



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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Subj: *Keeping Faith: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* - Faith and Justice Series

Dear Gary,

Thank you for asking me to introduce your performance of William Jennings Bryan in Dillon last spring. As I have been reflecting on both the script and your portrayal I am struck by what Bryan's life, career, and friendship with Clarence Darrow (*The other half of the Faith and Justice presentation*) can teach us after nearly 90 years. What you bring to the fore is the man behind the caricature used to attack McCarthyism and lift up the more enduring story of two friends at a loss to communicate after so many years.

Bryan's age is largely forgotten and very foreign to us because it assumes a public Christianity wrestling with cyclic panics in the market and labor unrest and violence, with the national push for women's suffrage and temperance, and a nascent imperialism. We can hardly appreciate the sense of moral urgency Bryan, Roosevelt, and Wilson felt in tackling these issues. When I was teaching High School English in Missoula I found it easier to unpack for my students Lincoln's biblical references in his Second Inaugural Address than it was to unpack Bryan's Cross of Gold speech. The students could connect with Lincoln's expedience to heal the nation as leader, but were confounded that a fiscal policy could be a moral issue and a test of personal faith. Your Bryan goes a long way toward putting flesh on a man who was shaped by his biblical convictions and his vows as an elder in the Presbyterian Church.

It is, however, Bryan's expression of deep personal loss that is so well captured by your performance; especially at two points. One is where Bryan recalls his resignation as Secretary of State under President Wilson and the other is when he recounts the Scopes Trial. As Secretary of State Bryan was remarkably successful in negotiating 28 treaties for the President, and yet because of his pacifism he resigned his appointment when Wilson determined to enter "The European War." Again, what you bring to bear is Bryan's complexity in his resignation: he never reviled the president, nor refuted those of his own party who called him a traitor. In fact Bryan himself campaigned for Wilson's reelection in 1917 and personally offered "to bear his part of the burden of war." This last is particularly well done and really sets the right tone to understand Bryan's reaction to Darrow during and after the Scopes Trial.

Few people know that Bryan and Darrow clerked together as young lawyers or that Darrow campaigned for Bryan's 1896 presidential bid throughout Ohio. Fewer still would know that Bryan and Darrow were both ardent pacifists and anti-imperialists who opposed the death penalty and championed the common man. This shared history and these shared values make the closing movement of the Bryan performance truly unique. I have read of, but nowhere have I seen, until now, Bryan's desire to be reconciled with his "old friend" who excoriated him in press releases and finally betrayed him in the courtroom by denying cross-examination. What stands out is Bryan's dismay at Darrow's disregard for fair play and their 30 years of friendship.

My one caution would be that the script does not put a fine enough point on Bryan's opposition to Darwinism. He was not an anti-intellectual, as H.L. Mencken would have us believe, nor was he a simple creationist, as Darrow pigeonholed him in the trial. Bryan came to believe that the Great War had been caused by a philosophy based on the theory of evolution that threatened all of humanity. But this did not happen overnight. In fact the 1905 version of his popular Chautauqua lecture "The Prince of Peace" is much more ambivalent about evolution than his Sprunt Lectures of 1921.

One last thread worth mentioning is the evident love and partnership between Bryan and his wife Mary that undergirds your performance as Bryan addresses her offstage presence. I know Mary helped craft nearly all of Bryan's speeches and it was her strength that buoyed him when he had been abandoned by his party and his president. But I hadn't made the simple and profound connection that they would have talked about all of these things as husband and wife. Wonderful.

Thanks again for bringing this production to Dillon and providing a rare insight into a man who wrestled with many of the same issues Americans see in the news on a daily basis. I hope it might be possible to arrange a symposium discussion or a "character interview," when you are available, to prompt a larger discussion with members of my congregation and the college on science, faith, and justice and the practice of public discourse. I truly appreciate your passion for letting these men speak again to us in their own context, with their own failings, and from their own words.

IHS

David H. Andrew IV
Pastor