

CHAPTER
13

Section 1

PRIMARY SOURCE *from* **The Scopes Trial**

The 1925 Scopes trial pitted defense attorney Clarence Darrow against special prosecutor William Jennings Bryan. Called as a defense witness, Bryan answered a blistering volley of questions fired at him by Darrow. As you read this transcript from the trial, think about which side—the fundamentalists or the evolutionists—prevailed.

DARROW: Mr. Bryan, could you tell me how old the earth is?

BRYAN: No, sir; I couldn't.

DARROW: Could you come anywhere near it?

BRYAN: I wouldn't attempt to. I could possibly come as near as the scientists do, but I had rather be more accurate before I give a guess. . . .

DARROW: Have you any idea how far back the last glacial age was?

BRYAN: No, sir.

DARROW: Do you know whether it was more than six thousand years ago?

BRYAN: I think it was more than six thousand years.

DARROW: Have you any idea how old the earth is?

BRYAN: No.

DARROW: The book you have introduced in evidence tells you, doesn't it? (*Darrow held up a copy of the Bible.*)

BRYAN: I don't think it does, Mr. Darrow.

DARROW: Let's see whether it does. Is this the one?

BRYAN: That is the one, I think.

DARROW: It says, B.C. 4004?

BRYAN: That is Bishop Usher's calculation.

DARROW: That is printed in the Bible you introduced?

BRYAN: Yes, sir. . . .

DARROW: Would you say the earth was only four thousand years old?

BRYAN: Oh, no; I think it is much older than that.

DARROW: How much?

BRYAN: I couldn't say.

DARROW: Do you say whether the Bible itself says it is older than that?

DARROW: I don't think the Bible says itself whether it is older or not.
(*a long pause*)

DARROW: Do you think the earth was made in six days?

BRYAN: Not six days of twenty-four hours.

DARROW: Doesn't it [the Bible] say so?

BRYAN: No, sir.

ATTORNEY GENERAL STEWART: I want to interpose another objection. What is the purpose of this examination?

BRYAN (*Pale and trembling, he rose, shaking his fist above his head.*): The purpose is to cast ridicule on everybody who believes in the Bible, and I am perfectly willing that the world shall know that these gentlemen have no other purpose than ridiculing every person who believes in the Bible!

DARROW: We have the purpose of preventing bigots and ignoramuses from controlling the education of the United States, and you know it, and that is all.

from L. Sprague de Camp, *The Great Monkey Trial* (New York: Doubleday, 1968), 401–404.

Activity Options

1. Re-create Darrow's cross-examination of Bryan. Have classmates take the following roles: Darrow, Bryan, Stewart, other members of the defense team, other members of the prosecution team, newspaper reporters who are covering the trial, and spectators who either support Bryan and the fundamentalists or Scopes, Darrow, and the evolutionists.
2. The Scopes trial highlighted the clash between evolutionists and fundamentalists. With a group of classmates, discuss some contemporary examples of the clash between science and religious beliefs.