

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

DEFENSE OF THE FAITH  
J. FRANK NORRIS  
AND TEXAS FUNDAMENTALISM, 1920–1929

by

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DURING THE 1920s a wave of reaction to liberal and scientific thought swept over the United States. Essentially it was a movement of revulsion from increased industrialization, growth of cities and loss of individualism, and a backlash from the fervor of World War I. All that America had stood for — all the traditional values of an essentially rural nation — seemed to be breaking up. One of the most important facets of this reaction was the spread of religious fundamentalism among the Protestant sects. In 1925 for the first time in its history, the Episcopal Church dethroned a bishop for preaching heresy. A few years later, ultra-conservative Presbyterians forced the nationally known preacher, Harry Emerson Fosdick, from his pulpit in New York City. During this period Texas remained a rural state, but industrialization was coming, with its attendant shift of population and influence from rural areas to the cities. Necessary readjustments to these changes proved difficult, and reactionary movements developed to defend the old against the new. Religious fundamentalism played a significant role in this climate of reaction.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Comprehensive studies of the 1920s reveal these trends. See, for example, William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914–1932* (U. of Chicago Press, 1958); David A. Shannon, *Between the Wars: America, 1919–1941* (Boston, 1965); Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen Twenties* (New York, 1931); and John D. Hicks, *Republican Ascendancy, 1921–1933* (New York, 1960).

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The fundamentalist crusade was basically a response to the liberal theology that tried to reconcile modern science with religion. Since before the turn of the century, some leading theologians had been attempting this reconciliation by de-emphasizing those aspects of Christianity which scientific discoveries contradicted, and by emphasizing the moral teachings of religion. Rejecting especially the stories of the Old Testament, these liberal thinkers had accepted the Darwinian doctrine of evolution and made it a workable part of religion. In theological terms, evolution meant that man had risen and was still rising, rather than that he had fallen and was doomed.<sup>2</sup>

Having produced few advocates of this modernist approach, Texas religions remained basically untouched by the new liberal theology. As a large number of Texans began to feel the need to hold on to the past, they demanded a return to the more exacting religion of their forefathers. Rejecting liberal theology, these defenders of the faith accepted as their basic tenets the infallibility of the Scriptures, the virgin birth of Christ, His substitutionary atonement for man's sins, His resurrection, and His literal second coming. Necessary to the validity of the last four doctrines, and therefore most important in the crusade, was the belief in the infallibility of the Scriptures; the fundamentalists' most significant characteristic became their literal interpretation of the Bible. To them the crucial obstacle to such an interpretation was the theory of evolution. This concept negated the Genesis account of creation, and to the fundamentalists denial of any one part of the Bible meant rejection of the whole and the ultimate destruction of Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>The tenets of modernist theology varied greatly from one individual to another, making specific summations difficult. For explanations of the modernist faith, see Harry Emerson Fosdick, *Christianity and Progress* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1922); Shailer Mathews, *The Faith of Modernism* (New York, 1924), and his "Ten Years of American Protestantism," *North American Review*, CCXVII (May 1923), 577–93. For reconciliations of science and religion, see Henry Higgins Lane, *Evolution and Christian Faith* (Princeton U. Press, 1923); Arthur Thompson, "General Aspects of Recent Advances in the Study of Organic Evolution," *Methodist Review Quarterly*, LXX (April 1921), 210–11; *El Paso Times* (Texas), February 23, 1923; *Dallas Morning News* (Texas), November 9, 1925.

<sup>3</sup>The most comprehensive study of the fundamentalist movement is Norman Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918–1931* (Yale U. Press, 1954). For contemporary statements of fundamentalism, see William Bell Riley, *Inspiration or Evolution* (Cleveland: Union Gospel Press, 1926); William Jennings Bryan, "The Fundamentals," *The Forum*, LXX (July 1923), 1665–80, and his *In His Image* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1922), 111–16; *Houston Post Dispatch* (Texas) October 6, 1924.

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The arguments of the fundamentalists were characterized by ignorance and a failure to understand scientific doctrines. As the *Honey Grove Signal*, an East Texas newspaper, proudly declared, “We don’t know anything about evolution and cherish no hope of ever learning anything about it.” Most Texans apparently agreed with the *Signal* that studying evolution was useless and even dangerous for the soul. As a result, throughout the state the doctrine was little studied and less understood. To most fundamentalists evolution meant that man had evolved from monkeys, and they rarely attempted to understand the process by which species developed. Some crusaders, for example, explained that dinosaurs died out, not because of evolution, but because the Ark was not large enough to transport them. Fearing that the study of evolution endangered one’s soul, these people made little effort to learn the facts involved.<sup>4</sup>

The Protestant denominations which expressed the strongest orthodoxy predominated in the religious constituency of Texas. During the 1920s approximately three-fourths of a million Texans belonged to Baptist groups, more than to any other denomination. Of these, contemporaries claimed that at least ninety-eight percent were fundamentalists. Other large denominations in Texas included the Methodists, Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ, and Church of Christ. The one denomination that consistently opposed fundamentalism, the Unitarian Church, had fewer than three hundred Texas members during the decade. Thus the most influential religious groups in the state were strongly orthodox.<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of denomination, the religious beliefs of most Texans consisted of a simple, unquestioning acceptance of the Bible as literal truth. Since, for the most part, they were indifferent to or ignorant of liberal theological developments, anti-evolution sentiment was strong

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<sup>4</sup> *Tyler Daily Courier Times* (Texas), July 10, 1925; *Dallas Morning News*, December 15, 1925. For further examples of the fundamentalists’ failure to understand evolution, see Thomas Theodore Martin, *The Inside of the Cup Turned Out . . .* (Jackson, Tennessee: Mercer Printing Company, 1932); Riley, *Inspiration or Evolution*; and Alfred McCann, *God or Gorilla?* (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1922).

<sup>5</sup> For a breakdown of Texas church membership, see *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide* (Dallas: Dallas News, 1929), 220–24. See also *Fort Worth Fundamentalist* (Texas), July 7, 1922; July 9, 1926.

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across the state. Although fundamentalism received support from all areas of the state, its strongest proponents hailed from Northeast Texas. Typical of comment from this area was the *Honey Grove Signal's* declaration that, "We have known several monkeys in our day and not one ever gave evidence of losing its tail and joining the pants-wearing tribe known as the genus homo." Central Texas also gave strong support to the movement, while its greatest opposition came from West and South Texas. Nationwide, the fundamentalists received their strongest support from the Old South since southern religion was more conservative than that of any other section of the nation. Northeast and Central Texas were more closely aligned with the southern Protestant groups than South and West Texas. In the southern part of the state, large numbers of Catholics were unreceptive to fundamentalist agitation. In the western regions, the wide dispersion of the ranching population helped prevent fundamentalism from winning a stronghold.<sup>6</sup>

In Texas, as in other states, the Protestant churches became the major battlefield for the controversy. Agitation from both sides forced the various denominations to issue statements and resolutions setting forth their official positions, which generally supported the fundamentals of the faith. Much of the agitation in Texas came from evangelist, sensationalist, and controversialist J. Frank Norris. In all probability, without him the Texas controversy would have been mild, but his activities made it a major issue in secular and religious affairs.

John Franklyn Norris was born on September 18, 1877, in the slums of Birmingham, Alabama, where his father, Warner Norris, was a poorly paid steel worker. Warner drank heavily and the family was poverty-stricken. In 1881, in an effort to start anew, the Norrises moved with their three children to Hubbard City, Texas, where the father became a tenant farmer. Neither the family's financial condition nor the elder Norris' drinking problem improved. With Warner Norris spending practically every penny he made on liquor, the family frequently lacked sufficient food and the other necessities of life.

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<sup>6</sup>For an interesting contemporary analysis of Texas religious groups, see Owen P. White, "Reminiscences of Texas Divines," *American Mercury*, IX (September 1926), 95–100. For examples of sentiment in various areas of the state, see *Gilmer Daily Mirror* (Texas), July 2, 1925; *Tyler Daily Courier Times*, July 4, 1925, which quotes several area newspapers. *Austin Statesman* (Texas), March 6, 1923; *El Paso Times*, March 25, July 20, 1925; *Lubbock Morning Avalanche* (Texas), July 23, 1925; *Corpus Christi Caller* (Texas), July 6, 1925; *San Antonio Express* (Texas), January 19, 1923.

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The mother, Mary Norris, found escape from her many troubles in religion and instilled a strong fanaticism in her young son. When, as a child, J. Frank Norris had recovered from a serious illness, she was so grateful to God that she carried him to the banks of a nearby river where — she told her son years later, — “I said to the music of the falls ‘God gave this babe to me’ and He snatched you from the jaws of death, and I lifted you up and said ‘I give him back!’ . . . and she said she heard the voice of God and He said ‘You have given the world a preacher.’ ” At least this was Norris’ version of the incident as he told it in July of 1946.

Frank was a near invalid for about three years during his teens, as a result of a gunshot wound. During this time his mother spent long hours reading the Bible to him, telling him stories of great men, and convincing him of his own exalted destiny. Even when he was a child, she had assured him that he would be a prophet, and instilled in him the ambition to become a great man. Thus, from his home life Norris acquired a hatred for liquor, a belief in the fundamentals of Christianity, and a desire to preach to huge crowds.

In spite of extreme financial difficulties Norris earned degrees from Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, with high honors, and began his long, sensational career as a Baptist minister. On May 5, 1902, he married Lillian Gaddy, whom he had met at Baylor. The daughter of a Baptist missionary, her religious training and family background made her an ideal wife for Norris. Attracted by his ambitious, enthusiastic approach to religion, she gave his ministry her full support and made few demands upon him at home. They had four children: Jim Gaddy, J. Frank, Jr., George Louis, and Lillian Gaddy — but Norris was too concerned with building his ministry to be a dedicated family man.

For several years he pastored the McKinney Baptist Church of Dallas, but in 1909, he was called to the more prestigious pulpit of the First Baptist Church of Fort Worth, a position which he held until his death of a heart attack on August 21, 1952. During this time his church grew to a membership of over 10,000; his controversial church newspaper, which was variously titled *The Fence Rail*, *The Searchlight*, and *The Fundamentalist*, reached a circulation of over 70,000; and he influenced thousands more through his powerful radio station KTAT, later KFSL. He also established the Bible Baptist Seminary at Fort Worth, which is still in operation, and acquired a significant following

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of fundamentalist churches. Norris' success can be explained largely by the tactics he used, constantly engaging in some crusade against the forces of Satan — liquor, gambling, Catholicism, Sunday movies, religious modernism, or some similar evil.<sup>7</sup>

Few people have been more successful in winning the support of Texans than J. Frank Norris, largely because he designed his methods to appeal to the uninformed masses. Norris' appearance was attractive and appealing. He was tall and slender, light complexioned, with blue eyes that had a dreamy quality. His unusual speaking talent gave him a strong hold over his audiences. Beginning in a soft voice, almost inaudible to those in the back of the assembly, his volume increased as he became more and more excited, until he shouted and waved his arms about violently, pacing back and forth, completely carried away by what he was saying. The dominant theme of his ministry was fear, and he never failed to warn his audiences of the eternal damnation they faced if they refused to heed his message.<sup>8</sup>

The "Texas Tornado," as Norris was called, frequently illustrated his emotion-packed message in graphic terms. When a district attorney, who had prosecuted the pastor for arson in the burning of his own church, was killed in an automobile accident, someone found a broken liquor bottle containing a portion of the victim's brain and carried it to Norris. Taking the exhibit into the pulpit, Norris used it to illustrate a sermon titled "The Wages of Sin is Death." Although the people were terrified and some even fainted, they loved this kind of sensationalism, and Norris gave them what they wanted.<sup>9</sup>

Although Norris' church was located in a city, his appeal was to those who identified with the country, and his speeches were replete with references to farm animals and situations. Calling upon the "fork of the creek boys" to destroy modernism, he referred to himself as "a

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<sup>7</sup>E. Ray Tatum, *Conquest or Failure? Biography of J. Frank Norris* (Dallas: Baptist Historical Foundation, 1966), *passim*. For additional biographical information on Norris, see Homer G. Ritchie, "The Life and Career of J. Frank Norris" (M.A. thesis, Texas Christian University, 1967); and William K. Connolly, "The Preaching of J. Frank Norris" (M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1961).

<sup>8</sup>Nels Anderson, "The Shooting Parson of Texas," *The New Republic* (September 1, 1926), 35–37; *Fort Worth Fundamentalist*, January 20, 1922.

<sup>9</sup>Louis Entzinger, *The J. Frank Norris I Have Known for 34 Years* (n.p., n.d.), 112.

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country Baptist preacher who lives in a cow town up here and fights the devil for a living.” Since Texans generally distrusted intellectuals, whom they did not understand, Norris knew that their suspicions could easily be aroused against “frizzled-headed professors.” He also knew that Texans loved a good fight; the same type of people who could be aroused to hang or flog a man for little or no reason could be incited to fight a vigorous battle against evolution, even where it was little believed or taught. Using fear and emotion to enhance his cause, Norris threatened all modernists with doom, boasting: “I preach old-fashioned hellfire and damnation, 3-linked, unadulterated repentance and mourners’ bench faith gospel.” Evidently this was the type of religion that appealed to Texans. As Norris pointed out he drew large crowds all over the state, while the modernists preached to “empty woodyards.”<sup>10</sup>

Norris caused most disturbance within the Baptist denomination, which his agitation ultimately split apart. Actually modernists were practically non-existent among Baptists in the state, so that the battle was between conservatives and ultra-conservatives, rather than between modernists and fundamentalists. No Texas Baptist leader openly admitted belief in extreme modernist doctrines such as evolution, but a few were willing to give a slightly less than literal interpretation to the Scriptures. Any deviation from complete orthodoxy brought immediate cries from the ultra-conservatives, especially from Norris and his followers. For example, when James Dawson, a Baptist minister from Waco, contended that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by volcanic fires or natural causes, the extreme fundamentalists answered that fire and brimstone or supernatural causes were responsible. Some of the less conservative Baptists admitted that God might have worked through various inspired individuals to write the Bible, but the ultra-conservatives insisted that inspiration was direct, instantaneous, and verbal dictation from God. The only real differences among Baptists was in degree of orthodoxy, and it was paradoxical that fundamentalist agitation became extremely intense within a denomination that agreed almost unanimously on the fundamentals.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Fort Worth *Fundamentalist*, October 5, 1923; October 14, 1921; September 29, 1922; May 18, 1923; May 12, 1921.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, November 30, 1928; June 14, 1929; Martin, *Inside of the Cup*, *passim*.

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Throughout the 1920s Norris accused such prominent leaders as Reverend George Truett, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas; Lon R. Scarborough, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth; and Samuel P. Brooks, president of Baylor University, of accepting modernist doctrines. These leaders, actually as orthodox as Norris himself, retaliated by proving their own fundamentalism, not by defending modernism. One leader contended that in looking for modernists among Texas Baptists Norris was “setting up men of straw to knock down,” since no such sentiments actually existed. The *Baptist Standard*, the denominational periodical published in Dallas, was almost as concerned with combating modernism as Norris himself, and practically every issue condemned the doctrine of evolution. Scarborough declared that any teacher would be dismissed from Southwestern who had “a streak of modernism or Darwinian or theistic evolution in his teachings as big as the finest feather on an angel’s wings.” Norris obviously had little real basis for his heresy hunts among Texas Baptists.<sup>12</sup>

Norris’ fanaticism was most destructive to the Baptist schools, especially Baylor University, which he plagued repeatedly by exposing so-called “evolution professors.” His first assault on Baylor came in 1921 with an investigation of Samuel Dow, a sociology professor. Dow had written a book describing man’s development from an apparently much less civilized being, and emphasizing social and family life in its various stages. Norris insisted that Adam and Eve made up the first family and that man had never been uncivilized; thus Dow’s views were heretical. Finally, after prolonged, bitter attack Dow resigned, but only after publicly defending his orthodoxy and denying belief in evolution. Throughout the decade Norris constantly launched similar attacks, forcing Texas Baptists into an even more fundamentalist stand than other Southern Baptists. All of the professors whom he accused of being modernist answered him by vowing complete acceptance of the Bible. The nearest any came to modernism was when one Baylor history

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<sup>12</sup>Fort Worth *Fundamentalist*, August 17, 1923; April 30, 1926; August 3, 1923; November 11, 1921; Dallas *Baptist Standard* (Texas), February 23, 1923; January 12, 26, February 3, March 30, 1922; May 17, 1923.



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J. FRANK NORRIS dominated the fundamentalist controversy in Texas during the 1920s. — *courtesy Mrs. Jean Taggart.*

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**SAMUEL P. BROOKS** was president of Baylor University in the 1920s. – *Texas Collection, Baylor University.*



**SAMUEL DOW**, a sociology professor, was driven from his position at Baylor by Norris' attacks. – *Texas Collection, Baylor University.*



**LULA PACE**, a professor of botany, refused to resign from the Baylor faculty under pressure from Norris. – *Texas Collection, Baylor University.*



**ORA C. BRADBURY** resigned as a professor of zoology from Baylor under Norris' attacks. – *Texas Collection, Baylor University.*

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teacher, Charles Fotergill, admitted that he did have some doubts that the ark could have been large enough to transport two of every kind of animal.<sup>13</sup>

The Texas Baptist General Association, a branch of the Southern Baptist Convention, constantly refuted modernism and yet opposed the extreme fundamentalist agitation caused by Norris. The Texas Association met annually in a general convention in which such matters as finances, missions, schools, and general policies were discussed. The actions and policies of this convention were the best expressions of the Southern Baptists' opinions as a denomination in Texas, and it was this group that Norris constantly opposed. On numerous occasions the convention passed, without opposition, statements giving unqualified acceptance to the Genesis account of creation. Without exception, the policies and resolutions of this convention were orthodox and fundamentalist.<sup>14</sup>

Their suspicions aroused by Norris, the Baptists, through their convention, frequently investigated their institutions and instructed them not to employ anyone who believed or taught anything that contradicted the literal interpretation of the Scriptures. The most significant investigation of the Baptist schools occurred in 1921 as a direct result of Norris' attacks on Baylor. Two borderline cases of heresy were discovered in the beliefs of Lula Pace and Ora Clare Bradbury, both biology teachers who accepted Genesis but thought that the language might be allegorical. Norris immediately used this deviation from total orthodoxy as a basis for bitter attack, demanding the resignation of both professors, and of President Brooks who defended them. Bradbury

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<sup>13</sup>Fort Worth *Fundamentalist*, October 21, November 11, 1921; Dallas *Baptist Standard*, November 3, 1921. For Norris' similar attacks, see Fort Worth *Fundamentalist*, April 6, 13, 1923; November 24, 1922; September 26, 1924. For the defense by various professors of their own orthodoxy, see *ibid.*, December 8, 1922; November 7, 1924; Dallas *Baptist Standard*, October 16, 1924; November 3, 1921.

<sup>14</sup>*Annual of the [77th] Baptist Convention of Texas, . . . December 2–5, 1925* (n.p., n.d.), 172; *Annual of the [73rd] Baptist Convention of Texas, . . . December 1, 1921* (n.p., n.d.), 172; *Annual of the [74th] Baptist Convention of Texas, . . . November 16–20, 1922* (n.p., n.d.), 19, 159; A. Wakefield Slaten, "Academic Freedom, Fundamentalism and the Dotted Line," *Education Review*, LXV (February 1923), 74; *Annual of the [79th] Baptist Convention of Texas, . . . November 16–20, 1927* (n.p., n.d.), 25.

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resigned but Lula Pace remained at Baylor until her death in 1925, although Norris continued to demand her resignation.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the various controversies Norris managed to connect the heresies of the Baptist colleges with the financial campaigns of the denomination. He told the people through his pulpit, his newspaper, and his radio station that donations were being misappropriated, and that a large portion of their money supported institutions which taught evolution. Apparently his attacks hurt the denomination because leaders announced that churches were not paying their quotas and that the association faced a serious debt. Ecstatically taking credit for this situation, Norris even offered monetary rewards to students who would testify against the schools and help him keep the issue alive.<sup>16</sup>

Understandably upset at his activities, the Texas Baptist convention refused to seat his delegates in 1922 and 1923 and ousted his church from the state general association permanently in 1924. This affront failed to lessen Norris' influence or to stop his attacks. Instead, he gained a significant following of fundamentalist churches which disassociated themselves from the state convention also. Thus Norris succeeded in breaking the denomination apart, with the more fundamentalist Baptists following his lead. His separate association became known as the World Baptist Fellowship, but this group later split, primarily because of personality conflicts, and another association known as the Bible Baptists developed from it.<sup>17</sup>

While Norris' center of strength lay in Northeast and Central Texas, his newspaper circulated throughout the state and over much of the United States. He spoke in numerous small Texas towns, but he also drew large crowds in Houston, San Antonio, Dallas, Austin, and other cities. Conducting revivals outside the state, he frequently appeared in New York, Boston, Chicago, and similar cities.

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<sup>15</sup> *Texas Baptist Annual*, 1922, 13, 17–18, 151–61; *Fort Worth Fundamentalist*, September 29, 1922; March 16, 1923; July 17, 1925; *Texas Baptist Annual*, 1925, 49.

<sup>16</sup> Entzminger, J. *Frank Norris*, 179–80; *Dallas Baptist Standard*, March 15, 1923; *Fort Worth Fundamentalist*, April 20, 1923; April 25, 1924.

<sup>17</sup> *Texas Baptist Annual*, 1922, 15–16; *Annual of the [75th] Baptist Convention of Texas*, . . . November 15–17, 1923 (n.p., n.d.), 18–24; *Annual of the [76th] Baptist Convention of Texas*, . . . November 20–22, 1924 (n.p., n.d.), 24–25; Tatum, *Conquest or Failure?* 260–61.

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Not being satisfied with purging the Baptists, Norris contributed to the conflicts arising in other denominations also. In 1921 fundamentalism struck Texas Methodism with an attack on John Rice, a professor at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. His book, *The Old Testament in the Life of Today*, pointed out that the Old Testament was largely Hebrew folklore, which had been retold for ages before finally being recorded. Norris, along with a large number of the professor's Methodist brethren, attacked his position as being heretical, contending that he denied the direct, instantaneous inspiration of the Bible. Rice resigned under pressure, after publishing a defense of himself in which he, like the accused Baptists, insisted upon his own orthodoxy.<sup>18</sup>

The most explosive controversy in the Methodist church, however, erupted in 1923, when the more fundamentalist brethren, led by Reverend W. E. Hawkins, began accusing the Methodist colleges of teaching evolution. A committee of Methodist churchmen, which investigated the schools, failed to convict individual teachers but also failed to appease the fundamentalists. The climax of the agitation came in May of 1923, when the World's Christian Fundamentalist Association held its convention in Norris' church and presented a sensational two and one-half hour trial. Six young people testified that they had learned the soul-destroying heresy of evolution from Methodist teachers in Texas Women's College in Fort Worth, Southwestern University in Georgetown, and Southern Methodist University. The schools, of course, were found guilty, and much dissension within the church resulted from the meeting.<sup>19</sup>

Most other Texas denominations remained fundamentalist in viewpoint with few modernists speaking out. One Episcopal minister, Reverend Lee Heaton of Fort Worth, who did express liberal beliefs was threatened with being tried for heresy and suffered humiliating attacks from Norris. Finding Texas generally unreceptive to his liberal theology, Heaton resigned from the ministry and became a salesman.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Fort Worth *Fundamentalist*, May 12, 19, 26, 1921; Dallas *Texas Christian Advocate*, April 14, July 7, August 11, September 22, November 17, 1921.

<sup>19</sup>Fort Worth *Fundamentalist*, January 5, 26, May 4, 11, 1923.

<sup>20</sup>*New York Times*, January 21, December 17, 1923; Fort Worth *Fundamentalist*, July 11, 1924; January 16, 1926.

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On the national level the fundamentalist controversy disturbed the Presbyterian church, but most Texans supported that denomination's strongest actions against modernism and took steps to eliminate it from their ranks. Meeting in San Antonio in 1924, the Presbyterian Church of the United States reaffirmed its acceptance of the fundamentals and voted to withdraw financial support from missions, colleges, and other institutions where modernism was taught or believed. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church also took a strong stand against modernism. Meeting in Austin in 1924, it passed a resolution, proposed by the Presbytery of Weatherford, Texas, declaring that every member of the church from "president to janitor" opposed the "ape-man" idea. It declared itself "squarely, fixedly and unmoveably against these infidelic theories . . . poisoning the minds of the rising generation . . . with these dangerous and soul-destroying doctrines." Texas Presbyterians expressed little opposition to such fundamentalist stands.<sup>21</sup>

Controversy was not intense in most of the other Protestant denominations, largely because fundamentalism was unopposed. Various Texas groups of the Missionary Baptist Association, for example, adopted resolutions opposing evolution and modernism and stating that there was not a single modernist in the denomination. The Seventh Day Adventists, holding their annual conference in San Antonio in 1925, declared that the church had no place for evolution or other modernist theories and appealed to the people to accept the infallibility of the Bible. One speaker called the evolution controversy the Christ and Anti-Christ struggle to which the Bible referred, and said that it was a sign pointing to the end of the world. The Disciples of Christ and the Church of Christ were disturbed nationally by the controversy but apparently Texas ministers either remained fundamentalist or kept their opinions quiet.<sup>22</sup>

In the process of upholding their beliefs, Texas fundamentalists were not satisfied to combat modernism merely within their own religious

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<sup>21</sup> George Paschal, Jr. & Judith Brenner, *One Hundred Years of Challenge and Change: A History of the Synod of Texas of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.* (Trinity U. Press, 1968), 148–49; *Dallas Morning News*, July 20, 1925; *Austin Statesman*, May 11, 16, 20, 1924.

<sup>22</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, July 25, 30, August 3, October 16, November 14, 1925; Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy*, 170–76.

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denominations, but were determined to root the evil out of every institution in which it manifested itself, including public schools, colleges, and universities. Secular phases of the movement were closely tied to the religious agitation, as church leaders, like Norris, stirred their followers to fight modernism wherever it appeared.

Across the nation religious zealots attempted to use state governments to force people back to the fundamentals of the gospel. Throughout the 1920s fundamentalists inspired a number of bills and resolutions in Texas, the major goal of which was to prohibit the teaching of evolution in the public schools and colleges. In 1923, the House passed an anti-evolution bill, but it died in the Senate. In the same year the House also passed a resolution stating that teaching evolution was unconstitutional, but it too failed in the Senate. The senators, being from larger districts, were not so close to their constituents, nor so tied to the rural areas. The Senate Committee on Education reported on the 1923 bill with the recommendation that it pass, but it was allowed to die on the calendar so that the Senate was never called upon to record a definite vote. All of the various bills and resolutions proposed during the decade originated in the House but as only the 1923 bill passed the House, the others did not reach the Senate.<sup>23</sup>

Leading proponents of the bills in the state legislature were J. T. Stroder of Navarro County, S. J. Howeth of Johnson County, J. A. Dodd of Texarkana, James W. Harper of Mount Pleasant, and W. R. Wigg of Paris. In the debates held on the bills and resolutions, these proponents of fundamentalism identified evolution not as scientific doctrine but as religious dogma, and argued that to teach it in the public schools was to teach a religion, which the Constitution prohibited. They argued that since Christian doctrines could not be taught, neither could anti-Christian doctrine. Their major legal argument was that the majority of the people disapproved of evolution and felt that it would destroy

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<sup>23</sup>H. B. No. 97, "A Bill to Be Entitled an act prohibiting the teaching of evolution . . ."; H. B. No. 378, "A Bill to be Entitled an act prohibiting the teaching of evolution in any of its phases . . ."; H. B. No. 90, "A Bill to be Entitled an act making it unlawful for any teacher . . . to teach as a fact that mankind evolved from a lower order of animals . . .," type-script copies, Legislative Library, Austin, Texas. See also the Journals of the House and Senate of the Thirty-eighth, Thirty-ninth, and Forty-first Texas Legislatures. During the 1920s five states, Oklahoma, Florida, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas, passed laws against teaching evolution in public schools.

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Christianity. Since their tax money supported the schools, they reasoned that it was illegal to teach anything that opposed their beliefs and suggested that the modernists establish their own schools.<sup>24</sup>

Texas legislators' arguments frequently revealed the nature of the fundamentalist mind, especially their ignorance of scientific doctrine. For example, one of the strongest supporters of anti-evolution bills in the House, J. T. Stroder, denounced evolution as that "vicious and infamous doctrine . . . that mankind sprang from pollywog, to a frog, to an ape, to a monkey, to a baboon, to a Jap, to a negro, to a Chinaman, to a man." Another representative, J. A. Dodd, proclaimed:

The state forces me to pay taxes to support schools, then forces me to send my children to those schools and there shows my children the road to hell through teaching them the hellish infidelity of evolution. We owe it to our children and to our mothers who loved their Bible and taught us its meaning to abolish forever from our schools this iniquitous fallacy which holds that the Bible is a liar and that man is a monkey.

Speaking to the legislature in support of the bills, J. Frank Norris explained that the doctrine of evolution originated in Germany, that it was more dangerous than German militarism, and that it would ultimately destroy civilization. So soon after World War I, connecting evolution with Germany was an effective scare tactic. Generally, emotionalism, ignorance, and fear characterized the arguments of the various bills' proponents.<sup>25</sup>

Lloyd Price of Morris County, Eugene Miller of Parker County, J. Roy Hardin of Kaufman, and Roland Bradley of Houston were the leading opponents in the House of the anti-evolution bills. These men argued that such laws would restrict teachers unnecessarily, that they were violations of academic freedom, and that such restrictions were outside the authority of the state legislature. Some argued that restrictive laws were unnecessary since Texas teachers did not teach evolution anyway.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Fort Worth *Fundamentalist*, February 23, 1923; *Dallas Morning News*, July 9, 26, 1925; March 4, 1923; *Fort Worth Star Telegram* (Texas), February 16, 1929.

<sup>25</sup> *Waco News Tribune* (Texas), January 19, March 4, 1923; *Fort Worth Fundamentalist*, February 23, 1923; *Austin Statesman*, March 3, 1923.

<sup>26</sup> *Austin Statesman*, February 24, March 3, 1923; *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, February 16, 1929; *House Journal, Thirty-Eighth Legislature, Regular Session, 1459*.



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Fundamentalists enjoyed greater success in influencing the seven-man Texas textbook committee than in swaying the state legislature. Appointed by Governor Miriam A. Ferguson, the committee in 1925 ordered all references to evolution deleted from texts used in state schools, an action which proved almost as effective as the proposed laws would have been. Because of local pressures and public opinion few teachers taught evolution anyway; thus the textbooks were the primary means by which Texas young people became acquainted with the doctrine. Censorship of these books was therefore a major victory for fundamentalism.<sup>27</sup>

Having decided to remove all mention of evolution from textbooks, the committee, which consisted primarily of Texas educators, proceeded to a thorough accomplishment of its task. Changing the word evolution to development, the committee removed all indications that man was related to other animals or that he had ever lived in an uncivilized state. One committee member even suggested that the word evolution be stricken from dictionaries, but the group decided that these were not actually textbooks. So extensive were the revisions that the publishers had to prepare separate school books for Texas students.<sup>28</sup>

Little opposition to the committee's action arose. Even educators and teachers did not voice significant protest to this violation of freedom in the classroom. For the most part, Texas politicians were either fundamentalist or noncommittal. Governor Miriam Ferguson supported the committee, declaring: "I am a Christian mother . . . and I am not going to let that kind of rot go into Texas textbooks." Equally as fundamentalist, her successor Dan Moody contended, "I believe in the Bible from cover to cover. I believe that God created man in His own image and likeness, that the whale swallowed Jonah, and that the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea on dry land." This lack of opposition

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<sup>27</sup>Maynard Shipley, *The War on Modern Science: A Short History of the Fundamentalist Attacks on Evolution and Modernism* (New York, 1927), 172. The Texas textbook committee consisted of Ida Mae Murray, a University of Texas graduate and San Antonio public school teacher; F. M. Black, supervisor of Houston public schools; A. W. Bridwell, president of Nacogdoches State Teachers' College; T. J. Yoe, Brownsville school superintendent; R. L. Paschall, a Fort Worth high school principal; F. W. Chudej, who had five years teaching experience in grades below the high school level; and H. A. Wroe, a businessman.

<sup>28</sup>*Dallas Morning News*, October 6, 1925; "No Evolution for Texas," *Literary Digest* (August 14, 1926), 30; Shipley, *War on Modern Science*, 173.

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was one of the major reasons that fundamentalists were able to expunge so thoroughly the concept of evolution from the state's books.<sup>29</sup>

The controversy which swirled around Norris came to a climax on July 17, 1926, when he shot and killed a Fort Worth lumberman, D. Elliot Chipps, in his church study. Infuriated by some accusations Norris had made concerning Henry Clay Meacham, the mayor of Fort Worth, Chipps had come, unarmed, to the church making threats and Norris, apparently afraid for his own life, shot him. The minister was arraigned and tried for murder, but was cleared on a plea of self defense. This incident hurt Norris' influence among many Texans who thought that he was carrying sensationalism in religion too far. This was especially true when the pastor tried to use the affair to increase his popularity, saying that the evil forces in Fort Worth had hired Chipps to assassinate him.<sup>30</sup>

With Norris' own following, however, this incident served to increase his popularity, making him an even more sensational character. His own church welcomed him back after the trial with much singing, praying, and crying. On the other hand, the traditional Baptists of the Southern Baptist denomination were less inclined to listen to his accusations — a trend that was spreading throughout the fundamentalist movement during the latter part of the decade. Although Norris remained a very influential personality in the state's religious as well as political life, the two separate camps were definitely established and his disturbances had less effect among traditional Baptists. Maintaining a following of fundamentalist churches, Norris continued to be extremely popular with some Texans and with the ardent fundamentalists across the nation.

Beginning in 1932, Norris pastored, simultaneously with his Fort Worth church, the Temple Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan, where many southerners had been drawn by employment in the automobile industry. He commuted by railroad between the two cities. Norris had conducted a revival in the Detroit church in 1932 and had been invited

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<sup>29</sup> Maynard Shipley, "The Forward March of the Anti-Evolutionists," *Current History*, XXIX (January 1929), 582; *Literary Digest*, August 14, 1926, 30.

<sup>30</sup> *New Republic*, September 1, 1926, 36.

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to become its pastor. He did not wish to give up his church in Fort Worth, but found in the Temple church a large number of agrarian migrants who were seeking just the kind of religion that he taught. He decided that he could serve both churches by alternating Sundays and by printing each week's sermon. The combined congregation reached a total of about 25,000, the largest in the world. Norris' appeal seemed especially strong to those people who were moving during this decade from the rural areas to the cities and who found adjustment to urban conditions difficult. He could give them the sort of emotional religion that they had known "back home," and he was fighting the forces that they despised in city life.<sup>31</sup>

During the latter part of the 1920s, fundamentalism gradually ceased to be a controversial issue in Texas and in the nation. By 1929 Norris had shifted his attention from evolution to other issues. In October of that year, he refused to publish an anti-evolution article entitled "The Doctor Bell Theorem vs the Gods of Evolution," and wrote the author that his paper was not printing anything on evolution at that time. Norris did not give specific reasons for ceasing his battle against evolution. However, he was always intensely aware of public opinion, and undoubtedly realized that anti-evolution was not as popular an issue as it had been in the past. After the 1925 Scopes trial in Tennessee, newspaper editors, educators, and even church groups finally began to oppose religious restrictions on teaching.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Fort Worth *Fundamentalist*, October 12, November 16, December 7, 1923; January 13, 1922; June 13, 1924. J. Frank Norris, *The Inside History of the First Baptist Church* (Fort Worth: n.p., n.d.); Entzinger, J. Frank Norris; and Tatum, *Conquest or Failure?* give good accounts of Norris' career.

<sup>32</sup> Entzinger, J. Frank Norris, 107–109; Arthur C. Bell to Norris, October 6, and Norris to Bell, October 9, 1929, J. Frank Norris Papers, 1927–1952, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. *Austin Statesman*, February 2, 11, 1927; Marian J. Mayo, "Freedom in Education," *Texas Outlook*, XII (March 1927), 9–10; *Fort Worth Record Telegram* (Texas), January 16, 1929. The Scopes trial, the climax of the anti-evolution movement, occurred in Dayton, Tennessee, after John T. Scopes, a high school biology teacher, and a group of his friends decided to test the state's anti-evolution law. When Scopes was arrested for teaching evolution, the American Civil Liberties Union engaged Clarence Darrow and other notable attorneys to defend him, while William Jennings Bryan gave his services to the prosecution. The trial attracted national attention, and seemed to be a battle to the death between the forces of fundamentalism and modernism. On July 20, 1925, Darrow called Bryan to the witness stand as an expert on religion, and under the defense attorney's searching questions the limitations of Bryan's mind were quickly revealed. Scopes was convicted, but both Bryan and fundamentalism suffered an embarrassing exposure as a result of the trial.

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During the 1920s fundamentalist sentiment had been especially intense in Texas. There had been disturbances in the Protestant denominations, agitation in the state legislature, and censorship of textbooks. Most segments of the population, urban and rural, educated and uneducated, felt the effects of the controversy. In Texas, no one group could unite the forces that might have combated the movement openly, and certainly the few modernists had no leader as effective as J. Frank Norris. Texans proved a receptive audience for Norris' fanaticism, while modernist expressions were indeed rare.



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Patsy Ledbetter

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