief in God and Immortality." Leuba has himself rejected belief in a personal God and

belief in a personal immortality, and presents evidence to show that a majority of the prominent scientists agree with him.

Some deny that they are atheists, preferring rather to call themselves agnostics, it being easier to plead ignorance than to defend atheism. Darwin declared himself to be an agnostic, having substituted his hypothesis and its implications for the Bible. Darwin began life a Christian, but finding that his hypothesis was inconsistent with the fundamental teachings of Christianity, he rejected the Bible as an inspired book, and with it the Christ of whom the Bible tells. Darwin declared himself an agnostic, and said that the beginning of all things, was a mystery insoluble by man.

The tendency of Darwinianism, although unsupported by any substantial fact in nature, since no species has been shown to come from any other species, is to destroy faith in a personal God, faith in the Bible as an inspired Book, and faith in Christ as Son and Saviour.

The so-called theistic evolutionists refuse to admit that they are atheists, contending that they believe in a God back of creation; they argue that evolution is God's method, but they put God so far away as to practically destroy a sense of God's presence in the daily life and a sense of responsibility to Him. At least, that is the tendency, and since the so-called theistic evolutionists borrow all their facts from atheistic evolutionists and differ from them only in the origin of life, theistic evolution may be described as an anesthetic administered to young Christians to deaden the pain while their religion is being removed by the materialists.

When the Christians of the nation understand the demoralizing influence of this godless doctrine, they will refuse to allow it to be taught at public expense. Christianity is not afraid of truth, because truth comes from God, no matter by whom it is discovered or proclaimed, but there is no reason why Christians should tax themselves to pay teachers to exploit guesses and hypotheses as if they were true.

The only thing that Christians need to do now is to bring the enemies of the Bible into the open and compel them to meet the issue as it is. As soon as the methods of the atheists, agnostics, and Darwinists are 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. Christians will be just as prompt as atheists to oppose any attempt to interfere with absolute freedom of conscience. 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.

Neither do Christians object to the teaching of atheism and agnosticism by those who believe in these doctrines. Atheists have just as much civil right to teach atheism as Christians have to teach Christianity; agnostics have just as much right to teach agnosticism as Christians have to teach their religion. Let it be understood that there is no attack either upon the 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. They dare not claim higher rights, though they now enjoy higher rights and are contending for higher rights.

When Christians want to teach Christianity, they build their own schools and colleges, and employ their own teachers—Catholics build Catholic schools, Protestants build Protestant schools. Every Protestant branch of the Christian church builds its own schools for the propagation of its own doctrine. This is the rule, and there is no protest against it.

Why should not atheists build their own colleges and employ their own teachers if they want to teach atheism? Why should not agnostics build their own colleges and employ their own teachers if they want to teach agnosticism? Only a small percentage of the American people believe that man is descendant of the ape, monkey, or of any other form of animal life below man; why should not those who worship brute ancestors build their own colleges, and employ their own teachers for the training of their own children for their brute doctrine? There are no atheistic schools, and there are no agnostic schools—why should there be, if atheists and agnostics can save the expense of building their own schools and the expense of employing their own teachers by using the public schools for the propagation of their doctrine? They even make their living by teaching to the children of Christians a doctrine that the parents reject and which they do not want their children to accept. As long as the atheists and agnostics have the same rights as the Christians, what complaint can they make of injustice? Why do they ask special favors?

If those who teach Darwinism and evolution, as applied to man, insist that they are neither agnostics nor atheists, but are merely interpreting the Bible differently from orthodox Christians, what right have they to ask that their interpretation be taught at public expense? It is safe to say that not one professing Christian in ten has any sympathy with Darwinism or with any evolutionary hypothesis that takes from man the breath of the Almighty and substitutes the blood of a brute. Why should a small fraction of the Christian church—if they call themselves Christians—insist upon propagating their views of Christianity and their interpretation of the Bible at public expense? If any portion of the people could claim the right to teach their views at public expense, that right would certainly belong to a large majority rather than to a small minority. But the majority are not asking that their views be taught at the expense of the tax-payers; the majority is simply protesting against the use of the public schools by a MINORITY to spread their view, whether they be called atheists, or agnostics, or are merely teaching their interpretation of the Bible.

Christians do not ask that the teachers in the public schools, colleges and universities become exponents of orthodox Christianity; they are not asking them to teach the Bible conception of God, to affirm the Bible's claim to infallibility, or to proclaim the deity of Christ; but Christians have a right to protest against teaching that which weakens faith in God, undermines belief in the Bible, and reduces Christ to the stature of a man. The teacher who tells the student that miracles are impossible because contrary to evolution, is attacking the Bible; what right has he to do so?

Our schools are intended to train the minds of students, but back of the mind is the heart, out of which "are the issues of life." Religion deals with the Science of How to Live, which is more important than any science taught in the schools. The school teacher cannot cram enough education into the mind to offset the harm done to the student if his life is robbed of faith and his

ideals are brought down to the basis of materialism. It is high time for the people who believe in religion to make their protest against the teaching of irreligion in the public schools under the guise of science and philosophy.

A resolution without penalties will be sufficient—a resolution passed by the legislature declaring it unlawful for any teacher, principal, superintendent, trustee, director, member of a school board, or any other person exercising authority in or over a public school, college or university, whether holding office by election or appointment, to teach or permit to be taught in any institution of learning, supported by public taxation, atheism, agnosticism, Darwinism, or any other hypothesis that links man in blood relationship to any other form of life.

We are not dealing with criminals, for whom fine or imprisonment is necessary, but with educated people who have substituted a scientific guess for the Bible, and who are, in the opinion of orthodox Christians, attempting to use public schools for the propagation of doctrines antagonistic to the Bible or to the interpretation of the Bible commonly accepted by professing Christians throughout the United States and the world. Fines and penalties are not only unnecessary, but would, if included in legislative measures, turn attention from the real issue which is the protection of the rights of all in matters of conscience and religious belief.

The right of the tax-payers to decide what shall be taught can hardly be disputed. Someone must decide. The hand that writes the pay-check rules the school; if not, to whom shall the right to decide such important matters be entrusted?"