

# Reflections

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reading notes

AUGUST 2004—*The Scopes Trial*

Edward Larson won the 1998 Pulitzer Prize in history for his book *Summer for the gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion*. The title speaks for itself. The book is divided into three main parts. The first part traces the events that led up to the famous trial. The second chronicles the basics of the trial. The third addresses the lingering issues we still face due to the trial.

In my estimation, the crux of the trial is exposed when one of the defense attorneys, a Mr. Hays, attempts to convince the judge to let him question several scientists concerning the viability of evolution in an obvious attempt to portray the Tennessee law prohibiting the teaching of evolution as archaic.

The jury was out of the room when Mr. Hays presented his case before the judge, but his plan unravels when Mr. Bryan, the prosecuting attorney, asks if these science experts for the defense could be cross-examined. The following is from a personal journal kept by Mr. Hays and written later reflecting on this part of the trial:

Cross-examination would have shown that the scientists, while religious men—for we chose only that kind—still did not believe in the virgin birth and other miracles (p. 181).

The ACLU knew that "...if the cause of free education was ever to be won, it would need the support of millions of intelligent churchgoing people who didn't question theological miracles" (ibid.)

This confirms what I have suspected for a number of years concerning the creation/evolution controversy. The debate then and now is Supernaturalism v. Naturalism. Supernaturalism leaves the door open for the possibility of a supernatural intelligent agent to act. Naturalism, on the other hand, is the denial of a creation distinct from its Creator and seeks natural explanations for the universe, man and the origin of life. It closes the door to the possibility of a supernatural intelligent agent. This is, in my estimation, the pivotal issue in the Scopes trial. It is the ultimate issue we face in debates conducted on the subject today.

