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Religion and Culture in *Inherit the Wind*

Abstract

Stanley Kramer's *Inherit the Wind* (1960) has long been considered a classic for its indictment of McCarthyism as allegorized in a dramatic treatment of the Scopes Monkey Trial. But for all its political messaging, the film is also patently up front in its treatment of religious perspectives on culture. The presence of such material may be read allegorically but may also be read in connection with the period of the film's production, as a statement piece on religious perspectives of media such as film. This article examines the religious messaging in *Inherit the Wind* in conjunction with religious perspectives of the 1920s and 30s (the time period depicted in the film) and the late 1950s (the period of the film's making). In so doing, the article offers a new reading of the film, connecting it explicitly to religious perspectives on culture and cultural engagement contemporaneous with the film's release.

Keywords

culture, structuralism, pietism, *Inherit the Wind*

Author Notes

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A central tension of the Christian faith is encapsulated in a perspective traditionally summarized as “Christians are to be *in* the world but not *of* the world,” indicating a distinctiveness to the Christian lifestyle that clashes with secular morality. This tension, and the seriousness with which Christians have taken their beliefs throughout time, have been associated with some of history’s most world-changing events, including the establishment of the United States. And even as provisions in the U.S. Constitution protect freedoms of speech and religion, these do little to lessen strains between Christian communities and the ideals of secular society.

One of the most famous and enduring manifestations of these strains was the 1925 case popularly referred to as the Scopes Monkey Trial. Designed as a test of Tennessee’s law against teaching evolution in public schools—Scopes actually volunteered to be prosecuted—the trial eventually came to be seen as a moral contest pitting religious Fundamentalism against scientific progress and religious Modernism. As such, the trial remains an emblem of controversy and a standout event in the history of Christian and specifically Protestant entanglement with culture.

At nearly the same time as the Scopes trial, religious groups were fighting a different yet thematically related battle over engagement with culture, this in the arena of filmmaking and popular art. As movies rose to prominence, religious groups recognized the medium’s potential for influence and sought control over messaging appropriate for mass distribution. Both Catholic and Protestant groups saw the movies as an opportunity to assert authority across the nation, articulating distinct and opposing philosophies of a Christian engagement with art. Further, Protestant groups themselves often differed in their interpretation of the Believer’s responsibility to secular art, with two major camps emerging: pietists, whose conservative theological perspective begot an emphasis on specific content in movies, and structuralists, whose liberal theology pushed for viewers to assess critically the whole of a film’s message and intent.¹

The Scopes trial and Protestant perspectives on filmgoing became more clearly linked through the production of *Inherit the Wind* (1960). Adapted from a 1955 play by the same name, the film is a retelling of the events of the Scopes trial, with details and names changed but the religious and social controversy left intact. Director Stanley Kramer heightened the political allegory of the play, adapting the already political story into “the quintessential parable about McCarthyism.”² But in addition to the implicit political messaging, the film’s story is explicit in its emphasis on religious parties and extremism. And though a historical drama in terms of its direct subject matter, the religious debate at the center of *Inherit the Wind*’s events nonetheless has parallels to the Christian community’s continued wrestling over the artifacts and attitudes of secular culture, including the movies themselves.

While history has celebrated Kramer’s *Inherit the Wind* for its biting and continually relevant public allegory, its relationship to ongoing and specifically religious controversies at the time of its release has gone largely unremarked upon. Worth noting here is that Robert E. Lee, one of the play’s original authors, was a member of the Protestant-organized Broadcasting and Film Commission of the National Council of Churches around the time of the film adaptation’s release.³ As a Christian himself, the religious elements of *Inherit the Wind* were certainly more than mere subtext for Lee, and though the translation of such aspects may not have been at the fore of director Kramer’s mind, they are nonetheless prominently featured in the film’s narrative. This essay re-reads *Inherit the Wind* in light of the continuing culture wars between Christians and secularists in the late 1950s and early 1960s, with specific attention to the type of Protestant denominations depicted in the film. First, a brief history of the Scopes trial and the Fundamentalist and Modernist groups that butted heads there will provide context for the film’s story and its religious subject matter. Next, issues concerning the appropriate role of religious organizations in Hollywood

contemporaneous to the film's release will be detailed. Finally, the essay will turn to a rhetorical look at *Inherit the Wind* itself to show how the film conveys an uneasy hope for religion even amidst the bifurcation and dominance of often extreme religious and political viewpoints.

The Scopes Trial, or Fundamentalism vs. Modernism

In January of 1926 the state legislature of Tennessee outlawed the teaching of Darwinian evolution in public schools.⁴ The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) had recently taken a specific interest in cases relating to freedom of speech in classrooms and educational settings, and responded to the legislation by printing an advertisement in Tennessee newspapers stating their willingness to defend any teacher prosecuted under it. This ad was seen in Dayton, Tennessee by one George Rappleyea, who took it to Fred E. Robinson, chair of the local school board, who thought that he had the perfect candidate: substitute teacher John T. Scopes.

As such, the formal beginnings of the Scopes trial were rather inauspicious: Scopes was asked if he would be willing to act as a test case for the law; when Scopes agreed, lawyers were contacted, Scopes was indicted, and the process began.⁵ Part of Rappleyea's motivation was a Modernist Christian conviction that Darwin's principles of evolution could be reconciled with the creation account of Genesis; the larger part of his motivation, however, and that of others involved, was publicity for Dayton, which had fallen on hard times.⁶ And publicity was certainly to be had when the Scopes case quickly took on a life of its own as an emblem of the ongoing debate between religion, science, and culture in the early decades of the century.

Particularly in the 1920s, it seemed that a truly modern era had begun to emerge in the aftermath of World War I. Lynn Dumenil notes a number of significant changes to the fabric of society that emerged in this decade, bringing with them "an acute consciousness of social and

cultural change that challenged tradition, religion, rational order, and progress.”⁷ Willard B. Gatewood Jr. notes that “by the 1920s the spirit and method of science had become part of popular culture largely as a result of the democratization of education and knowledge” so that “science had been raised to the level of a national cult in the United States.”⁸ Such an elevation of science brought with it a new emphasis on rationality as a way of thinking and living, forcing a reconciliation with many traditional stances on morals, ethics, and religion. Many in religious circles remained wary of science’s ostensibly irreligious character, with some, including former Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, warning that the amorality of science was what had “manufactured poisonous gases to suffocate soldiers” during World War I.⁹

Bryan, of course, would become a prominent player in the Scopes drama by volunteering to participate in the prosecution. He brought with him an ethos as a nationally recognized speaker, built in part on his staunch adherence to Fundamentalist values. The term “fundamentalism” had its roots in the Presbyterian-organized Niagara Conference, where conservative Christians sought to define the “fundamentals” of the faith in the face of a more liberal turn in society. Later, the term was popularized through the publication of *The Fundamentals: A Testimony To The Truth*, a series of 90 essays published between 1910 and 1915 in which “leading conservative theologians gave accessible accounts of such doctrines as the Trinity, refuted the Higher Criticism, and stressed the importance of spreading the truth of the Gospel.”¹⁰ However, according to George M. Marsden, “The fundamentalists’ most alarming experience was that of finding themselves living in a culture that by the 1920s was openly turning away from God.”¹¹ Bryan himself spoke widely on the need for America to reform its morals and return to the piety of its forefathers; religious Modernists, conversely, argued that Christianity needed to adapt to the culture of the present day.¹²

The differences between Modernism and Fundamentalism are perhaps best expressed through the very controversy of the Scopes matter. A key tenet of Fundamentalism was a literal interpretation of the scriptures, including the creation account of Genesis 1-2.¹³ But the rise of scientific rationalism called into question the authority of the Bible as a source of knowledge about natural phenomena. No theory was more contradictory to the Bible's account than that of Darwinian evolution, often simplified in the popular press as the belief that men had evolved from monkeys.¹⁴ In contrast to Fundamentalist Christians who saw such beliefs as directly opposing the inerrant truths of Scripture, many Modernists held that the Bible was still not wrong, but that modern science offered insights into realities that Scripture sometimes cast in poetic language, as was the case, they argued, with the creation story of Genesis. Some Modernists, including the famed New York pastor Harry Emerson Fosdick, saw Darwin and other scientists as worthy of being canonized "under a special head: Servants of the truth of God."¹⁵ The Bible, such views held, told us what had happened; science was telling us *how* God made it happen.

The Modernist view was that which Scopes was tacitly supporting in his trial. While the larger issue for Scopes himself was likely that of freedom of speech, the teacher also publicly avowed to some religious inclination, even if he did not belong to any specific denomination and was more personally agnostic than explicitly religious.¹⁶ Whatever the specifics of Scopes's religious beliefs, it was clear that he did not espouse a Fundamentalist view, but rather saw science and the Bible as commensurable.

After the elements of Fundamentalism and Modernism, one final viewpoint was represented in the Scopes matter, that of staunch atheism. This view was represented by Clarence Darrow, a spirited lawyer who had gained some infamy for his successful representation of the murderers Leopold and Loeb. Darrow, referred to by one author as the "attorney for the damned,"

had previously worked alongside William Jennings Bryan during several presidential campaigns, but Bryan's fanatical devotion to anti-evolutionary thinking and causes rubbed Darrow the wrong way.¹⁷ Throughout the Scopes trial, Darrow worked to treat the local population with respect, but he often backhandedly insulted the majority present, referring to a local Christian modernist as one "who dares to be intelligent."¹⁸ In the metadrama of religious forces at play in the Scopes situation, Darrow easily stands in for the broader culture against which Fundamentalist views were positioned, a culture that accepted Darwinism as at least somewhat true, and believed strongly in the freedom of speech. Darrow was not unappreciative of the good that religion had done in culture but was wary of the unbending extremism that gripped many followers, and disappointed in the abandonment of reason for blind faith. Though already past middle age by the time of the Scopes trial, Darrow's views here are remarkably reflective of the diminishing religious influence that Lynn Dumenil recognizes infusing the spirit of the 1920s.¹⁹

Worth noting, however, is that Darrow's views emerged from his staunch adherence to the principles of free speech. Representing a further extreme of atheistic thinking was the rabbleroising newspaperman H.L. Mencken, whose contempt for the locals far outweighed any that Darrow may have had. He referred in print to the Dayton Fundamentalists as being "among the inferior orders of men," even as he found the town as a whole to be rather agreeable.²⁰ Still, Mencken sought to humiliate Bryan and his beliefs throughout the trial, which caused much stir among Daytonians and did nothing to endear Mencken and his irreligious candor to the locals.²¹

The actual events of the Scopes trial were rather straightforward. Judge Tate Raulston struck most of Darrow's expert witnesses, derailing the defense's plan of demonstrating that evolution and the Bible were compatible. The only major drama in the case came when Darrow called Bryan to the stand and subjected him to a blistering line of questioning surrounding Bryan's

own Biblical interpretations and authority for making such judgments. Darrow expertly caught the prosecution's nationally heralded star in inconsistencies that reduced Bryan's credibility through flustering him to the point of a defeated rage. This was, ultimately, a symbolic victory, as Raulston ordered Bryan's testimony stricken from the record and moved the trial towards a hasty conclusion. With little to argue with, Darrow urged the jury to find Scopes guilty to prepare the case for appeal; and guilty the jury did find him.²² The case's consequences were widely but divergently felt: although the Tennessee statute against the teaching of evolution was upheld on appeal,²³ in the popular imagination Darrow's discrediting of Bryan (made legendary by the apocryphal story of Bryan actually dying the day of the trial's conclusion) cemented views of religious fundamentalists as backwards and irrational.²⁴ This was, of course, no matter to the devoutly fundamentalist: Jesus had already warned them that they would be reviled in the world.²⁵

Cinema in the Culture Wars of the 50s and 60s

Bearing cultural persecution did not mean sitting idly by, however. Just as Bryan and others had stood firm in their defense of their beliefs in the Scopes trial, still others continued to fight against Modernism and liberalism in other areas of culture. And while the debates between creationism and evolution never quite disappeared,²⁶ other areas of conflict took precedence throughout the following decades. One major site for debate centered around a burgeoning medium for the dissemination of ideas and, if Christians were to be believed, morality: cinema.

Christian involvement in the cinema began early, and, as is perhaps predictable with religious organizations, quickly fell into action along denominational lines. Catholics quickly rose to the fore of the fight over censorship and morality in motion pictures with the 1933 establishment of the National Legion of Decency, which worked in ostensible conjunction with Hollywood's

own Production Code Administration (founded in 1934) to approve motion pictures for national release. Should the Legion of Decency deny a film approval, its chances of success were reduced significantly, as America's Catholic population was forbidden from attending such films "under penalty of mortal sin."²⁷ The aim of the Legion, however, was primarily moral instruction. Identifying the cinematic medium as one rife with the potential for misleading the masses of America brought with it the belief that the power of cinema could be harnessed for instructive, moral, Progressive ends. In fact, Jane Addams and other Progressive reformers of the 20s and 30s, including members of the Catholic church, saw the cinema in just this light, aiming to cultivate Progressive allies through cinematic morality lessons.²⁸

Unlike this relatively unified perspective of the Catholics, Protestant power in Hollywood suffered from the inherent disunity of their independent theologies. William D. Romanowski's history of Protestant involvement in Hollywood showcases that Protestants desired the same kind of censorial and educational power that the Catholics seemed to hold in the film industry, but their differing perspectives on what standards ought to be in place with regard to Hollywood's product were too varied to establish a consensus from which to operate. Romanowski names the two most prominent perspectives "pietist" and "structuralist," and aligns their administration with conservative and liberal political and theological ideologies respectively.

The pietist perspective aligned with the perspectives of Fundamentalists, and took the basic principle of the 1930 Production Code at its most literal: "No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it."²⁹ What qualified as immorality emerged from the Scriptures themselves, including from Jesus himself: "And he said, 'What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”³⁰ Likewise, in Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church he admonishes them to “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”³¹ Swearing, sexuality, and crime had no business in the movies, according to pietists, and so their position supported some measure of censorship, arguing in favor of tougher penalties in Hollywood and for more family fare to be produced by major studios. The pietist emphasis on the individual as the center of one’s own sin and subsequent place in society resulted in a perspective that emphasized the influence of cultural artifacts like movies on the morality of the individual.³² Movies had potential to be either forces for good or for evil in the life of the individual, with this influence meted out specifically in terms of the content that the films contained. If the proverbial notion that “bad company corrupts good morals” was true, then keeping the company of bad films could only lead to the downfall of the individual and, thus, the larger society of individuals. At stake in the war over cinematic morality was the soul of the country, led by the souls of individual citizens.

The structuralist perspective that Romanowski identifies was a more liberal vision of Christianity. Structuralists perceived culture itself as problematic in governing the lives of individuals. Transforming the systems of society, then, is one major goal of Christians and their work.³³ Though societies are comprised of individuals, structuralists perceived the whole as greater than the sum of its parts, recognizing a more deterministic bent to societal structures. The philosophies that guided things like government, social, or commercial institutions were stronger and more influential than the individuals working within them, meaning that to influence change in the life of an individual required shifting the underlying assumptions of the systems and institutions to which they belonged. As such, the structuralist perspective manifested itself in a

more holistic approach to the evaluation of cinema. While there may be immoral behavior represented onscreen, whether that be violence, swearing, or even nudity, it is the overall message of the film that is important—what it says about society, about humanity, or about God. Structuralists held that it was “the total philosophical assumptions and values conveyed by a film and their total effect upon audiences,” that ought to be of chief concern for religious audiences.³⁴ To engage in the kind of wholesale censorship that the pietists advocated seemed to fly in the face of Protestant values relating to the freedom of the individual in scriptural interpretation and expression of worship. Censoring art by dividing certain qualities or ideas into “religious” and “secular” categories was dualistic and antithetical to the comprehensive and total devotion demanded by the Christian life. In opposition to the pietists, structuralists saw being in the world but not of the world to include engagement with media such as cinema in order to transform the moral and spiritual groundings underpinning society, particularly society’s inequalities.

That this divide in Christian approaches to culture became particularly visible during the late 1950s is perhaps not surprising. The postwar era was one of the most profitable for America, riding high as the only major power not to have been economically devastated by the war, and yet this prosperity masked cultural disparities. Women, who had stepped up to work in factories while the men were fighting, suddenly found themselves expected to be happy in serving docilely in the domestic sphere.³⁵ Issues of race and discrimination were highlighted in the wake of Hitler’s explicitly racial agenda, which African Americans in the armed forces had fought against.³⁶ The reality of the atom bomb and subsequent atomic developments wrought a new emphasis on science and technology,³⁷ while the icy mood and reality of the Cold War was rapidly setting in accompanied by a new Red Scare.³⁸ Within religious circles specifically, societal developments gave way to a culture of intellectualism in opposition to popular religion, pitting the layman against

the learned in a battle over beliefs.³⁹ As the world seemed poised on the edge of destruction, and with such prominent and overwhelming cultural forces astir, it was only natural for Christians to ask what their role in the changing world was to be.

Given the popularity and prominence of the cinema--particularly amongst teenagers--the emergence of the movie palace as a site for waging cultural and religious battles was to be expected as the cultural climate continued to shift into the 1950s and 60s. As the decades wore on, the power of Hollywood's Production Code to censor and standardize movie content waned, resulting in a dramatic increase of blood, gore, sex and more in the nation's theaters, with a teenaged audience waiting to rabidly gobble up such fare.⁴⁰ This fact was not lost on Christians generally, nor Protestants specifically. A Protestant Motion Picture Council (PMPC) was established and used the periodical *The Christian Herald* as a venue to display "audience suitability" ratings of Hollywood fare for families and individuals to make informed decisions about their media consumption.⁴¹ Others took Hollywood on at their own game, with evangelist Billy Graham in particular using the momentum of the explosive growth of his revivals in the early 1950s to fuel a deliberate approach to media in order to counter the prevailing trends of the day. Graham's revivals were significantly bolstered by coverage in the news media, and the advent of television enabled a larger audience for his preaching and demonstrated the power of media when used for religious ends.⁴² Success in the realm of television led to an expansion of Graham's engagement with popular media; he established World Wide Pictures as a subsidiary of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) in 1951, and the company quickly produced its first film that year, *Mr. Texas*.⁴³ What distinguished Graham's efforts from earlier religious production companies such as Cathedral Films was the emphasis on stories that were rooted in real life, rather than retellings of Bible stories.⁴⁴ Such an approach enabled the use of the cinematic medium to

demonstrate and display good morals and Christian theology for moviegoing audiences, with a patently evangelistic message of salvation wrapped up in the telling. These movies were markedly successful as an evangelistic tool for the BGEA,⁴⁵ but also stand out as an exemplar of a pietistic approach to Christian cinema as the antithesis to secular media. Where secular cinema pushed the boundaries of good taste and acceptability, Graham's films eschewed such trends and adopted a wholesome, moralistic tone that matched the messaging and style coming from Graham's pulpit on the radio and on television every day. This was the environment into which *Inherit the Wind* was released, using a familiar controversy to address continuing religious and cultural tensions.

Religious and Cultural Controversy in *Inherit the Wind*

Stanley Kramer's adaptation of Lawrence and Lee's play maintains the stage play's tone and outlook. *Inherit the Wind* takes place in the generic town of Hillsboro, where Bertram Cates (Dick York) is on trial for teaching evolution in the public school. Aiding the prosecution is the esteemed Matthew Harrison Brady (Fredric March), who is aligned with the Fundamentalist worldview that established the law in question and, effectively, brought the suit. Cates's defense is headed by Henry Drummond (Spencer Tracy), a big-shot Chicago lawyer who was previously associated with Brady's unsuccessful presidential campaigns. Aiding Drummond and acting as jester is E.K. Hornbeck (Gene Kelly), writer for the *Baltimore Herald*. Each of these characters has clear parallels with real actors in the actual Scopes matter. To this cast is added two significant characters: Reverend Jeremiah Brown (Claude Akins), a fiery Fundamentalist preacher, and his daughter Rachel (Donna Anderson), who is engaged to Cates.

It has already been noted that *Inherit the Wind* is famous for its defense of free speech in the context of the era's McCarthyism.⁴⁶ Using the historical framework of the Scopes trial to

dramatic effect gave Lawrence and Lee and eventually Kramer license to critique the politics of their own times. But the explicit religiosity of the story cannot be ignored. Even as the story's themes were implicitly political and pointed at specific, contemporaneous people and parties, its critique of religious views of culture were even more poignant and relevant. In looking at the film's overall treatment of religious ideology, and through a focus on the character of Rachel, it can be seen that *Inherit the Wind* also proclaims a stance of hope in the relationship of Christians not only to science, but to culture and the arts.

The film's opening embeds its story in an explicitly religious frame, focusing on Hillsboro's courthouse while the image is accompanied by a woman's voice singing "Give Me That Old Time Religion." As the song directly hearkens back to the dedication and faith of the Biblical patriarchs, it also represents the moral commitments of the town's religious element to an almost classical ideal of Christianity, even in the face of what they see as intense cultural persecution and perversion. Reverend Jeremiah Brown accompanies police officers into Bertram Cates's classroom while they read his charges and make the initiating arrest. Notable is the innate hostility in Cates's arrest. With the Reverend Brown present, the teacher's cuffing is presented with an air of greater consequence than any mere rule-breaking: under Brown's furrowed gaze, Cates is condemned in the eyes of God.

Following Cates's arrest, Brown and others from the town's upper crust gather and discuss a spate of newspaper headlines from surrounding towns and cities discussing their case: "Monkey Shines in Hillsboro," reads one, "Heavenly Hillsboro—does it have a hole in its head or its head in a hole" reads another. Reverend Brown compares such intellectual abuse to the mocking of Christ on his journey to the cross, admonishing the others: "they smote him, and they spat on him and he turned to them his other cheek."

In this conversation the town banker explicitly connects Brown and the town's religious association to Fundamentalism, interestingly in a brief moment of doubt. Recognizing that the rest of the country may see the community's anti-evolution law as antiquated and "horse-and-buggy"-ish, the banker is worried about what the trial will mean for the town's reputation until one newspaper headline declares that Matthew Harrison Brady has volunteered to work with the prosecution. The forthcoming presence of the esteemed speaker eliminates any fears that the community organizers may have had. Brady taking up their cause intimates that they are in the right—their faithfulness to the defense of the Lord's Holy Word is already being rewarded. While the rest of the world may scoff and laugh, these Fundamentalists are committed to the literalness and truthfulness of Scripture, and Brady will champion them.

Following this, we are introduced to the film's embodiment of Modernism, Bertram Cates himself, as he meets with his fiancé, Rachel, in the town's courthouse. The introduction of these two characters is quick but noteworthy in the way it sets both Rachel and Cates in opposition to traditional Fundamentalist morals through a simple action: a kiss. When Rachel first sees Cates in the courtroom, she rushes over to him and passionately kisses him in relief. This action depicts Rachel as caught in a recognizable cultural tension of the times. On the one hand her physical actions show her as the kind of liberated young woman of the 20s discussed by Dumenil and shows both her and Cates as representing a modernist, liberal morality, which neatly accompanies the stance that Cates has already taken on science. However, Rachel is still uneasy about this morality and her role in all of this, and here acquiescence to her fiancé's view raises questions of her agency in the relationship, hinting at the kind of insecure and voluntary subjugation diagnosed in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*.

Importantly, Cates and Rachel's morality clashes with other, cynical perspectives to demonstrate that they are not irreligious. In the same scene where they are reunited, E.K. Hornbeck introduces himself and quickly makes known his deprecating view of the Hillsboro locals: "So, this is where the fate of learning will be decided for the next 10,000 years," he says as he saunters in. He eats an apple and after Rachel turns down a bite notes, "I'm not the serpent, little Eva. This isn't from the tree of knowledge. Oh, no. You won't find one growing in 'Heavenly Hillsboro.' A few ignorance bushes, maybe, but no tree of knowledge." Cates, he argues, will be a martyr for the cause of intelligent thinking here in Hillsboro.

Cates stands in direct contrast to Hornbeck in his continued identification with, at the very least, religious language. He argues that he is not trying to prove anything but is only fighting for the right "to teach my students that man wasn't just planted here like a Geranium in a flowerpot, that life comes from a long miracle." Without being explicit, Cates's use of the term "long miracle" recognizes a divine element in creation without discounting scientific advances. Later in the film Rachel defends Cates on the stand as being someone who questions God in relation to the realities of the world around him. And though Brady's blistering interrogation of Rachel reduces her to tears and damages Cates's reputation, it also serves to paint Cates as a moderate, intelligent, curious Christian who seeks to reconcile the mysteries of God with the revelation of science and the intellect.

The townsfolk treat Matthew Brady's arrival as an event in its own right, complete with a parade, an honorary commission into the state's militia by the mayor, and a chorus's reprise of "Give Me That Old Time Religion" with Brady's name worked into one of the verses. He quickly makes explicit the symbolic victory that is at stake over the religious minds of the town's citizens,

and indeed the citizens of America as a whole. Giving ground to “evil-ution,” as he calls it, is to start the country down a fiery path of corruption that leads inevitably to death.

Brady’s loud oratory and ostentatious style are contrasted with Henry Drummond, who arrives very simply in town and is shown around by Hornbeck. Drummond and Brady eventually meet and bond over their shared past before discussing the differences that exist between their worldviews. “Funny how two people can start from the same point and ... drift apart,” Brady says. “Well, all motion is relative, Matt,” Drummond replies, “Maybe it’s you who have moved away by standing still.” Cates, who sees a way for religion and the progress of science to support one another, Drummond sees the ethic of Fundamentalism as representative seemingly of all religion and has decided that culture’s advances have moved too far beyond such things to make them tenable as a personal ethos. His is a soft atheism, replete with a continued concern for other people, but is atheism, nonetheless. Drummond specifically refers to an earlier confrontation between Reverend Brown, his followers, and his own daughter. Brady defends the underlying belief that led to this confrontation as one of faithful hope in response to the challenges of an evil world, the world that Drummond and his worldview purports to endorse. Drummond flips the script on Brady and compares such hope to a rocking horse that his parents purchased for him as a kid, a Golden Dancer that was ultimately “All shine, and no substance!” He compares the hope of the mob to this kind of glitter and glamour that lacks any kind of real basis in reality; the hope that Brady is selling, he says, is no hope at all. Throughout this exchange both Brady and Drummond are seated in rocking chairs on the front porch of the boarding house where Brady is staying. At the beginning of the discussion the two of them rock in their chairs, but out of sync with one another. As the conversation continues and the pair reflect on their shared values and starting points, their rocking

lines up; when Drummond begins his monologue and reflects on the hollowness of militant faith the pair get out of sync with each other again, reflecting the conflict of their worldviews.

This symbolism, plainly presented in the film's straightforward visual style, reinforces that the film's main characters represent particular worldviews with definitive views of religion, culture, and the relation between the two. They are all, for the most part, static. The only exception is Rachel, whose strong ties to her father and her emotional ties to Cates place her in a precarious position. Though not the most prominent figure in the story, Rachel is easily seen as the audience representative as she struggles to determine which view is correct, and where her convictions lie. Several of the plot's key events center around the ways that she is directly influenced or impacted by the religious convictions of the others around her.

The first decisive moment is when Reverend Brown hosts a prayer meeting on the courthouse lawn. The event is not far off from actual Fundamentalist revival meetings but feels exaggerated, even trending towards caricature. Canted angle shots present Reverend Brown in the midst of a righteous mob as he loudly proclaims the sovereignty of God's role in creation, his voice growing louder and more passionate as he swoops into outright condemnation, calling for the Lord to "strike down this sinner as thou did thine enemies of old in the days of the pharaohs!" In this presentation, Brown's appearance seems intentionally designed to evoke the language of evangelists such as Billy Graham, particularly when viewed from someone outside of their sphere of influence or understanding. For those who share Brown's views and interpretation of scripture, his words are not surprising or even controversial. But the canted angles and mob-like presentation of the crowd demonstrates its implicit hostility towards those who stand outside of that shared worldview. In this the camera deliberately acts as a defamiliarizing agent, taking on the role of the

outsider looking in on what to bystanders may seem an otherwise normal, familiar religious gathering.

When Rachel tries to intervene, Reverend Brown spins his invective onto her: “Lord, we ask the same curse for those who ask for grace for this sinner, though they be blood of my blood and flesh of my flesh!” Rachel’s terror at having her own deep-seated beliefs turned against her is palpable, as is our relief when Brady steps in to turn aside the Reverend’s wrath with a soft answer, quoting Proverbs 11:29: “He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind,” rebuking Brown’s overzealousness that would denounce his own daughter. The moment communicates the consequences that can occur when religious views are taken to their most extreme. Rigid adherence to one’s position can have grave repercussions, Brady’s warning implies, as he will personally experience all too well at the hands of Drummond.

After Brady rescues Rachel from her father, she confides in him about Cates, a decision which ultimately hurts Rachel when Brady calls her to the witness stand. This key instance reveals much about both Brady and Cates. Rachel says that Cates stopped attending her father’s church because of its condemnation of the “Stebbins boy,” a local youth who drowned and who Reverend Brown said was damned because he had not been baptized. The moment spurs a reaction from Cates himself, who yells out that “Religion’s supposed to comfort people, not frighten them to death!” Rachel also notes that Cates left the church but did not abandon God. These answers give further insight into the more moderate position that Cates holds, and that Rachel has arrived at, one which seeks to reconcile the scientific and emotional realities of life with the truths of scripture. Brady, however, will hear none of it. He berates Rachel, yelling at her to tell of Cates’s religious doubts and reducing her to tears. While Brady seemingly rescued Rachel from the harshness of her father’s religious fanaticism, his shared beliefs with Reverend Brown come out, acting as a

warning for the way that one's devotion can become twisted. While initially principled and holding to a limit of cruelty in the name of God, Brady falls into that same trap. The film's depiction of such a fall inquires of the religious viewer as to the line between staunch belief and grace, and how a commitment to the former can reduce one's capability of exercising the latter.

Brady's fall is further dramatized when Rachel goes to confront him at his hotel. First, she encounters Brady's wife, Sarah, who tries to prevent Rachel from talking with him. "I taught my pupils that Matthew Harrison Brady was a great man ... next to God, almost," Rachel says. "He encouraged me to open up my heart to him, and then he twisted my words. He tricked me.... if he could do such an evil, then he must be an evil man, and everything he stands for must be evil, too!" Sarah Brady defends her husband, who has also just been put on the stand and routed and embarrassed by Drummond's questioning, which painted Brady as an inconsistent fool. "My husband's neither a saint nor a devil. He's just a human being ... and he makes mistakes," Mrs. Brady says. "If he's been wrong, at least he stood for something." When Brady himself emerges from his bedroom, Rachel makes it clear that she no longer follows his line of thinking and wants nothing more to do with him or his views.

When Rachel leaves, Mrs. Brady commends her husband's principles but asks where his grace has gone. "Sarah," Brady says, "a victory here would be a monument to God that would last a thousand years!" Mrs. Brady admonishes him that any monument that he is building through his arguments is inevitably going to fail the moment that people find a flaw in him--which has already become apparent through his excoriation at Drummond's hands. Brady insists that he can make people see the truth. While Mrs. Brady watches on, Brady brandishes the final speech that he has prepared to convince the world of God's truth; and she holds him when he collapses in recognition of how the crowd abandoned him in the wake of his testimony.

Rachel's final moment in the narrative is when she approaches Cates's table in the courtroom on the day of sentencing. She stammers an apology, but Cates waves it away. Just as he has not abandoned God, he has not abandoned Rachel, either. "I'm just glad you're here," he tells her, and invites her to sit down. While Rachel had for so long been torn by the staunch faith of her father and her upbringing, she has come to a point that recognizes the danger in such a narrow view of culture and of others.

But in spite of resolving the religious drama of Rachel's character, the story as a whole is not yet complete. Having set Rachel's faith into a modernist balance, the eyes of the story shift to how secular culture deals with religious expression by refocusing the narrative on Drummond and Brady. The jurors return and convict Cates of his crime, to which Drummond responds with the intent to appeal. With the matter settled, the courtroom becomes a bustling hive of activity, the townspeople and observers hurrying to leave. Brady shouts for the people to stop, for them to listen to the remarks that he has so carefully prepared; but to no avail. The camera shifts backwards away from him as he stands bellowing at the front of the courtroom, diminishing his manic movements amidst the bustle of the townspeople who entirely disregard his shouts, emphasizing that their concern has primarily been for their town, not Brady's issue. This is one of the first times that the camera has attained any measure of sustained mobility, and it is deliberately used here to isolate Brady from the rest of the mob that has to this point followed along with his logic. Eventually, Brady collapses in a heap: he is dead. The cause is given as a busted gut, but the implication is that he died of a broken heart or of disappointment related to salvaging his reputation as God's defender.

In the film's closing scene, Drummond packs up his things while talking with E.K. Hornbeck. When Hornbeck expresses the view that Drummond must be happy that Brady is dead, Drummond rebukes him, reminding him that Brady was a person just like any other, he just

happened to lose his way: “A giant once lived in that body, but Matt Brady got lost because he looked for a god too high up and too far away,” Drummond says. Quoting Proverbs 11:29 again he notes that the principle of standing united is universal, applying to the religious and secular alike. The world has no place for extremism of any kind--whether that be religious extremism or the cynicism of Hornbeck. After Hornbeck leaves, dissatisfied, Drummond lingers in the courtroom, packing up his things. He picks up Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* and holds it in one hand with a copy of the Bible in the other. Weighing and considering them together, Drummond finally stacks the Bible on top and gathers them both under his arm before grabbing his bag and making his way out of the courtroom. The kind of Modernist religion that Cates has exemplified is something that Drummond can support, if not outright believe in, intimating that there are some kinds of religious faith that can live in harmony with secular culture, that can take the artifacts of that culture and see God working in them, even if others do not.

Conclusion

Throughout *Inherit the Wind*, Henry Drummond argues that too many are too willing to accept the dogmas of those around them without critically engaging with what they see in the world. This stance is remarkably similar to that of the Christian Structuralists who worked in Protestant film circles to adopt a reformed, open view to the cinematic art in the late 50s and early 60s. The film’s story relegates Cates and his Modernist views to the backburner, with Drummond’s secularism coming to the fore as the ideological reconciler, particularly in the closing scenes as we see the view reflected that religion and culture are inextricably intertwined, and the message is communicated that finding and maintaining a balance is necessary for a healthy, deliberative society.

The contrasting view, that of Fundamentalism, also persisted, and does to this day. Many Protestant denominations continue to avoid secular culture and speak out against media that they see as harmful to youth and culture, with boycotts in recent memory targeting Harry Potter and Disney both as being especially harmful and misleading to impressionable youth.⁴⁷ And while specifically Christian film and media content has long been produced in independent spheres across the whole history of cinema,⁴⁸ the advent of digital production technologies has opened up the door to a revolution of independent Christian filmmaking. Creative artists like the animators of the now-defunct Big Idea, Inc. and the Kendrick brothers who established Sherwood Pictures have broadened the reach and scope of Christian filmmaking. They have also maintained their Evangelical stance on wholesome, explicitly moral family entertainment, which has its roots in the kind of Fundamentalist viewpoint on display in *Inherit the Wind*.

While the politics of *Inherit the Wind* are still talked about today, it cannot be ignored that the film's ideas are steeped in a religious context that was experiencing ongoing debates at the time of the film's production. In this the film speaks in similar ways to different audiences, offering something for both religious and secular viewers. The religious messaging of the film ultimately offers support for the Structuralist perspective that sees film as a holistic piece of culture that needs to be assessed as a whole piece before being judged. In this the film provides an air of hope for those Christians confused about the role of culture in their faith or concerned about their engagement with what many traditional religious figures and denominations have declared the evils of secular media. What the film ultimately supports is the notion that there are ways for religion and secular culture to coexist, and to work together artfully. The message for Christian communities was as clear as it was for any invested in the film's politics: "He that troubleth his

own house shall inherit the wind”: in-fighting and witch-hunting, even in the name of God, would ultimately profit no man.

¹ William D. Romanowski, *Reforming Hollywood: How American Protestants Fought for Freedom at the Movies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 9–10.

² David Robb, “Stanley Kramer’s ‘Inherit the Wind’ Still Resonates,” *Reuters*, September 23, 2010, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kramer-idUSTRE68MOJ720100923>.

³ Romanowski, *Reforming Hollywood*, 158.

⁴ Anne Janette Johnson, *Defining Moments: The Scopes “Monkey Trial”* (Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics, 2007), 17–18.

⁵ Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scope’s Trial and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 88–91.

⁶ Larson, 87–88.

⁷ Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 148.

⁸ Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., ed., *Controversy in the Twenties: Fundamentalism, Modernism, and Evolution* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), 147.

⁹ Lawrence W. Levine, *Defender of the Faith: William Jennings Bryan, the Last Decade, 1915-1925* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987), 280.

¹⁰ Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism* (New York: Random House, 2011), 171.

¹¹ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

¹² Marsden, 132–33.

¹³ James Ussher calculated the date of creation to have taken place in 4004 B.C.; Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 15.

¹⁴ Interestingly, Darwin did not actually use the term “evolution” at all in the original edition of *Origin of Species*, and his follow up work *The Descent of Man* traced the beginnings of naturalistic species rather than mankind specifically. Still, the implications of his arguments were more often taken up than his arguments themselves. See Paul Keith Conkin, *When All the Gods Trembled: Darwinism, Scopes, and American Intellectuals*, *American Intellectual Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 21–48.

¹⁵ Quoted in Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 119.

¹⁶ Larson, 91, 113.

¹⁷ John A. Farrell, *Clarence Darrow: Attorney for the Damned* (Scribe Publications Pty Limited, 2011).

¹⁸ Quoted in Conkin, *When All the Gods Trembled*, 89.

¹⁹ Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 10.

²⁰ Henry Louis Mencken, *A Religious Orgy in Tennessee: A Reporter's Account of the Scopes Monkey Trial* (New York: Melville House, 2006), 15, 28–29.

²¹ S.I. Harrison, "The Scopes 'Monkey Trial' Revisited: Mencken and the Editorial Art of Edmund Duffy," *Journal of American Culture* (01911813) 17, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 61.

²² Andrew E. Kersten, *Clarence Darrow: American Iconoclast* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 208, 211.

²³ For an overview of the complicated path that led to the case being lost on appeal, see Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 197–224.

²⁴ Bryan did not actually die before the trial concluded or on the day of its conclusion. Rather, after the trial ended on July 21 he stayed in Tennessee, gave several speeches, and died five days later on July 26th.

²⁵ Jesus says in John 17:14, "I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." This verse is sometimes drawn upon to encapsulate the idea of Christians being "in the world but not of the world" as previously mentioned.

²⁶ For insight into contemporary views on Young Earth Creationism see "Answers in Genesis," Answers in Genesis, accessed March 25, 2019, <https://answersingenesis.org/>; for a recounting of recent creationist/evolutionist debates, see the following accounts of the much publicized debate between creationist Ken Ham and public scientist and intellectual Bill Nye "The Science Guy": Ken Ham, Bodie Hodge, and Diana Bogardus, *Inside the Nye Ham Debate: Is Creation a Viable Model : Revealing Truths from the Worldview Clash of the Century* (Green Forest, OR: Master Books, 2014); Dan Vergano, "Bill Nye and Ken Ham Debated Creationism—But Did They Change Anyone's Mind?," National Geographic News, February 5, 2014, <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/02/140205-creationism-debate-bill-nye-ken-ham-opinion/>.

²⁷ James M. Skinner, *The Cross and the Cinema: The Legion of Decency and the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, 1933-1970* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 1993), 118.

²⁸ Gregory D. Black, *The Catholic Crusade against the Movies, 1940-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6–7.

²⁹ Jack Valenti, quoted in Romanowski, *Reforming Hollywood*, 202.

³⁰ Mark 7:20-23.

³¹ Ephesians 4:29.

³² Romanowski, *Reforming Hollywood*, 9.

³³ Romanowski, 9.

³⁴ William F. Fore, executive director of the Broadcasting and Film Commission, quoted in Romanowski, 158.

³⁵ Virginia Nicholson, *Perfect Wives in Ideal Homes: The Story of Women in the 1950s* (New York: Viking Books, 2016).

³⁶ Matthew F. Delmont, *The Nicest Kids in Town: American Bandstand, Rock "n" Roll, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in 1950s Philadelphia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012).

³⁷ Howard Ball, *Justice Downwind: America's Atomic Testing Program in the 1950's*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

³⁸ Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1998); Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017); for a comprehensive discussion of many of these 1950s issues, see Richard Polenberg, *One Nation Divisible: Class, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States since 1938* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980).

³⁹ Robert S. Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 10–11.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, the descriptions of the films contained in Jean-Claude Romer, “A Bloody New Wave in the United States,” in *Horror Film Reader*, ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (Pompton Plains, NJ: Limelight Editions, 2000), 63–66.

⁴¹ Greg Linnell, “‘Applauding the Good and Condemning the Bad’: The Christian Herald and Varieties of Protestant Response to Hollywood in the 1950s,” *The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 12, no. 1 (March 2006): 4–4, <https://doi.org/10.3138/jrpc.12.1.004>.

⁴² Uta Andrea Balbier, “Billy Graham’s Crusades in the 1950s: Neo-Evangelicalism between Civil Religion, Media, and Consumerism,” *Bulletin of the GHI*, 2009, 75–77.

⁴³ Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2016), 50.

⁴⁴ Cathedral Films in particular specifically aimed to produce a large cycle of films based on the life of Jesus. While still evangelistic in tone and mission, the company’s films were more directly rooted in scriptural sourcing. See Kenneth Suit, *James Friedrich and Cathedral Films: The Independent Religious Cinema of the Evangelist of Hollywood, 1939-1966* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018).

⁴⁵ The website for World Wide Pictures--which is still in operation today--boasts that “Billy Graham’s films have been shown around the world since 1953, and viewers have recorded more than two million decisions for Christ as a result.” See “World Wide Pictures,” Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, accessed August 12, 2019, <https://billygraham.org/tv-and-radio/worldwide-pictures/>.

⁴⁶ Kathiann M. Kowalski, *Evolution on Trial: From the Scopes “Monkey” Case to Inherit the Wind* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishing, LLC, 2009), 69–72.

⁴⁷ Belinda Elliott, “Harry Potter: Harmless Christian Novel or Doorway to the Occult?,” CBN.com - The Christian Broadcasting Network, March 21, 2019, <http://www1.cbn.com/spirituallife/onlinediscipleship/harry-potter-harmless-christian-novel-or-doorway-to-the-occult>; Macy Halford, “Harry Potter and Religion,” November 4, 2010, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/harry-potter-and-religion>; Allen R. Myerson, “Southern Baptist Convention Calls for Boycott of Disney,” *The New York Times*, June 19, 1997, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/06/19/us/southern-baptist-convention-calls-for-boycott-of-disney.html>.

⁴⁸ Terry Lindvall, *Sanctuary Cinema: Origins of the Christian Film Industry* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); Terry Lindvall and Andrew Quicke, *Celluloid Sermons: The Emergence of the Christian Film Industry, 1930-1986* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

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