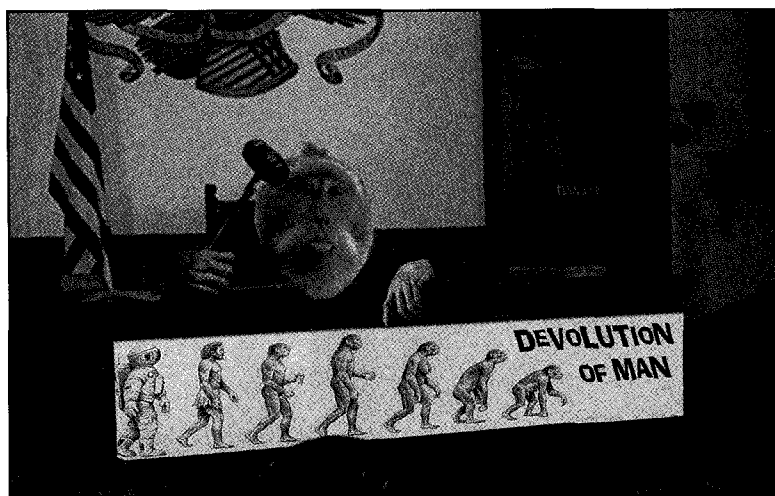


Too Much Monkey Business

Inherit the Agitprop

by James O. Tate



Melanie Anderson

Watching a disaster or beholding a disintegration is inherently destructive, but there is also an element of morbid fascination. Might there be, as well, a redemptive element in tracking the entropic parabola of the great fall of yet another Humpty Dumpty?

The national coverage of the recent conventions of the Episcopal Church, U.S.A., and of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been mostly fixated on the politics of homosexuality, but, beneath that cloud of confusion, there is a larger story with a longer arc. The story of the Episcopal Church is a substantial part of the history of America, considered as an Anglo-Saxon settlement; and the disestablishment of the old Anglican churches is an illustration of the meaning of revolution. Add to that the history of the Presbyterian Church or churches, the demography represented by that church, and add again the history of the Methodist Church, the preaching of George Whitefield and another demography (and the founding of the first orphanage in America—where and when? Quiz later), and you have the story of the mainline churches in America. Their transformations are the changes of the country and a register of the history of the nation.

But these churches (and other churches such as the Congregationalist and the Lutheran ones) have a longer history going back through England and Scotland to the Continent. And, if you want to get picky, the history goes back further through the Reformation to the Middle Ages, all the way back to the Apostles. I have always thought, by the way, that the most difficult point of Christian theology is not the doctrine of the Atonement or of the Trinity but of Apostolic Succession. I had already begun to doubt this doctrine providentially, after meeting contemporary seminary graduates and Protestant ministers and reading the *Journal of the American Academy of*

Religion, even before a certain lady told me of the remarks of her plumber—a preacher of some obscure sect, who declared that the Epistles were the wives of the Apostles.

So, having clarified at least that point of orthodox theology and established an historical perspective, we are ready for the news that the delegates to the convention of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have voted to “receive” (rather than “approve”) a policy paper on “gender-inclusive” language for the Trinity. Congregations are not required to use the language—yet. But how could they resist “Mother, Child, and Womb” and “Rock, Redeemer, and Friend,” as Andrea Dworkin- and Mary Daly-style replacements for “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”? We will magisterially declare the winner for the New Liturgical Language Award at the end of this essay, but, for now, we will only remark that “Presbyterian” is literally an odd name indeed for a “church” that is governed by the spirit of radical feminist blasphemy.

In the prevailing American tradition, the delegates to the convention of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have demonstrated that absurdity is justified by votes, and that theology, the logic of God, is just too tough for us girls and girly-boys. If there is a principle here, it is that, in modern Protestant America, nothing serious can be addressed without a gross collapse of mind and language, a feeble affirmation of banal Pelagianism, and a groveling display of servility before the gods of the marketplace. Why is it that there can be no grand image in America of great issues clashing—no Henry at Canossa, no Luther nailing his theses to the door, no Galileo hedging his recantation—but only the droning of another committee, limp-wristed *ayes* that have it, pathetic appeals to false authority, all mummy-wrapped in the smothering strands of liberal clichés.

There is, however, an exception to the parade of the insipid and the inane which fills the collective memory, and that is the remarkable film *Inherit the Wind* (1960), though there may be a question about just why or how it is “remarkable.” Based on

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the Broadway play written by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee (!), *Inherit the Wind* is quite a cultural statement—some movie, indeed, taking as it does the Scopes “Monkey Trial” of 1925 as its subject. Interestingly enough, *Inherit the Wind* has been filmed three more times since 1960, suggesting either that producer/director Stanley Kramer did not get it right, or that the powerful message of the play cannot be told often enough, or perhaps that it cannot be shown often enough in the high schools of America. But the quadrupled presence of *Inherit the Wind* may also suggest that it is the play and its burden that matters, not its embodiment on film.

Even so, there remain a few points to be made about the original film, one of which is that it is, indeed, a very bad movie, and there are a lot of reasons why. Of course, there is an inherent difficulty in filming a play, but then that challenge is one that was inherent in the project. Another major flaw is the acting, and this is perhaps not to be blamed so much on the principals as upon the source and the director. Spencer Tracy certainly had his moments, but not with Stanley Kramer. The names were changed to protect the guilty, but this Clarence Darrow is no representation at all of anything like Darrow. (By the way, Orson Welles was just as bad or even worse as Darrow in *Compulsion*.) Fredric March was also a formidable actor, in his younger days a matinee idol and a star, but his version of William Jennings Bryan is a vicious grotesque—the sheer malice of the performance, unjustified by any notion of a pageant-like reenactment, is quite revealing of the agenda. And Gene Kelly as the H.L. Mencken figure is utterly inadequate in that role. *Inherit the Wind* is a big nothing as a movie, yet it is “important,” and, even more, it is an X-ray or, better, an autopsy of the liberal imagination, or lack thereof.

As a product of the 1950’s, the playwrights’ vision was distorted by contemporary anxieties relating to McCarthyism and other such hysterias. The exposure of the left’s entanglement with communism required many a deception, and *Inherit the Wind* was far from the only such example of willfully misleading agitprop, quite a bit of it emanating from Stanley Kramer—*Twelve Angry Men*, for example. The justification of liberal obscurantism led necessarily to outrageous misrepresentation, and that included the falsification of the characters and motives of men, and of events as well. Clarence Darrow was hardly the “thoughtful,” “sincere” advocate of humane values whom we know from the film. He was, instead, a nasty piece of work, a grandstanding village atheist who took sadistic pleasure in baiting his inferiors—a very large group. We would not know from *Inherit the Wind* that, for reasons of discretion, the defense at the Scopes Trial did not want Darrow but could not keep him out.

The caricature of William Jennings Bryan in that film is so crude as to eclipse all the baggage that he brought with him to Dayton in 1925. Bryan was “the Great Commoner,” an important player in the Democratic Party for decades, Democratic and Populist presidential candidate in 1896, Democratic candidate again in 1900 and 1908, and secretary of state in the Wilson administration until he resigned on matters of principle in 1915. A Presbyterian, populist, and progressive, anti-imperialist and antimilitarist, Bryan was the star of the Chautauqua circuit, the advocate of the common man, the foe of privilege and occulted power, the champion of a rural America that was fading before urban ascendancy and industrial combinations of wealth. He clung to “left wing” positions for reasons of Christian principle: the vote for women, temperance, the popular election of

senators. The world was passing him by in 1925—he died five days after the trial ended—but it was Christian principle that required his attack on Darwinism and his defense of biblical inerrancy, a defense he hedged. The smug liberal fantasy of *Inherit the Wind* misrepresented everything about the Scopes Trial, including its real issue, about which Bryan was lucid. The complexity of Bryan is nowhere suggested in *Inherit the Wind*, and neither is his opposition to Darwinism on the grounds of the damage to the Western mind known as Social Darwinism. “The survival of the fittest” (a tautology meaning the “survival of the survivors”) had suggested to many in America, including Mencken, that fraternal concern was a mistake: The poor, the sick, and the unfit should go under for the improvement of the species. Teutonic militarism was a product of Darwinism, Bryan thought, and Adolf Hitler and Margaret Sanger were later to confirm his convictions. Broadway and Hollywood were more comfortable with a twitching hick from the sticks than they were with William Jennings Bryan.

H.L. Mencken is another story altogether. When we think of him, it is words, not images, that come to mind, for Mencken was an extraordinary journalist—a prose poet—and he has been called the best writer in the America of his time. His brilliance of style and wit, however, was never matched by wisdom, for Mencken was trapped by his own limitations and unfortunate early influences. To admire extravagantly Wagner, T.H. Huxley, Nietzsche, and James Gibbons Huneker is a shaky foundation, however much Mencken made of it. His contempt for religion led him to what he called “prejudices” and errors of all sorts. In his famous essay “The Sahara of the Bozart,” Mencken was quite wrong about the state of education in the South, and about the state of culture there as well; but that did not matter, for the engine of Mencken’s prose hummed so efficiently that actual inquiry or observation was quite out of the question. In the case of the Monkey Trial, our intrepid reporter was Johnny-on-the-spot, but he was even more a hooper going through the old song and dance than he was an observer. Mencken might just as well have stayed home in Baltimore and wired in his articles, for they did not get to the heart of anything. His reportage was just Menckenizing, and no one did that so well as he—the subject was irrelevant to the processing. When he described Bryan’s hold over the people of the West and the South, he continued as follows:

But out where the grass grows high, and the horned cattle dream away the lazy afternoons, and men still fear the powers and principalities of the air—out there between the corn-rows he held his old puissance to the end. There was no need for beaters to drive in his game. For miles the flivver dust would choke the roads. And when he rose at the end of the day to discharge his Message, there would be such breathless attention, such a rapt and enchanted ecstasy, such a sweet rustle of amens as the world had not known since Johann fell to Herod’s ax.

I.J. Semper has called attention to the triple combination thrice repeated and the blank verse of this musical passage. But Semper has not asked any question about the attitudes displayed: Rustics are “game”; piety is illusory; a farm is a lazy place. These formulations are not the result of observation but are mere incantations, and the more removed they are from experience, the more musical they become. We can hardly expect that the mercurial, paradoxical Mencken could be even

remotely portrayed in a hack movie.

Like Darrow, Mencken showed a revealing streak of sadism. Darrow delivered a nasty crack about Bryan's death, and, privately, Mencken actually gloated: "We killed the son-of-a-bitch!" Such remarks show something about the emotions surrounding the trial, and urban contempt for rural images was unmistakably involved. The city *versus* the country, the North *versus* the South and near West—these are familiar themes that played themselves out in Dayton. And though much has changed in America since 1925, these themes are still regularly sounded, like gongs. There is something frenzied about the hatred of religion and specifically of the Bible that I have heard violently expressed on many occasions, always in an academic setting. The city slicker is smarter than the country hick, but not so smart that he won't rub it in.

Today we still hear about controversies in the schools. "Creationism" is taught in the public schools in certain places, in parallel with or even eclipsing Darwinian expositions. Such an outrage to modernist complacency has to be misrepresented as an encroachment upon the separation of Church and state, which it certainly is not, for that doctrine has to do with the establishment of religion, as in the old Anglican dispensation. The real issue of the Scopes Trial, as Bryan knew and as the judge in the case knew, was the right of local authorities and even people to determine what was taught in the schools financed by taxes those people paid. That is still the issue today, and the issue is pointed, for it challenges us to think about what "education" means. Biology is one thing, and we know a lot more about it today than Darwin did, and science must be respected. Of course, science would be more respected if it did not so crudely adapt itself to politics, as

it does deplorably in the weekly *Science* section of the *New York Times*, and as it did for the Nazi and Soviet regimes.

We can fully expect witch doctors in black robes to interpret the law and the Constitution to mean that scientism should be taught in the schools, and that the Bible should not be taught in the schools, and we should be prepared to deal with the consequences. The ideology that declares man to be an animal and nothing more is reflective of modern values and of the contemporary economy, which is arranged to appeal behavioristically to gross instincts. The contrary doctrine, that man was created in the image of God, imposes responsibilities that are counter-indicated by driver education, condom adjustment, and an accepting, diverse community. Private schools, homeschooling, taxpayer revolts, and Catholic schools are all answers to problems that the present regime denies. If the young are not to know the Bible, then what is it that they should know? The list of what they are not learning in school—grammar, languages, literature, history, geography, mathematics, science, and so on—is an imposing one, so that even if the Bible were taught in school, it might well become just another item on the list of what the students do not know.

And another curricular item that should replace the mendacious and misleading *Inherit the Wind* is Edward J. Larson's excellent work *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (1997). This unlikely Pulitzer Prize winner was published by Harvard University Press—yes, miracles happen every day! I rest my case, only to add—in response to many requests—that the winner for the New Liturgical Language Award is the following trendy Trinity: The Margarita Mix, the Nachos, and the Tequila. *Adios*, mainline Protestantism. ◀

Black Sea Sketches

BLACK SEA SKETCHES is a travel book written for serious travelers, including armchair travelers. Although the author may take an occasional swim or walk the beaches, the book is much more about the history and prehistory, the culture and the contemporary scene than about recreational opportunities. It is the kind of book you would want to read before or during your own travel in these fascinating countries.

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Nation-Building and the U.S. Military

Reexamining America's Role

by Robert D. Hickson

America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq is the title of a 240-page strategic and historical study released in July 2003, four months after we invaded Iraq, by the RAND Corporation, an influential national-security institute that originally conducted special research for the U.S. Air Force. The early intellectual leadership of the RAND Corporation is still influential among neoconservatives. For example, the late Albert Wohlstetter and his friend Andrew Marshall (the long-serving and founding head of the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment—a very influential in-house think tank of the Department of Defense) have been mentors and strategic collaborators of Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle, among others.

An implicit premise of the RAND study is that the U.S. military's newly proposed "core mission" of foreign "nation-building" can and should be conducted simultaneously with its dissipating "Global War on Terror." This combination, even at first glance, appears irrational.

Nonetheless, this study explicitly supports a new "core mission" of concurrent "nation-building" for our military, even though the GWOT (as it is affectionately known) itself increasingly eludes definition. Our military forces (including our reserves) are now exhaustingly overextended in their oft-reactive, yet pervasively inconclusive, operations without clearly knowing either the nature of the enemy or the kind of war we are in. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude, even at the outset, that any such protracted and concurrent combination of these two new "core missions" for the U.S. military will very soon produce an irreversible, self-inflicted, and self-sabotaging "binary weapon" (a unique combination that causes a detonation, or disintegrating implosion).

The RAND study entirely omits any discussion of these momentous matters, let alone their longer-range implications for war and peace and the rootedness of ordered life.

The study mentions five nation-building projects spanning the last 12 years: Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Haiti (the only non-Muslim country). With Iraq, however, the United States now "embarks on its most ambitious program of nation-building since 1945," when we purportedly engaged in nation-building in Germany and Japan. Both of those efforts were clearly, in the view of the RAND Corporation, "successful." It should be noted, however, that the study's only criterion of "success" in nation-building is the attainment of "democratization" and of a "vibrant economy."

The study argues that the United States did not invest sufficiently over recent years in the "capacity of the U.S. armed

forces or of U.S. civilian agencies to conduct postcombat stabilization and reconstruction operations." (Notice the Newspeak and deliberate vagueness.) It also addresses the willingness of the U.S. Armed Forces to conduct such nation-building, beyond their capability to do so:

Nation-building has been a controversial mission over the past decade, and the intensity of this debate has undoubtedly inhibited the investments that would be needed to do these tasks better. Institutional resistance in the departments of State and Defense, neither of which regard nation-building among their core missions, has also been an obstacle.

It is worthwhile to consider these words very carefully. The language is characteristic of the entire study, and the evasive style also reveals the authors' mentality, which so often seems stiflingly superficial, equivocally vague, and altogether frigid and presumptuous. RAND's critique offers nothing concrete and specific about the military's putative "institutional resistance" to engaging in nation-building or whether such resistance is intelligent (moral and strategic) or merely inertial.

Nor does the RAND study even mention the key arguments for or against such a demanding and deeply consequential (arguably neo-imperial and unconstitutional) mission. Such omissions of important and indispensable substance are altogether unprofessional—as well as subtly sophistic. For, like the sophists of ancient Greece, the RAND-study authors attempt to "make the worse seem better and the better seem worse."

To what extent are our active-duty military officers fatalistically or supinely accepting this new orientation? Do they even hold their civilian masters to a high standard of definition about what they dare to call nation-building before they comply with the new mission, or honorably resign? The RAND study surely will not help our officers of discerning or inquiring intellect in that question.

Why should nation-building ever constitute a "core mission" for any deeply reflective military culture in the world, let alone for the U.S. military, which is already over-extended, linguistically unprepared, culturally and religiously undereducated, and exhausted by the tempo of its multifarious global operations? Even the GWOT, moreover, implies that we are making war against a method of warfare and not against a clearly specified enemy. (It is absurd to think that anyone could ever defeat "psychological warfare," for example. Yet terrorism is a form of psychological warfare.) Nor do we seem to have even a consistent "image of the enemy."

We should also ask why the RAND Corporation so disapprovingly calls the U.S. military's firm resistance to the new "core mission" of nation-building an "obstacle"—an obstacle

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