

The Timothy Tree:  
Growth and Assimilation of Tennessee Catholicity, 1865-1962

by

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*For*  
*Stephanie, Dobby, and Severus*

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“But I am going to Mordor.”

“I know that well enough, Mr. Frodo. Of course you are. And I’m coming with you.”

-Samwise Gamage, *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien

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## ABSTRACT

For nearly a century, a memorial tree stood in Nashville's Centennial Park in honor of James Simmons Timothy, the first Tennessee officer to die in World War I. Dedicated with dramatic patriotic pageantry in 1919, the memorial was more than a tribute to a fallen soldier. It was the physical embodiment of a century-long assimilative campaign carried out by the Irish Catholic community to which Timothy belonged. In this study, I explore the dynamics of religious mainstreaming from the perspective of Catholics living in Tennessee from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. Specifically, I employ public history techniques to frame the issue within a state and local context using sectarian and secular newspapers published in Tennessee in the period 1898-1962. Six thematic chapters document how Irish Catholics like the Timothys harnessed social mobility, war participation, news media, revivalism, physical expansion, and trends toward tri-faith Americanness to stake a claim to local indigeneity through a locally adapted version Americanization that I call Southernization. Success, however, invited rivalry. Quasi-establishment Protestant denominations like the Southern Baptist Convention responded to Catholic social and political gains by reinforcing their devotion to the principle of church-state separation. The evolving relationship between Tennessee Catholics and the Southern Baptist Convention in the years leading to John F. Kennedy's presidency exemplify a larger reciprocating relationship that redefined the meaning of "100 percent Americanism" and led to what I call polar ecumenism, or the realignment of American identity along political rather than religious or ethnic lines. Finally, I explore what the unexplained disappearance of James Simmons Timothy's memorial in the late 2010s means for the fate of Catholic assimilation in Tennessee.

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## Prologue

### Catholic Roots, Southern Soil

On a late-spring afternoon in May 1919, the heady notes of “America” could be heard drifting across the great lawn of Centennial Park. Prominent politicians, social activists, and religious leaders mingled their voices with those of school children, Civil War veterans, and active-duty U.S. soldiers as they sang the popular song. Though foul weather had forestalled the festivities a week prior, May 30 was blessed with exceptional conditions. “The bright sunlight of heaven poured in a golden flood upon the rich, fresh grass,” gushed a reporter from the conservative *Nashville Banner*. The diverse members of the impromptu choir stood round the city’s newest altar to patriotism: a young hackberry tree. The unassuming sapling, whose leaves “rustled gently at the soft caress of the Southern breeze,” kept watch as politicians and pontiffs offered auspicious addresses on love of country and sacrifice round its purposefully exposed roots.<sup>1</sup>

The figures in attendance bridged the Tennessee’s past and future. Governor Albert Roberts, who would call the special legislative session to ratify women’s suffrage, stood near Anne Dallas Dudley, the infamous Nashville suffragette who would lead the charge toward that session’s historic vote. Col. Harry Rene Lee, a Confederate veteran and Chief of Staff of the United Confederate Veterans, mingled near Sgt. Charles W. Scott and Sgt. D.H. Foster of the U.S. Marine Corps, both fresh from the battlefields of France. Prominent members of

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<sup>1</sup> “Memorial to Lieut. Timothy,” *Nashville Banner*, June 1, 1919; “To Hold Timothy Memorial Saturday,” *Nashville Banner*, May 27, 1919.

Tennessee's social pantheon with names like Donelson, Overton, Kirkland, and Thomas stood in solidarity with homeless orphans whose names would attract the attention of none but the charitable societies who served them. Leaders from Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic organizations also comingled round the fragile sapling.<sup>2</sup>

Against the imposing figure of the Parthenon, the small hackberry must have seemed to many of them an odd choice to memorialize a death in the most horrific war the world had yet known. Unlike the stone and marble monoliths erected elsewhere, a three-foot tall concrete pillar was the only indication that this tree was any different from hundreds of others. The bronze plate atop the pillar bore a single name: Lt. James Simmons Timothy. The inscription described Timothy's wounding during a gas attack in the Verdun Sector as well as his eventual death from artillery fire on June 14, 1918, at Belleau Wood, France. Describing Timothy's death as a heroic sacrifice for "justice and humanity," the marker ended with a poem,

"Strong in faith, no fear he knew,  
this gallant Knight of God so true:  
Pure, courageous, grand was he –  
our hero son of Tennessee."<sup>3</sup>

Representatives from the secular and sectarian organizations were then asked to toss spades of Southern soil over the tree's exposed roots. In doing so, the cultural, political, and religious divides that had long complicated the relationship of Irish Catholics with their Protestant Southern kin were symbolically buried beneath "a broad plane of patriotism."<sup>4</sup> "Such is the unity and spirit of the nation," Judge M.T. Bryan stated in his memorial address, "that it

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<sup>2</sup> "Memorial to Lieut. Timothy," *Nashville Banner*, June 1, 1919.

<sup>3</sup> "Lt. James Simmons Timothy Marker," World War I Centennial Commission, accessed October 19, 2021, <https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/component/gmapfp/?start=2264>.

<sup>4</sup> Memorial to Lieut. Timothy," *Nashville Banner*, June 1, 1919.

matters not from what state or section of our country our soldier boys hail, nor what creed they profess, or to what class they belong, they are American soldiers – heroes all.” “Visitors of all ages,” he continued, “may likewise find in this memorial a quickening sense of patriotism, as they are reminded of the valorous deeds of this heroic son of the Volunteer State.”<sup>5</sup> Timothy’s memorial became the latest installment in a long line of assimilative junctures for both his family and Tennessee Catholicity.

James, the son of Irish-born Catholic immigrants, was thus adopted as the ‘hero son’ of a Southern city at the very buckle of the Protestant Bible Belt. But why him? What forces led Timothy’s memorial to be the first and most personalized of any in Nashville? What larger cause did his memory serve? The answers require a firm grasp on scholarship in Catholic history, American religious history, and public history.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## Introduction

### Productive Tension: Insiders and Outsiders in the Protestant Empire

The traditional narrative concerning mainstream American religion is one dominated by the image of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants ruling over a geographically expansive Christian kingdom. After all, Protestantism (when measured collectively rather than by denomination) was statistically dominant over all other religious sects and possessed a lineage of cultural leadership dating back to the established churches of the colonial period. It provided the young United States with much of its early symbolism and folklore. It dotted America's landscape with churches. For these reasons, Martin E. Marty, the preeminent American theologian, referred to the early United States as the "Protestant Empire."<sup>1</sup> It is little wonder, then, that sectarian, mid-twentieth century historians like William Warren Sweet considered the terms Protestant and Christian interchangeable when discussing the early republic.<sup>2</sup> There was simply no need to delineate between smaller sects when mainstream Protestantism seemed to command such dominance.

Using Christian and Protestant interchangeably, however, disguises the pluralism that was inherent in the American system from the beginning. Thanks to the disestablishment clause, nineteenth century America and its "god-less Constitution" presented Protestant sects and other

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<sup>1</sup> Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience In America* (New York: Dial Press, 1970), 210.

<sup>2</sup> William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religions in America*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 1950), 2-7.

religious groups with a sort of religious free market in which denominational “brands” could freely compete for souls.<sup>3</sup> Andrew Preston of Cambridge University argues that the free market environment “pushed American religion to be innovative and entrepreneurial” and “encouraged nonconformist and eccentric sects to invent and reinvent themselves...as they responded to the wishes of their adherents.”<sup>4</sup> Marty acknowledges the presence of myriad other sects as well, but reminds us that the Protestant denominations saw themselves as a “family” of churches and, as a result, “could always unite for practical and strategic purposes,” cementing their enduring claim to ‘mainstream’ status.<sup>5</sup>

Kevin Christiano, professor of sociology at Notre Dame, echoes Marty in citing pluralism’s capacity to incite strategic cooperation among at least some Protestants sects despite their internal differences.<sup>6</sup> He agrees that nineteenth century Protestant denominations could compete with each other by making “specialized appeals for commitment” to attract new members yet could also act in a “coordinated fashion” when “political and social conflict” required them to do so.<sup>7</sup> Historian Egal Feldman conditions this optimism, however, pointing out the splintered nature of the Protestantism mainstream made it susceptible to heightened hostility and fear toward newcomers.<sup>8</sup> For example, when large institutions like the Catholic

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<sup>3</sup> Marty, *Righteous Empire*, 70-71.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 12.

<sup>5</sup> Marty, *Righteous Empire*, 72.

<sup>6</sup> Kevin J. Christiano, *Religious Diversity and Social Change: American Cities, 1890-1906* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 150.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 155.

<sup>8</sup> Egal Feldman, *Catholics and Jews in Twentieth-Century America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 8.

Church began to make significant gains in population share in the middle and late nineteenth century, some Protestants lashed out, likely out of the concern that their tentative mainstream ecumenism might not hold in the face of a more ecclesiastically organized opponent. Catholic priest and sociologist Andrew Greeley confirms the justification behind such fears, noting that anti-Catholic hostility generally had the effect of forging a “bond of unity” among Catholics, augmenting the very quality that drew mainstream Protestant ire.<sup>9</sup>

Taking Protestant dominance of American culture as a baseline, however, religious historians have explored multiple models for how non-Protestant religious sects integrated into the American system over time. Harvard Professor William R. Hutchinson frames the issue in terms of a hierarchy of pluralist phases, arguing that society begins in a ‘pluralism as toleration’ phase and then proceeds through additional phases of ‘inclusion’ and ‘participation.’<sup>10</sup> He describes ‘pluralism as toleration’ in terms of the Protestant mainstream granting a “right to exist” for outsiders at the beginning of the nineteenth century that denoted no political or social equity. By the end of the century, he argues that both insiders and outsiders came to view the toleration systems as “morally and practically” inadequate, and, therefore, advanced into ‘pluralism as inclusion’ which granted increased (though usually inequitable) degrees of cooperation and power-sharing with the ‘mainstream’ Protestant quasi-establishment. As for the phase of ‘pluralism as participation,’ Hutchinson doubts whether the United States passed into that phase any time before the last half of the twentieth century. His delineation of phases, however, represents a possible solution for reducing confusion within the historiography that

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Experience: An Interpretation of the History of American Catholicism* (Garden city: Doubleday, 1967), 28.

<sup>10</sup> William R. Hutchinson, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 5-6.

results from the misapplication of the overly inclusive term ‘pluralism’ across different eras. For example, historians attempting to apply the hallmarks of pluralism (of participation) as it exists in modern America to earlier eras might conclude that there was no pluralism at all when, in fact, persons living in that time would have readily identified pluralism (of toleration or inclusion). This scenario was likely why Yale historian Sydney Ahlstrom argued that “the condition we call pluralism had not even existed” through much of Protestantism’s “long hegemony.”<sup>11</sup>

Alternatively, sociologists Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark describe American pluralism in terms of “patrolled boundaries.”<sup>12</sup> Their term means that mainstream tolerance of outsider sects extends only to the point that such sects approach the more “invidious” category of cult. Put another way, sects who wander too far astray from the religious ‘mainstream’ may come to be viewed as “mutants” who are too anomalous to “qualify as members of the legitimate American religious genus.”<sup>13</sup>

Most historians agree, however, that the Protestant hegemony that had characterized much of nineteenth century American history ended by the turn of the twentieth. As described by Marty, America transitioned from a ‘Protestant Empire’ to a ‘Protestant Experience.’ By experience, Marty meant the new ways that Protestants dealt with both their internal struggles

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<sup>11</sup> Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), xxii, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism: A Scientific Study of the Ways in Which the Teachings of Christian Churches Shape American Attitudes Toward the Jews* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 84.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

(“mainliners versus outsiders, fringe-group members, late-comers, etc.”) as well as their attempts to define themselves against non-Protestants.<sup>14</sup>

One reason historians argue that Protestants lost their hegemony was because they failed to protect their overwhelming numeric superiority. Despite multiple nativist movements, hundreds of thousands of immigrants, many belonging to Catholic, Jewish, or other non-mainline Protestant faiths, arrived on America’s shores from the 1830s to the 1920s, transplanting their distinctive styles, ethnic forms, and interests to the cities where they settled.<sup>15</sup> Though Protestants still claimed the largest number of followers, summoning the ecumenism to compete against their chief rivals, Catholics, grew increasingly difficult. Unlike the constantly diverging Protestant denominations, Catholics had less difficulty seeing themselves as a religious whole thanks to the principle of doctrinal unity. When Nativists and Know-Nothings in the mid-nineteenth century failed to effectively call into question the immigrants’ loyalties writ large, Protestants were forced to accept that they lived in a land they no longer dominated. In the process of transitioning, Marty argues that they also acquired “a new understanding of the American religious charter, even as they began to lose their dream of a homogenous evangelical empire.”<sup>16</sup>

Another reason historians cite for the decline in Protestant hegemony is the increasingly kaleidoscopic array of decentralized and radical sects that emerged throughout the nineteenth century to challenge the supremacy of old stock, ecclesiastically minded mainline denominations like the Episcopalians and Congregationalists. Idol smashing fundamentalists, Saint-Simonians,

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<sup>14</sup> Marty, *Righteous Empire*, ii.

<sup>15</sup> Harold J. Abramson, *Ethnic Diversity in Catholic America* (New York: Wiley, 1973), 175-176.

<sup>16</sup> Marty, *Righteous Empire*, 130.

Fourierists, Owenites, Latter-day Saints, Transcendentalists, Shakers, Premillennialists, and liberal Darwinists seemed to emerge from all sides.<sup>17</sup> Their efforts to carve out identities in the shadow of the Protestant mainstream exposed fault lines in the ‘family of churches’ who could once reliably unite when common cause required. “Old coalitions began to fall apart in the last two decades of the [nineteenth] century,” Marty argues, and denominational friendships were strained as Protestants “spent more time fighting each other than they did fighting Catholics, Jews, and infidels.”<sup>18</sup>

Another side effect of the breaking of Protestant hegemony was the realignment of Protestantism into a two-party denominational system consisting of ‘private’ and ‘public’ Protestants. Taking up the mantle of ‘evangelical,’ private Protestants set about the work of instigating personal salvation and patrolling of individual morals. Alternatively, public Protestants assumed responsibility for broader social reforms, a term which soon attached itself to the branch’s many incarnations: Social Christianity, the Social Gospel, Social Realism, etc.<sup>19</sup> Historian Donald B. Meyer points out that while Social Gospel ministers made up a minority within the faith, they nonetheless caused a “crisis in the religion” as Protestant intellectuals wrestled with whether to pursue the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.<sup>20</sup> As Protestants turned against one another in ever greater numbers, the edges of what had been the mainstream became hazier.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 120-124.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 181.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 179.

<sup>20</sup> Donald B. Meyer, *The Protestant Search for Political Realism, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 2.

James Turner of the University of Notre Dame University argues that the erosion of Protestant hegemony also invited the rise of disbelief as a legitimate social option. Rather than point to the Enlightenment or Darwinian theories, Turner lays responsibility for the legitimization of disbelief squarely at Protestants' feet. He insists that as the various denominations attempted to adapt their beliefs to "secularization, the spread of capitalism, the influence of modern science, [and] industrialization," they lost aspects of their cultural identities and alienated some of their members. Even though church membership grew dramatically during the same period, Turner concludes that "the defenders of God...slowly strangled Him." The result was disbelief acquiring the status of a "readily available answer" in American culture alongside a myriad of competing secular and sectarian options.<sup>21</sup>

The rising tide of secularism and science, however, was not solely subtractive for the Protestantism mainstream. Historian James Gilbert argues that the social transformations triggered by the increasing prominence of secularism and science in American culture actually ignited a "particularly inventive religious genius" that fueled at least part of the growth noted by Turner.<sup>22</sup> By provoking both competition and cooperation, the turn-of-the-century coupling of science and religion stoked what Gilbert calls the "essential cultural strategy of religious people: their refusal to accept marginalization."<sup>23</sup> He insists that mainstream American culture was created "not by isolated subcultures operating according to their own rules in self-style obscurity,

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<sup>21</sup> James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), xiii, 199, 203, 262.

<sup>22</sup> James Gilbert, *Redeeming Culture: American Religion in an Age of Science* (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1997), 13.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

but by groups and individuals reacting to questions that discharge like sheet lightning across the sky.”<sup>24</sup> In short, mainstream American religion became more a product of rivalry than power.

Symbiotic rivalry, in fact, is a core concept in the historiography of American religion and a major avenue through which groups vied for mainstream status. Focusing on the Protestant-Catholic dyad, historian Wildred M. McClay argues that the contentious relationship between Protestants and Catholics is best understood as a “reciprocating engine” in which “the movement of one part is registered in the other.”<sup>25</sup> In McClay’s estimation, both Protestants and Catholics wielded significant agency as they pursued their own interests and maneuvered in reaction to each other, locked in an intimate cultural dance that further blurred the lines of the Protestant mainstream.

In *Danger on the Doorstep*, Justin Nordstrom engages the reciprocating engine concept by investigating the rhetorical battles waged by Catholic and anti-Catholic newspapermen in the Progressive Era. He argues that successive clashes between the two sides illustrated the “inherently subjective and malleable” nature of nationalism, which was “continually contested and reinvented” as the rivals sought to define what Americanism meant at the turn of the century. In the process, they created an “arena of conflict” in which “divergent, even competing explanations of who belongs to a nation” coexisted without a corresponding loss of legitimacy.<sup>26</sup> Importantly, as each side set its expectations for Americanness and observed the other to judge compliance, success inevitably led to the modification of those expectations. For example, when

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>25</sup> Wilfred M. McClay, “The Catholic Moment in American Social Thought,” in *Catholics in the American Century: Recasting Narratives of U.S. History*, ed. R. Scott Appleby and Kathleen Sprows Cummings (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 137.

<sup>26</sup> Justin Nordstrom, *Danger on the Doorstep: Anti-Catholicism and American Print Culture in the Progressive Era* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 17, 31-32.

Catholics began to emphasize their philanthropy and patriotism to counter anti-Catholic accusations of excessive, inward-looking outsiderhood, Catholic success triggered a reciprocating denunciation of excessive claims to philanthropy and patriotism as phony and not sincere. When Catholics attempted to rally around pivotal figures in American history previously used by generations of anti-Catholics to signal their true Americanism, nativists responded by denouncing those same symbols as evidence of “Catholic disloyalty and cupidity.”<sup>27</sup> With each ideological readjustment, the opposing sides were not only modifying their own concept of Americanism but also forcing corresponding modifications in their rivals’ conception as well. From this perspective, the religious mainstream was less akin to a fortress than an unmoored ship tossed about on troubled waters. As a result, Nordstrom concludes that American nationalism in the twentieth century was pervasive and flexible enough to legitimately accommodate both sides’ definitions of mainstream Americanism.<sup>28</sup>

Instead of clashes between Catholics and Protestants, sociologist Robert Wuthnow focuses on the religious impact of reciprocal relationships between government and society. Wuthnow contends that religion’s ability to survive the constantly shifting balance of power between government and social institutions in the twentieth century demonstrates its “strength and vitality.”<sup>29</sup> In the Great Depression and World War II, America’s religious institutions attempted to navigate an evolving political landscape that was dominated by a more assertive federal government with expanded powers, including popular consent to intervene in social matters once reserved to the churches. Religious historian Alison Collis Greene notes how

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 209-210.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 6.

Americans stung by the Depression “looked to God, and then...looked to Roosevelt.”<sup>30</sup> Following their congregations, the churches too were driven to the state for aid. In the process, they also attempted to co-opt the most prominent features of the early New Deal, finding scriptural sources to cast programs like the National Recovery Administration and Federal Emergency Relief Administration as religious rather than secular triumphs.<sup>31</sup> Though many later turned against those programs once it became clear that Roosevelt’s administration had no intent of sharing power, the engagement of multiple religious groups with elements of the New Deal throughout the 1930s demonstrated that government had become a stakeholder in American moral authority and an active participant in the contest to wield it within mainstream culture. Religion’s creative engagement with government, however, helped churches survive the worst of the economic downturn and emerge post-World War II flush with both congregants and cash that they rapidly deployed to reengage in the struggle for mainstream supremacy.<sup>32</sup>

Related to McClay’s reciprocating engine construct is Grant Wacker’s concept of “productive tension.”<sup>33</sup> In exploring how emergent Pentecostal churches established mainstream status in the South by the 1950s, Wacker attributes Pentecostalism’s success to its ability to maintain a productive tension between the “primitive” and the “pragmatic.”<sup>34</sup> Put another way, Pentecostals captured the attention of mainstream Americans by offering an authentic belief in

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<sup>30</sup> Alison Collis Greene, *No Depression in Heaven: The Great Depression, the New Deal, and the Transformation of Religion in the Delta* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 194-195.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 195.

<sup>33</sup> Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard university Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

otherworldliness that was counterbalanced by a practical willingness to “work within the social and cultural expectations of the age.”<sup>35</sup> In *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya argue that unresolvable tensions help explain the success of black Protestant denominations in creating viable alternatives to the white mainline churches. Lincoln and Mamiya’s “dialectic model” consists of six opposing tensions: priestly versus prophetic functionality, otherworldliness versus worldliness, universalism versus particularism, communalism versus privatism, charisma versus bureaucracy, and resistance versus accommodation.<sup>36</sup> If taken as a list of desirable attributes meant to attract the widest possible array of congregants, the dialectic tensions described by Wacker, Lincoln, and Mamiya begin to look like selling points for products in a market economy, which in fact they are.

Cornell University historian R. Laurence Moore notes that the end of the nineteenth century bore witness to the rise of religion as a market commodity.<sup>37</sup> As religious leaders increasingly “looked for ways to appeal to all consumers” in a crowded religious arena, many began using the advertising techniques employed by big business.<sup>38</sup> Sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney Stark note that “religious economies are like commercial economies in that they consist of a market made up of a set of current and potential customers and a set of firms seeking to serve that market.”<sup>39</sup> Where business firms depended on organizational structures, sales

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>36</sup> C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), xi, xii, 12-15.

<sup>37</sup> R. Lawrence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 17.

representatives, products, and marketing teams, religions depended on politics, clergy, doctrines, and evangelization techniques.<sup>40</sup> Like the laissez faire policies that defined the economic markets of the nineteenth century, the American religious market was unregulated thanks to the shield of Constitutional disestablishment. As a result, religions wishing to stake a claim to mainstream status had to deploy increasing levels of business savvy in presenting themselves to potential spiritual buyers.

Finke and Stark's data, however, shows that the more twentieth century denominations modernized, the lower their attendance fell, revealing a social preference for stricter, otherworldly dogmas at a time when secular faith in science was supposed to be on the rise. This phenomenon helps to explain the success of more radically evangelical and conservative sects in the pluralist religion market. It also points to Catholicism's attraction for some Southern Protestants. Overtly liturgical and deeply dogmatic, Catholic practices delved the 'great mysteries' of faith in ways both otherworldly and fascinatingly unfamiliar to their Protestant neighbors. In fact, Finke and Stark note that pluralism helped drive church membership since no single religious body could hope to be both "worldly and otherworldly, strict and permissive, exclusive and inclusive" in ways that could satisfy every "consumer" in the market.<sup>41</sup>

The rise of mass media in the twentieth century also opened opportunities for religious groups to more aggressively market themselves as mainstream. Prominent Protestant leaders like Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich pitched the original sin doctrine as a viable dogmatic alternative to the theologically anemic culture-religion also taking hold mid-century. Though the three men are often contrasted (Niebuhr as a neo-orthodox prophet, Graham

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 18-21.

as a popular evangelist, and Tillich as a learned German theologian), Andrew Finstuen points out that all three packaged their writings for “popular consumption” and were so successful at capturing the zeitgeist of mainstream America that each received his own *Time* magazine cover.<sup>42</sup> Importantly, so did national Catholic figures like Monsignor Fulton Sheen.<sup>43</sup>

Catholic actors, directors, and producers also harnessed film to sell an evolving image of the heroic Catholic priest to the mainstream market. Their “highly Americanized renderings of Catholics” not only reinforced the image of Catholics as “good citizens” but also created “a cultural space in which to elaborate new understandings of an American community that included Catholics.”<sup>44</sup> In *The Look of Catholics*, Anthony Burke Smith notes that the “long journey...from margin to center” forced American Catholics to traverse the “contested grounds of popular culture.”<sup>45</sup> Yet, “because Catholics took urban, mass culture seriously,” Smith argues, “the nation’s popular culture industry also took Catholics seriously.”<sup>46</sup> Whether young and hip like Father O’Malley in *Going My Way* (1944) or earthy and street-tough like Father Barry in *On the Waterfront* (1954), Catholic priests became righteous and aspirational alternatives to gangsters and other materialistic protagonists in American film.<sup>47</sup> As a result, the cushioned

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<sup>42</sup> Andrew S. Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 1-2, 4.

<sup>43</sup> “Bishop Fulton Sheen: The First Televangelist,” *TIME Magazine*, April 14, 1952, <https://time.com/archive/6794617/bishop-fulton-sheen-the-first-televangelist/>.

<sup>44</sup> Anthony Burke Smith, *The Look of Catholics: Portrayals in Popular Culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 9; James Martin, “Fr Corridan: Karl Malden’s Waterfront Inspiration,” *America: The Jesuit Review*, modified July 1, 2009, <https://www.americamagazine.org/all-things/2009/07/01/fr-corridan-karl-maldens-waterfront-inspiration/>.

seats of America's movie theatres provided a viable path for Catholics to enter the cultural mainstream as socially-attuned participants in an emerging pop-culture.

Such tactics were not limited to Protestants and Catholics. For American Jews, the selling process involved creating an "American language of Jewishness."<sup>48</sup> Through "radio broadcasts, novels and short stories, films, theater, and dance productions, music, and the visual arts," Jews attempted to define their role in non-Jewish society by providing a "language of sociological Jewishness" for both Jews and non-Jews to utilize.<sup>49</sup> In the process, however, Jews were also defining a collective identity that affected how they "thought about themselves and their future."<sup>50</sup> In effect, Jewish attempts to become mainstream insiders were reinforcing their outsider status to others and themselves. While this may appear counterproductive, significant scholarship exists to suggest that developing an outsider mentality is not innately inimical to the concept of mainstreaming.

The most revolutionary take on insider and outsider status comes from R. Laurence Moore in *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans*. Moore argues that Americanization does not entail the acquisition of insider, or mainline, status but rather the differentiation of one's tribe from all others. Though there are multiple avenues for gaining what Moore terms "outsiderhood," he focuses on the efforts of religious groups like Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Catholics to invent their own "Americanness."<sup>51</sup> In "carving out a separate self-

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<sup>48</sup> Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Jewish Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 2, 5.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>51</sup> R. Lawrence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), xi.

identification,” Moore contends, they engage in a process that forms the heart of what it means to live a normal American life.<sup>52</sup> Citing earlier historians like Frederick Jackson Turner, who argued that American identity formed within the successive frontiers of the American West, Moore counters that Americanness is created when groups begin to nurture a “sense of separate identity” against the “vaguely defined concept” of the dominant culture.<sup>53</sup> He insists that mainline “has too often been misleadingly used to label what is normal in American religious life” and that outsider has too frequently been used “to characterize what is aberrational or non-American.” Instead, Moore presents the creation of outsiderhood as the true marker of Americanization.

Moore also stresses the active nature of this process. Americanness is not granted but rather actively crafted within a cultural arena filled with various other groups attempting to invent their own versions of Americanness. “The most famous clashes between Protestant and Catholics,” Moore insists, “are best understood as evidence of Catholic power and should be analyzed that way.”<sup>54</sup> In other words, clashes with the Protestant mainstream were the direct consequence of Catholics and other groups beginning to stake increasingly legitimate claims to what it meant to be American.

If such clashes were indicative of growing access to the mainstream, then evidence suggests that Catholic influence and Protestant anxiety were both on the rise in the opening decades of the twentieth century. Not only did Catholics face the threat of anti-hyphen movements and an active nativist press bent on associating them with “excesses of modernity,”

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, xi.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 70.

they also bore witness to the rise of the second Ku Klux Klan.<sup>55</sup> Like in generations past, the Klan was an outward expression of anxieties within white Anglo-Saxon “old stock America.”<sup>56</sup> During Reconstruction, Klan anxieties had centered on racial threats to white Southern power. In the 1920s, however, the Klan went national, marketing itself as a bulwark against immigrant invasion, urbanization, and the erosion of fundamentalist morality.<sup>57</sup> In order to “save the nation,” the Klan “defined the nature of true Americanism in opposition to all groups who were not white and Protestant.”<sup>58</sup> Catholics were a favorite target. Using Moore’s perspective, the Klan’s success at recruiting millions of followers in a relatively short period of time based in large part to their anti-Catholic rhetoric speaks to the potency of Catholic gains at the turn of the century. Ironically, as the Klan othered virtually all non-white Anglo-Saxon groups and defined ever narrower boundaries for true Americanism, they also ‘othered’ themselves. Using Moore’s logic, the moment of their self-marginalization was ironically the one moment when they truly were American.

Outsiderhood, however, is neither static nor permanent. Historian George Marsden notes how Protestant fundamentalists vacillated during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries between identifying themselves as part of the evangelical “establishment” and viewing themselves as “alien” outsiders in their own land.<sup>59</sup> Even quasi-established Southern evangelical

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<sup>55</sup> Nordstrom, *Danger on the Doorstep*, 4.

<sup>56</sup> David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 266.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK’s Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 96.

<sup>59</sup> George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4-7.

denominations like Methodists and Baptists found themselves slipping into and out of the mainstream depending on circumstance. In *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, historian Darren Dochuk chronicles the experience of southern evangelicals who relocated to the west in search of work from 1930 to 1960 and, in the process, were thrust into “grassroots combat” with unfamiliar sects who did not recognize the “establishment” aura they enjoyed at home.<sup>60</sup> By banding together across social strata, however, the southern evangelicals managed to forge a “distinctively Sunbelt creative conservatism” to defend their “churches, neighborhoods, and nation.”<sup>61</sup> Reminiscent of the experience of southern evangelicals in the Sunbelt, Jonathan Sarna’s conception of religious pluralism frames American religion as “a community of religious outsiders” who continuously observe each other in search of parallel goals that might constitute inclusion in an emerging mainstream movement.<sup>62</sup> Though he agrees with Marty that “the old dream of forging a Protestant America was effectively dead” by 1920, Sarna insists that mainstream Protestants continued to operate as a quasi-established church, “filling positions of power and authority and exercising enormous influence in public life.”<sup>63</sup>

In *Tri-Faith America*, Kevin Schultz also places significant continuing power in the hands of mid-twentieth century Protestants. Though Schultz acknowledges Catholic and Jewish agency in choosing to cooperate with Protestants in the construction of a tri-faith ‘religions of democracy’ campaign during and after World War II, he positions Protestants as the dominant

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<sup>60</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), xv, xxiii.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, xxii.

<sup>62</sup> Jonathan Sarna, ed., *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 2.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

partner who incessantly worried about losing “moral authority” in the process of cooperation.<sup>64</sup> Schultz does not argue that Protestantism was monolithic, but he does portray Protestant ecumenism as sufficiently potent to direct the development of the tri-faith ideology. When Catholics are discussed as gaining an “authoritative position” during the Cold War, such power is defined completely vis a vis the preexisting authority of Protestants.<sup>65</sup> Only when all three faiths experience the socio-political polarization of the 1970s does the emphasis on Protestant power fade in favor of a “co-belligerency” in which conservatives and liberals from each religious camp could find equal footing. Schultz argues, however, that participation in that co-belligerency and the assimilative successes it produced induced a simultaneous loss of religious identity for all the involved groups.<sup>66</sup>

Schultz is not alone in that line of thought. Historian Thomas J. Sugrue expresses a similar sentiment. Though he grants Catholics far more autonomy than Schultz, calling them “agents of change” who “made the modern United States more Catholic just as Catholics themselves became more American,” he arrives at a similar conclusion that mid-century Catholics “made their peace...with Americanism” and surrendered to conservative-liberal co-belligerency by 1970s.<sup>67</sup> Wilfred McClay, Robert Orsi, and Patrick Allitt also support the idea

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<sup>64</sup> Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-94.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 201-203, 208.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, “The Catholic Encounter with the 1960s,” in *Catholics in the American Century*, ed. Scott Appleby and Kathleen Sprows Cummings (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 67, 72-73.

that Catholics abandoned their distinctive identity in order to achieve mainstream status.<sup>68</sup> Like many of his fellow historians, McClay pinpoints the assimilative moment as the election of John Kennedy to the presidency in 1960. In his words, “the election of a Catholic president takes on an entirely different meaning if one believes that the noun was achieved entirely at the expense of the adjective.”<sup>69</sup>

Mid-century sociologists saw different ecumenical forces at work. In 1955’s *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, Will Herberg frames religion as an important aspect of what he calls the “American Way of Life.”<sup>70</sup> He argues that Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism are simply alternative ways of “being an American.”<sup>71</sup> Conversely, to not belong to one of those groups automatically marks one as foreign or, worse, un-American. Herberg points to a generational theory of assimilation to explain how the three religions became intimately intertwined with the cultural mainstream. In his reckoning, newly arrived immigrants remain largely isolated in ethnic enclaves that provide a sense of familiarity and security. The children of those immigrants then enthusiastically shed the ethnic identifiers of their parents to achieve a sense of belonging in the larger society. The grandchildren of the immigrants then return to certain elements of their ethnic ‘heritage,’ including religion, to better situate themselves within the American society to which they now unquestionably belong.<sup>72</sup> Herberg argues, however, that the

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<sup>68</sup> McClay, “The Catholic Moment in American Social Thought,” 139; Robert A. Orsi, “US Catholics Between Memory and Modernity: How Catholics Are American,” in *Catholics in the American Century: Recasting Narratives of U.S. History*, ed. Scott Appleby and Kathleen Sprows Cummings (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 11; Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 13.

<sup>69</sup> McClay, “The Catholic Moment in American Social Thought,” 139.

<sup>70</sup> Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 257.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 258.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 16, 18, 257.

religion remembered by the third generation is both Americanized and ‘re-traditionalized’ in ways that make it non-threatening to mainstream culture. “Each on his part...may regard his own faith as the best or even the truest,” he insists, “but unless he is a theologian or affected with a special theological interest, he will quite naturally look upon the other two [faiths] as sharing with his communion a common spiritual foundation of basic ideals and values – the chief of these being religion itself.”<sup>73</sup> In this way, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism represented triple melting pots through which newcomers can access American culture.<sup>74</sup>

Historian Andrew Polk proposes an alternative explanation for the mainstreaming ecumenism among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in the post-World War II era. Instead of placing primary agency in the hands of mainline Protestants, their religious rivals, or the descendants of immigrants, Polk proposes mid-century religious leaders and their flocks were “reacting to the machinations of political operatives” at the federal level.<sup>75</sup> In his estimation, the “religious patriotism and façade of national unity” evident by mid-century was the result of a deliberate “political project” in which civil and military leaders sought to “define or, if necessary, create” a civil religion through which Americans could understand both World War II and the United States’s place in the post-war world.<sup>76</sup> To accomplish this, civil and military leaders stripped away “old distinctions of theology liturgics, and doctrine” that were too limiting or invited internal conflict, leaving only a vague religiousness to which all Americans could

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 258.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>75</sup> Andrew R. Polk, *Faith in Freedom: Propaganda, Presidential Politics, and the Making of an American Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 5.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 4, 40.

subscribe.<sup>77</sup> Polk notes that by 1954, nearly all Americans claimed that they did.<sup>78</sup> If faith in a particular god had provoked too much competition in generations past, then a general faith in freedom would suffice for the next. Mainstream religion essentially became so neutrally mainstream that it nearly ceased to exist at all.

The obvious problem with politically coordinated ecumenism, however, is that it lacks buy-in from the constituent entities on whom it relies. Polk concludes that the “conformity and consensus of the 1950s could not hold” because it had only ever been a “surface unity.”<sup>79</sup> The theological and doctrinal tensions that fueled the religious conflicts of generations past had not disappeared at the behest of the federal government. Worse, many of the political leaders who had coordinated the effort were privately members of the mainline Protestant sects who had composed the old Protestant Empire. Despite having marginally benefited from the temporary armistice, Catholic and Jews resented that Protestants appeared to still be defining “what American religion was and how Catholics and Jews fit into it.”<sup>80</sup> Hegemony, it seems, did not die easily.

In this study, I explore the dynamics of religious mainstreaming from the perspective of Catholics living in Tennessee from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. Specifically, I employ public history techniques to frame the issue within a state and local context using underutilized sectarian and secular newspapers published in Tennessee in the period 1898-1960. What, however, does it mean to practice history in a public sense? When

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 175.

Robert Kelley defined the term ‘public history’ in the 1970s, it was primarily apophatic in nature. By Kelley’s reckoning, public history encompassed all facets of ‘doing history’ outside academia. In other words, to Kelley and his followers public history meant history conducted outside of the traditional classroom. The breadth of remaining possibilities for what it meant to practice public history under that definition, however, left the field amorphous and its practitioners defensive. Whether working for private companies, government entities, or museums, early public historians felt the need to continually reassert the validity of their standards and practices in the face of academic historians who viewed them as overly influenced by the needs of their employers and audiences.<sup>81</sup>

My use of a largely untapped body of Catholic newspapers poses several challenges. I wanted to tell the story of Catholic assimilation as experienced by Catholics, but issues of emotion-driven bias emerge immediately from all sides. To tell the story accurately, I must interrogate papers written by Catholics for Catholics against papers written largely by Protestants for Protestants. Given the intimate nature of religion, I risk offense to either or both sides if I attempt to assert a ‘true’ interpretation with unrestrained criticality. To gain access to the primary documents on which my research rests, I rely heavily on the hospitality and trust of the Catholic Tennesseans to whom I bear a responsibility to respect their traditions and institutional perspective while applying a historian’s critical eye. In the field of public history, such issues are common and feature prominently in a long history of professional literature.

As Leslie H. Fishel, Jr., notes, “public history is an old-timer,” tracing its professional lineage back to the mid-nineteenth century and the first secretary of the State Historical Society

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<sup>81</sup> Thomas Cauvin, *Public History: A Textbook of Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 10-11.

of Wisconsin, Lyman C. Draper.<sup>82</sup> During his tenure, Draper diligently collected a wide range of unorthodox historical resources for public use through sometimes questionable means. In a very early expression of the ‘new social history’ of the mid-twentieth century, Draper valued interviews, maps, fragments of journals, and financial records from veterans, frontiersmen, and other ‘common’ Americans, including perspectives on the roles of women, minorities, and Native Americans. Though he never fully engaged those sources in a manner identifiable as practicing public history, his contribution was the recognition that a broad evidential landscape ignored by traditional historians could be of interest to the public and other scholars.<sup>83</sup> During the first half of the twentieth century, increasing levels of federal activity, especially during the Great Depression, augmented the collection of source materials through programs like the Public Works Administration and, later, the Works Progress Administration.<sup>84</sup>

The range of sources with which public historians work is, in fact, a key defining feature of the field. As James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia note in *Public History: Essays from the Field*, modern students of public history cast a more inclusive eye on the kinds of evidence that qualify as historically significant.<sup>85</sup> For Ludmilla Jordanova, the issue centers on what qualifies as “history” to academic versus public historians. She insists that “remnants of the past are everywhere” but “are not necessarily seen as history or understood as elements in a structured

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<sup>82</sup> Leslie H. Fishel, Jr., “Public History and the Academy,” in *Public History: An Introduction*, ed. Barbara J. How and Emory L. Kemp (Malabar: Robert E. Krieger Publishing: 1988), 8.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid; “Draper Manuscripts, 1740-1891,” Wisconsin Historical Society, accessed November 25, 2025, <https://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi/f/findaid/findaid-idx?c=wiarchives;cc=wiarchives;view=text;rgn=main;didno=uw-whs-drapermss>.

<sup>84</sup> Jill Liddington and Simon Ditchfield, “Public History: A Critical Bibliography,” *Oral History* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 40, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40179818>.

<sup>85</sup> James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia, eds, *Public History: Essays from the Field* (Malabar: Krieger Publishing Company, 1999), 3.

account of the past.”<sup>86</sup> Oral histories, monuments, art, rituals, architecture, and community activities can all be valid sources of knowledge about the past if studied with the same rigor as traditional historical documents.<sup>87</sup> Tapping into community-driven historical artifacts, however, necessitates an admission that history does not belong to historians. Instead, public historians must maintain an awareness that history is part of the public domain and, consequently, that they share interpretative authority with the communities from which their sources derive.<sup>88</sup>

The concept of sharing authority with the public, however, does not sanction a relativist ‘everyone his own historian’ approach in the Carl Becker sense. Individuals and groups inevitably overlay their own needs and experiences onto historical narratives, but if every person were fully his/her own historian, the utility of trained historians would approach zero.<sup>89</sup> Put another way, if all interpretations are held equally valid, then a path toward common factual understanding of the past disappears. Yet, the need for public historians to communicate to broad audiences does not allow for a completely top-down approach in which an “invisible college of academic peers” passes judgment on the legitimacy of all regional, local, or group perspectives.<sup>90</sup> The solution lies in the realization that public historians operate chiefly as mediators for multiple conflicting interpretations.

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<sup>86</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London: Arnold, 2000), 142.

<sup>87</sup> Stephanie Fulbright, “Encountering Civil Religion at Public History Sites,” *History News* 73, no. 4 (Autumn 2018): 9, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26975175>; Jordanova, *History in Practice*, 149; Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 33.

<sup>88</sup> Cauvin, *Public History*, 14.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>90</sup> John Alexander Williams, “Public History and Local History: An Introduction,” *The Public Historian* 5, no. 4 (Autumn 1983), 10, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3376867>.

In essence, then, public history creates a “space for dialogue” among individuals, institutions, and communities.<sup>91</sup> Though the public’s a general need for optimism about the collective past can blunt the unrestrained criticality displayed by academic historians, it in no way diminishes the professionalism and rigor that public historians bring to the interpretations they produce. As Jill Liddington notes, public historians cannot afford to adopt a “wider-audiences-at-any-cost” approach.<sup>92</sup> Instead, they must nurture an acute awareness of appropriateness for the audiences they serve that avoids the pitfalls of either over accommodation or the reproduction of unequal power relationships.<sup>93</sup>

The question arises as to if it is possible for an outsider to engage in a legitimate study of a community’s history at all? How can someone outside the interplay of experience, memory, and re-interpretation hope to grasp the complex intricacies at work? A common solution to this problem is the promotion of identity history, which refers to the belief that a member of the community under investigation is best suited to write its history. Following this line of reasoning, a Catholic should write Catholic history, a Native American should write Native American history, a German should write German history, etc.

Like many public historians, I confronted the issue of identity history early in the development of my investigation of Catholic assimilation and institution building. Jordanova, however, argues that such reasoning only withstands scrutiny if two preconditions are met. First, inclusion in the community must confer a “privileged insight” that displays significant continuity

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<sup>91</sup> David Glassberg, “Public History and the Study of Memory,” *The Public Historian* 18, no. 2 (Spring 1996), 13-14, <https://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article-pdf/18/2/7/630853/3377910.pdf>.

<sup>92</sup> Jill Liddington, “What Is Public History? Publics and Their Pasts, Meanings, and Practices,” *Oral History* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2022), 90, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40179644>.

<sup>93</sup> Glassberg, “Public History and the Study of Memory,” 13-14.

over time.<sup>94</sup> Second, there must be a convincing ethico-political argument that only an insider can appropriately balance issues of respect and empowerment in the public sphere. Given the ethical constraints of fairness, self-awareness, and accuracy to which public historians are professionally bound, however, Jordanova categorically rejects the validity of identity history.<sup>95</sup> Given Alison Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory, which emphasizes that individuals need not experience a historical event in order to assimilate it into their personal memory, both insiders and outsiders can effectively integrate cultural memories and "suture" themselves into larger histories through exposure to descriptive relics of community memory, such as newspapers.<sup>96</sup> As a result, there is little separating the interpretive powers of insider from those of the public historian except that the historian is more conscious of bias and context. As Jordanova insists, "the best historians excel precisely because they can understand conditions that are not part of their own immediate experience."<sup>97</sup> In other words, a combination of outsiderhood and professional training make public historians well suited for the role of mediator.

To fully appreciate the role of public historians as mediators, acceptance of three basic facts is necessary. First, conscious and unconscious manipulation of the past is an intrinsic force that drives the evolution and diversification of public memory within and across groups. Second, the diversification of collective memory inevitably leads to competing interpretations of history. Third, the respectful interrogation of rival interpretations is possible by outside professionals

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<sup>94</sup> Jordanova, *History in Practice*, 164-165.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

who practice self-awareness and avoid falling into relativist thinking. The role of the public historian, then, is to establish appropriate contexts for interpretations rather than passing judgement on their veracity. Like academic history, public history engages directly with historical evidence, but, as Glassberg notes, “public historians can investigate the successive contexts created by the author, by institutions of communication, and by audiences, tracing the social organization of knowledge about the past in particular settings.”<sup>98</sup> Public historians share authority by providing incisive analysis of sources while also acknowledging the relevance of the feelings, emotions, and memories that individuals and groups associate with them. In doing so, they bridge participatory history and critical interpretation in a way that illuminates hidden stories while maintaining high levels of academic rigor and legitimacy.<sup>99</sup>

These attributes are acutely important in my localized study of Catholics. State and local histories are especially prone to dismissal by academic elites because of the Babbitry of amateur historians in previous eras. Uncritical boosterism in state and local religious histories is even more notable. Often written by community leaders or loyal insiders, local religious histories face significant pressures from both their mortal audience and the dogma of the featured religion to paint a best-case-scenario of the past that overemphasizes accomplishments and deflects failures.<sup>100</sup> Though immensely valuable for the preservation of collective memory, these

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<sup>98</sup> Glassberg, “Public History and the Study of Memory,” 16.

<sup>99</sup> Cauvin, *Public History*, 16-17, 217.

<sup>100</sup> Examples of Tennessee Catholic histories include: George J. Flanigen, *Catholicity in Tennessee; A Sketch of Catholic Activities in the State, 1541-1937* (Nashville: Ambrose Printing, 1937); Thomas Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee: The Sesquicentennial Story* (Nashville: Catholic Center, 1987) Farrar Hood Cusomato and Whit Stiles, *Diocese of Nashville: A Family of Faith* (Franklin, Tennessee: Grandin Hood Publishers, 2022); Diocese of Knoxville, *History of the Diocese of Knoxville* (Strasbourg Cedex, France: Editions du Signe, 2013); Diocese of Memphis, *That All May Be One: A History of the Catholic Diocese of Memphis, 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary* ed. (Strasbourg Cedex, France: Editions du Signe, 2022); Luckas Arulappa and Gail Gieske, ed., *Sacred Heart Church: A Century of Faith, Family, & Tradition* (Florence, Alabama: Aha! Press, 2012).

histories suffer from both a lack of professionalism and a surplus of good intentions. As a result, public historians can provide a vital link in mediating a group's need for "rootedness and a sense of place" and the "analytical power of modern historical scholarship."<sup>101</sup> Public history's recognition of feelings as a historically valid artifacts can calm a group's fear of impersonal judgement while its application of professional standards establishes evidence-based, thoroughly researched context.

In designing my study of how Tennessee Catholics navigated their socio-political environment during the first half of the twentieth century, all the above considerations came into play. I recognized that I would likely encounter suspicion from both individual Catholics and Diocesan leadership in presuming to tell their story as a non-Catholic. I also struggled with how to share authority over the Catholic experience in the first half of the twentieth century when many community members alive during that period have died. Ultimately, I settled on a close analysis of Catholic newspapers. My decision was based on a desire to bring a historian's critical eye to an abundant body of primary sources whose perspective was distinctly Catholic and local.

The first and most important body of sources I identified are the collections of Catholic newspapers housed at Aquinas College in Nashville, Tennessee. Given that printed materials preserve perspectives on history at a particular moment, *The Columbian*, *The Cresset*, and *The Register* offer a decade-by-decade account of how Tennessee Catholics experienced the twentieth century.<sup>102</sup> Written by Catholics for Catholics, the newspapers grant unique access to the perspective of a community that has been largely overlooked by the existing historiography.

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<sup>101</sup> Williams, "Public History and Local History," 8-13.

<sup>102</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past Is A Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 214.

In fact, there are no academic sources that make significant use of Tennessee's Catholic papers. Two variables account for this omission. First, most historians, including those within the Catholic faith, disregard Southern Catholics as too scattered and few in number to warrant serious study.<sup>103</sup> Second, the Tennessee newspapers are not digitized or indexed, necessitating frequent visits to Aquinas library to access the fragile, bound volumes. Given their longevity and broad topical scope, however, the newspapers offer the most complete window into how Catholics saw their place in society over time. As David Thelen insists, the study of memory involves understanding how "families, larger gatherings of people, and formal organizations selected and interpreted identifying memories to serve changing needs."<sup>104</sup> Public historians, therefore, must "explore how people together searched for common memories to meet present needs, how they first recognized such a memory and then agreed, disagreed, or negotiated over its meaning, and finally how they preserved and absorbed that meaning into their ongoing concerns."<sup>105</sup> As the most widely consumed resources produced by the Diocese of Nashville, the newspapers offer a detailed account of how that selection and renegotiation process operated among Tennessee Catholics as they strove to grow and legitimize Tennessee Catholicity as an integral and accepted institution. Given the dominance of Irish Catholics in the diocese, the newspapers also provide a window into their perspective particularly.

Kevin Kenny notes that the label Irish-American typically fosters an image of Irish Catholics fleeing southern Ireland during the Great Famine of the 1840s. Irish immigrants

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<sup>103</sup> Randall M. Miller, "Roman Catholicism" in *Religion*, ed. Samuel Hill, vol. 1, *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, ed. Charles Reagan Wilson, James G. Thomas Jr., and Ann J. Abadie (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 138.

<sup>104</sup> David Thelen, "Memory and American History," *Journal of American History* 75, no.4 (March 1989), 1123, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1908632>.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

arriving between 1700 and 1820, however, tended to be Protestant Presbyterians from Northern Ireland. These early arrivals were known as ‘Scots-Irish’ and were excluded from “authentic Irishness” by both native-born Americans and Irish Catholics. Their Protestant faith, however allowed those early Irishmen to be accepted as “true Americans” by native Protestants far faster than their Catholic brethren.<sup>106</sup> As a result, references to Irish, Irish-Americans, or Irish Catholics in this paper will include Catholic immigrants from southern Ireland (as well as their descendants) but exclude Scots-Irish Protestants from Northern Ireland (as well as their descendants) who arrived mostly prior to 1840.

I augmented my core body of evidence with additional newspapers from a variety of sources. *The Catholic Herald*, which is preserved on microfilm at the Tennessee State Library and Archive, provided a window into late-nineteenth century Catholic perspectives. Digitized copies of the *Nashville Banner* and *Tennessean* available from Newspapers.com and ProQuest, respectively, added secular perspectives on key people and events. Additional digitized papers from Memphis, Chattanooga, and Knoxville lent perspectives from beyond the state seat. Finally, copies of the *Baptist and Reflector* available online from the Southern Baptist Historical Library & Archives in Nashville chronicled the Southern Baptist perspective in Tennessee. Then, I surveyed the actual places that Tennessee Catholics created in their journey towards the mainstream. Over the course of two years and 5,000 miles of travel, I visited and photographed every Catholic church and mission in the state to create a publicly available Geographic Information System (GIS) map.

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<sup>106</sup> Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish: A History* (New York: Pearson Education Inc, 2000), 1-2.

## Structure

Chapter 1: “Camped But Not Settled” chronicles the arrival of the Timothy family into a rapidly changing nineteenth-century Tennessee. Beginning with small groups of Irish Catholics arriving in the 1830s, I establish the local political, social, and economic contexts in which nineteenth century Catholics sought to establish a foothold. In doing so, I discuss major movements and organizations that exemplified anti-Catholic sentiments as well as how early Catholics dealt with them. Specifically, Chapter 1 follows Patrick Henry Timothy and Humphrey Timothy as they cement the Timothy Dry Goods Company as an important player in the city’s economy and leverage that success into prominent social positions within the community. By the end of the chapter, I discuss the rising economic prosperity of both the Timothy family and their home city of Nashville as the innovations and challenges of the New South arrived in the city.

Chapter 2: “That Truth And Freedom Might Live” centers on the influence of World War I on the purposeful assimilative campaign initiated by Bishop Byrne at the turn of the century and carried forward by both the memorialization of James Simmons Timothy and the Knights of Columbus newspaper, *The Columbian*. During this period, Catholics staked a claim to 100 percent Americanism based largely on patriotic support of the war effort and adherence to traditional American ideals.

Chapter 3: “A Flame Upon the Hearthstones” picks up the previous chapter’s narrative through the lens of a new publication, *The Cresset*, that guided Tennessee Catholics through an ‘age of extremes’ in which they both faced elements of resurgent nativism and, in responding to that nativism, staked more assertive claims to local indigeneity. As the first generation of Timothy family patriarchs passed, their elevated status as businessmen and neighbors

highlighted the gains already made as the next generation, exemplified by Pat Timothy, James's younger brother, participated in a project that foreshadowed the coming Tennessee Valley Authority. The chapter also analyzes evidence of inter-ethnic tensions between Irish and German Catholics, the ascendancy of Irish identity as the dominant marker of Tennessee Catholicity, the effect of diocesan centralization on the Catholic press, and the onset of the Great Depression.

Chapter 4: "An Army of Youth" shifts focus to issues surrounding Catholic parochial schools and youth culture in the Great Depression era. The story of Humphrey Timothy, Jr., and his daughters provides evidence of evolving perceptions regarding the legitimacy of Catholic educational institutions. Additionally, the chapter analyzes the local character and relative importance extracurricular organizations like the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) compared to those developed in other regions of the country.

Chapter 5: "Out of the Wilderness, Into the Backwoods" unfolds in two parts. After following Pat and James Simmons Timothy's contributions in World War II, part one chronicles how World War II and the rise of Rooseveltian tri-faith ecumenism in the late 1930s and early 1940s raised Catholicism out of the cultural wilderness and into the mainstream. Part 2 focuses on the deployment of trailer missionaries into rural towns across the state and the rapid physical expansion of Catholic churches that followed.

Chapter 6: "A Tale of Two Vatican" opens with James Simmons "Tim" Timothy's contributions in Vietnam and the changed American cultural landscape to which he returned. The chapter then shifts to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) as it faced both an identity crisis born of urbanization and centralization and the prospect of Catholic incursion into its traditional rural strongholds. Using the *Baptist and Reflector*, the chapter analyzes how the mainstreaming of Catholicism forced the SBC to abandon the anti-Catholic language of previous

decades in favor of legalistic arguments geared to the tri-faith era. The *Baptist and Reflector* is the newspaper of the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board, which cooperates with the Southern Baptist Convention and, therefore, provides a useful window into the perspective of Southern Baptists in Tennessee. The chapter ends with an analysis of the escalating rhetoric in both the *Baptist and Reflector* and *The Register* in the months leading to the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960.

Epilogue: Vanishing reflects on the decline of inter-faith antagonism in the decades following Kennedy's assassination and Vatican II. Cultural upheavals and the lingering effects of the tri-faith campaign resulted in trans-faith alliances within the conservative and liberal wings of all three faiths. That phenomenon, which I call 'polar ecumenism,' replaced Southernization as the primary driver of institutional organization and growth by the end of the twentieth century. The chapter ends where the project began: the Timothy tree and what it represents for Catholicism as a Tennessee institution.

### **Eye to the Future**

The limitations of this project are numerous, but they offer tantalizing pathways for future research. First, I focus on accounts of events as portrayed in *The Catholic Herald*, *The Columbian*, *The Cresset*, and *The Register*. While I acknowledge that the press rarely presents unbiased fact, I am less concerned in this project with the objective truth of events than with how the Catholic press portrayed them and, as a result, how Catholic Tennesseans perceived and acted on them. As Jerry Knudson notes, newspapers approached in this way can represent agents

of social change that craft a reality of their own.<sup>107</sup> By tracking “the selection, gathering, writing, editing, and display” of news articles from 1898 to 1962, I draw conclusions about what Tennessee Catholics found important as their Church sought to establish itself as a significant institution.

Another major limitation of this project was the manual nature of analysis that the sources demanded. At the time I was writing this project, *The Catholic Herald* was only available on microfilm at the Tennessee State Library and Archives. Likewise, *The Columbian*, *The Cresset*, and *The Register* were held exclusively by Aquinas College Library and only in their original bindings. These circumstances posed several challenges. First, reviewing the papers necessitated physically visiting the involved institutions. For *The Catholic Herald*, I had to copy relevant pages from the microfilm to a flash drive. The remaining three papers posed a greater issue in both scope and method. Unlike the *Herald*, which only spanned a little more than one year, the *Columbian*, *Cresset*, and *Register* covered decades and were only available in their original physical forms. Given that Aquinas College Library only operated during normal school terms and then only for a limited number of hours per day, it became necessary early on to develop a strategy to digitize as many of the documents as possible for review outside Aquinas.

In 2022, I received permission from the library to begin scanning the newspapers using a phone app that recorded and collated high-resolution images of each page. With the assistance of built-in Artificial Intelligence, I gained the ability to upload thousands of pages in a single visit. Unfortunately, the high-resolution PDF files did not include text recognition. I attempted

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<sup>107</sup> Jerry W. Knudson, “Late to the Feast: Newspapers As Historical Sources,” American Historical Association, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-1993/late-to-the-feast>.

to utilize Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technologies to render the documents searchable, but their large size, complex layout, and diminutive text frustrated my efforts. Ultimately, budget constraints necessitated that I scan each page visually, highlighting important articles and manually indexing their contents. Future researchers should consider digitizing the newspapers using OCR technology to facilitate a more quantitative analysis of the papers' contents. For example, quantifying references to individual denominations, nativists, presidents, authors, etc., over time could provide a more nuanced understanding of how the primary topics of concern for the Catholic press changed across decades. A quantitative analysis of ads purchased by local businesses is another potentially fruitful path to illuminate changes in the economic affluence of Catholics within the state.

In general, this project takes a Nashville-centric perspective. Not only was Nashville the political and publishing hub of the state, but it was also home to the Catholic diocesan offices, the Southern Baptist Convention, and, importantly, the Timothy family, making it a logical focal point; however, both primary and secondary sources indicate that each of the state's four major cities had distinct qualities in relation to Catholic assimilation. Future studies should consider a comparative analysis of Catholic institution building across Nashville, Memphis, Knoxville, and Chattanooga.

Additionally, a 1959 article by Eugene P. Willging and Herta Hatzfeld in the *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* points to the existence of nine Catholic periodicals in Tennessee before 1900. Together with Reverend George J. Flanigen, Willging and Hatzfeld documented each paper's years of publication, leadership team, and general tone.

These early periodicals are also referenced by the owner-editors of the *Catholic Herald* and

Thomas Stritch in *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*.<sup>108</sup> Both note that the papers were primarily driven by the personal viewpoints of their founders and lacked any diocesan connections, which contributed to their limited scope, small readership, and short durations. Willging and Hatzfeld identify three of the papers as “Irish in tone,” making them valuable auxiliary sources to expand understanding of the Irish experience in decades not covered by this paper.<sup>109</sup> Comparative analyses between Tennessee and her sister states would also be useful. For social, geographic, political, and sectarian reasons, Tennessee provides an ideal archetype for the inland South generally, but studies comparing the Catholic experience in Tennessee against fellow inland states like Kentucky or Arkansas could illuminate important similarities and differences.

Despite dedicating each of the following chapters to a particular theme, this project does not cover in depth several major topics that warrant future investigation. The first of these is the role hospitals played in the institutional rivalries among denominations. Articles on the establishment and funding of hospitals in Nashville, Memphis, Chattanooga, and Knoxville appear throughout the various Catholic papers, and their impact on their host cities is undeniable. A clear indicator of their importance as an emblem of institutional legitimacy is the degree to which groups like the Southern Baptist Convention sought to establish their own medical facilities. The construction of Catholic hospitals also sparked instances of resistance that could potentially highlight differences across the state’s three great divisions.

Another important twentieth century topic is the role Tennessee Catholics played in the Civil Rights Movement. While the Catholic Church was an early adopter of integrative policies

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<sup>108</sup> “Our Future,” *Catholic Herald*, June 4, 1898, 4; Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 285-289.

<sup>109</sup> Eugene P. Willging and Herta Hatzfeld, “Catholic Serials of the Nineteenth Century in Tennessee,” *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 70, no. 1/2 (March/June 1959): 20-21, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44210549>.

nationally, the Diocese of Nashville had to maneuver with greater tact in Tennessee to preserve the institutional gains it had fought long to achieve. The contrast between Catholic attitudes toward integration and those of denominational rivals like the Southern Baptist Convention would also likely prove enlightening to the diversity in how the battle for Civil Rights unfolded across religious communities across the state. Though literature on the interaction of Catholics and the Civil Rights Movement exists, current works do not address how Civil Rights was discussed in the Catholic press, focusing instead on the writings of individual priests and bishops.

Finally, an in-depth review of the development of the state's Catholic architecture as a separate public history project is warranted. As part of my assistantship with the Center for Historic Preservation, I took up the mantle of the old circuit riders and resolved to photograph every Tennessee Catholic church and mission in the state, a property-centered survey that had never been undertaken. After traversing over 5,000 miles of Tennessee highways and backroads, I was surprised by the diversity of architectural styles represented across the state. In the four large cities, the styles matched what I anticipated for catholic churches: Gothic, Italianate, Romanesque, etc. In rural areas, however, church architecture became incredibly diverse. Some of the churches mirrored the aesthetic of nearby Protestant churches. Others deviated into unique and eclectic shapes, such as miniature geodesic domes. A close analysis of how those styles correlate to the ethnic makeup of congregations and their surrounding communities could reveal how Tennessee Catholics utilized architecture as a mode of assimilation or differentiation over time.

## Chapter 1

### **Camped But Not Settled: Irish-Americans in the New South**

#### **The Timothy Family**

The Timothy brothers began arriving in the United States from Kilkenny, Ireland, sometime around 1864.<sup>1</sup> Among the first were 21-year-old Humphrey and 6-year-old Patrick Henry. Five of their brothers, Oliver, Edward, Michael, Christopher, and John, eventually followed. Precisely when the other brothers arrived is unclear, but it appears that all were in Tennessee by the end of the 1880s. Together they represented a majority of the twelve children born to William Humphrey and Anastasia Timothy between 1842 and 1864. Anastasia died in 1864, likely while giving birth to John and his fraternal twin, Denis. It is unclear if William Humphrey immigrated. Given that two siblings, William and Denis, never made the crossing and there is no existing U.S. death record for William Humphrey, it is likely that he remained in Ireland with his two remaining children.

Unlike many of their compatriots, the Timothys did not settle in a major eastern city like New York or Boston. Instead, they joined a small but important legacy of Irish Catholics moving into the inland South. Given the destruction wrought by the recent Civil War, the decision to move South seems an odd choice at first glance, but there was ample economic opportunity in the post-war South, particularly at commercial hubs like Nashville. In contrast to the stratified and immigrant-saturated Northern states, the South's relatively homogenous,

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of the following chapter are adapted from my previous study, "A Flame Upon the Hearthstones: *The Columbian, The Cresset*, and Tennessee Catholicity, 1915-1932," MA thesis, MTSU, 2023.

Anglo-centric population (excluding non-whites) meant that nativist movements were not as virulent there. Additionally, Irish immigrants barely registered as a threat compared to other sources of social unrest that threatened the Southern power structure.

### **Tennessee Catholicity**

In Nashville, the future seat of the Tennessee's diocese, the story of Catholicism begins with the construction of a bridge across the Cumberland River to link Main Street in Edgefield to the Public Square downtown. When the Stacker and Johnson firm of Pittsburgh began the project at the behest of the Nashville Bridge Company in 1819, it brought thirty Irish masons with it. Those Irish families, who settled in nearby Edgefield, also crafted the bricks used to construct the city's first Catholic Church on donated land on the north slope of what is now Capitol Hill. A gift from prominent a local Mason, Anthony Foster, it was an early goodwill gesture from non-Catholics that would be repeated in other cities, such as Memphis.<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to popular myth, most of the early Irish Catholic families moving into the state worked in the building trades and river ports, not the railroads. The early Irish railroad workers were transient, so even as the Tennessee legislature authorized six railroad charters in 1831, the Catholic workers who laid the rails came and went without permanently settling. The descendants and extended family members of the original Irish construction workers, however, found abundant work on the construction projects that resulted from railroad-borne commerce. As the state economy expanded and the railroads stretched their iron fingers across rural counties, later Catholic railroaders would settle in outlying areas more readily than their

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee: The Sesquicentennial Story* (Nashville: Catholic Center, 1987), 54-55.

predecessors had done. Memphis and Knoxville were particularly enthusiastic early adopters of railroad construction. Though their zeal for laying new rail lines outstripped that found in Nashville for a time, the steady development of the Athens of the South would one day make it the state's the rail hub. Ultimately, Irish Catholic participation in the expansion of railroads ensured that nearly every Catholic parish erected in the state after the Civil War lay along a railroad line.<sup>3</sup>

Another mistake that is common in the historiography of Irish Catholics in America is the assumption that Irish Catholic immigrants always occupied the lowest socio-economic rungs in whatever city they settled. While the characterization fits many Irishmen arriving because of the Great Famine of the late 1840s, others who came before and after that period were far from paupers. Like some of their economically advantaged German Catholic counterparts, some Irishmen arrived in the inland South as a result of political rather than economic pressures. A prime example is the agitation caused by Daniel O'Connell.<sup>4</sup>

In 1840, Daniel O'Connell, a well-known Member of Parliament in Ireland, launched an all-out assault on the British Act of Union, which had fused Great Britain and Ireland into a single entity and placed significant restrictions on Irish Catholics. Convinced that the Act perpetuated Protestant domination over Irish Catholic majorities in Southern Ireland, O'Connell advocated for the Act's repeal and, in its place, the restoration of an independently elected Irish Parliament. While he stopped short of calling for complete independence, he believed that native Irishmen could better represent the interests of Irish Catholics if they were seated in their own legislative body. Many journalists, teachers, tradesmen, and other middle-class Irish who

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 54-55, 124

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 117, 123.

supported O’Connell’s position fled Ireland out of fear of persecution. As they did so, the movement quickly became trans-Atlantic. Repeal organizations formed as early as 1840 in the Irish enclaves of Northern U.S. states and then spread to the South and West by 1843.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately for O’Connell, his concomitant abolitionist views complicated support for the repeal movement in America and drew “bitter rejoinders” from major Irish press outlets throughout the United States. While the presumption that Irish-Americans, who had faced oppression at the hands of the British, would find common cause with enslaved African Americans and support abolition sounds plausible at first glance, the opposite was true. Some Irish-Americans contrasted “the good life” of slaves in what they saw as a paternalistic Southern society with the plight of abused Irish peasants living under the yolk of their British overlords. Less well-off Irish immigrants were in direct competition with both slaves and freemen for labor-based jobs, and abolition would have only exacerbated that competition.<sup>6</sup> Historians like William Shannon argue that because Irish-Americans were “the newest and least secure members of society,” they were “the most rigid and least generous in extending their sympathy to a submerged minority like the Negroes.” Noel Ignatiev agrees that “while white skin made the Irish eligible for membership in the white race, it did not guarantee their admission.” In this line of logic, the downtrodden Irish had to prove their worthiness to secure the advantages “whiteness” and social equality with their Anglo-descended fellow citizens. As a result, Irish-

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<sup>5</sup> Angela F. Murphy, “Slavery, Irish Nationalism, and Irish American Identity in the South, 1840-1845,” in *The Irish in the Atlantic World*, edited by David T. Gleeson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 129; David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 189-190; Carl Wittke, *The Irish in America* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1956), 127; Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 117.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

American opinions remained firmly anti-abolition throughout the antebellum period despite declarations from the Vatican against the slave trade.<sup>7</sup>

As noted, however, not all Irish fit that stereotype. Well-off Irishmen in the inland South were also frequently anti-abolitionists, but their support of the peculiar institution derived from a desire to preserve their lofty positions on the socioeconomic ladder rather than climb it. Some Irish Catholics also owned slaves themselves. Nashvillian Michael Burns is a prime example. Arriving in Nashville as an apprentice saddler in 1836, he leveraged his success in leatherworking into investments in banking, railroads, insurance, and politics. Like so many Irishmen after him, economic prominence translated into political prominence. As a State Senator and speculative gubernatorial candidate, Burns lived a comfortable life far from Nashville's slums, owning seven slaves by 1860.<sup>8</sup>

Thanks to the O'Connell Repeal Movement, however, historians have framed Irish-Americans in the South as having to navigate tensions resulting from dueling loyalties to America, Ireland, and the Vatican. Quinlan argues that Southern society was particularly challenging to navigate thanks to its "staunchly Protestant" population and general hostility to Roman Catholicism. Gleeson, however, notes that religious adherence among Southerners was lower than its "Bible Belt" characterization implies and, therefore, Catholicism was not viewed as a significant threat to existing norms.<sup>9</sup> In fact, professing a Catholic faith garnered positive attention from powerful Democratic lawmakers who counted Democratic-leaning Catholics as

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<sup>7</sup> William V. Shannon, *The American Irish* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1964), 54-55; Kieran Quinlan, *Strange Kin: Ireland and the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005): 51-52; Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 59.

<sup>8</sup> Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 119.

<sup>9</sup> Quinlan, *Strange Kin*, 6, 148-149; Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 193.

important constituents within their base. The *Nashville Whig* noted in 1938 that General Andrew Jackson and former governor William Carroll both expressed their well wishes to Nashville's Irish Catholic community following the city's St. Patrick's Day celebration. Philip Lindsley, President of the University of Nashville, also expressed his respect for the "enterprising, virtuous, gallant sons [of Ireland] who have found a happy home in America and who have contributed so essentially to the prosperity of the land of their adoption."<sup>10</sup> The friendliness of Tennesseans toward Irish Catholics in the nineteenth century, whether sincere or part of larger political calculations, is also a recurring theme in articles from the Catholic press in the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

Regardless, many Irish-Americans "still felt significant ties to their homeland" and, as a result, continued to promote the core goals of the Repeal Movement. To do so, they framed advocacy for Irish interests overseas as an extension of American political liberty. Drawing on the legacy of Irish participation in the American Revolution, they presented their desire to see Ireland freed from British tyranny as analogous to the American colonies' struggle against British imperialism. Ultimately, however, O'Connell pushed many Irish-Americans out of the Repeal Movement when he pledged to join with Great Britain should Anglo-American hostilities erupt. Most 'native' Americans saw this as nothing less than a declaration of hostility against the United States. In forcing Irish-Americans to "choose between their allegiance to Ireland and to the United States," O'Connell presented them with an opportunity to fully embrace the latter.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 119.

<sup>11</sup> "Nashville," *Catholic Herald*, May 30, 1898, 7; "Many Protestants Showed 'Friendliness' in Early History," *The Register*, August 19, 1960, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Murphy, "Slavery, Irish Nationalism, and Irish American Identity," 148-149.

By the 1850s, however, waves of more impoverished Irish immigrants triggered by the Great Famine gave oxygen to a burgeoning nativist movement led by the Know-Nothing Party. In the brief period between the collapse of the Whig Party in 1852-1853 and the rise of the Republican Party in 1854-56, the Know Nothings exerted considerable political influence nationally. Side-stepping tensions regarding slavery, they promoted anti-Catholicism and anti-immigration as “safer” political targets around which former Whigs and future Republicans could coalesce.<sup>13</sup>

As would often be the case, Catholics drew Know-Nothing vitriol most in the North. A Cleveland, Ohio, Know-Nothing candidate explained the party’s position on Catholic foreigners. “We are not now contending against foreigners,” he argued, “but against the principles of Roman Catholicism and its devotees.” Proscription of immigrants writ large remained a “secondary and contingent” goal. Co-opting the American education system as a tool for indoctrinating Protestant values, however, was high on the list of priorities. Catholic efforts to end the use of King James Bibles in schools prompted nativists in Massachusetts to double down on requirements that students read scriptures from that version daily. Additional measures aimed to bar the use of state funds for parochial schools. Once enrolled in Protestant-leaning school systems, Catholic children could learn proper “American” customs.<sup>14</sup>

In the South, however, Catholic communities lacked the size and political power needed to fuel Know-Nothing paranoia. W. Darrell Overdyke argues that some Southern Unionists turned to the Know-Nothing Party as a sort of social safety valve. They hoped to defuse

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<sup>13</sup> Kenny, *The American Irish*, 116-117; Shannon, *The American Irish*, 45-46; Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 110, 135-136.

increasing sectional animosities among native-born Americans by redirecting resentment toward Catholics and immigrants. Many conservative Southerners were also weary of the explosive tensions building around the slavery issue, and the anti-Catholic Know Nothings offered a welcomed and, according to Overdyke, natural diversion.<sup>15</sup>

Appearing in Tennessee around 1854 as the American Party, the Know-Nothings were welcomed by the *Tennessee Baptist*, later renamed the *Baptist and Register*. According to the paper, a “foreign element” consisting of “foreign Catholics and German infidels” sought to overthrow the Bible in public schools and “overthrow our constitutions through profligacy of our politicians.” The 1855 Tennessee American Party platform, however, took a relatively soft stance, protesting immigration by convicts and paupers but welcoming honest and industrious foreigners. Though it alluded to anti-Catholic conspiracies in its opposition to the “Union of Church and State,” it acknowledged the rights of all Christians to worship God freely without interference.<sup>16</sup>

Compared to their Northern counterparts, Know Nothings in Tennessee expressed only mild nativism. Focusing primarily on the threat of foreign voters in the territories, and the party’s regional successes was fleeting. The *Tennessee Register* later noted that the APA gained only momentary strength in Knoxville mainly among fallen-away Catholics rather than native-born Protestants.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, the divisiveness of slavery proved just as fatal for the Know-Nothings as it had been for the Whig Party before them. Northern and Southern branches of the Know Nothings simply could not reach a consensus on the issue. In Tennessee’s 1957

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<sup>15</sup> W. Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), v-vi, 66-67, 90.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> “Chattanooga Plan Sts. Peter and Paul’s Centenary,” *The Register*, January 6, 1952, 2-3.

gubernatorial campaign, Democrat Isham G. Harris of Memphis successfully undermined the candidacy of Know-Nothing Robert Hatton of Lebanon by emphasizing the strong vein of abolitionism within Northern Know-Nothing branches.<sup>18</sup> Just as they had with the O'Connell movement, Democratic-minded Irish Catholics doubled down in favor of their region's peculiar institution and were rewarded with weaker anti-Catholic activity than experienced by their Northern counterparts.

The onset of hostilities between North and South in 1861 provided yet another opportunity for Southern Irish Catholics to prove their loyalty. It was easy for many Irishmen to draw on the similarities between the Confederacy's desire for independence and their Irish homeland. Kenny argues that the military contributions of Irish volunteers was crucial for their assimilative campaign as pugnaciousness was a core attribute of both Irish and Irish-American identity. While regional loyalties meant there were significant numbers of Irish-Americans fighting on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line, Irishmen constituted the largest body of foreign-born troops in the Confederacy. In addition, major Confederate generals came from Irish stock, including Patrick Cleburne, Joseph Finnegan, James Hagan, and James Henry Lane.<sup>19</sup> Irish-American utility was not lost on the Confederate government, which sent envoys to Ireland to "propagandize for the southern cause" and lure more Irish immigrants to the South. Highlighting the strength of Know-Nothingism in the North, they insisted that Irish Catholics would feel far more "at home" in the Confederacy than in the Union. The South thus presented

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<sup>18</sup> Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South*, 266-267.

<sup>19</sup>Hallie Wilk, "Tennessee's Irish, 1870-1890" (Master's thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2017), 23, <https://ezproxy.mtsu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/tennessees-irish-1870-1890/docview/1900913203/se-2?accountid=4886>; Kenny, *The American Irish*, 121-123; Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 141, 158.

itself as a haven where Irishmen could live free from political antagonism and assimilate more readily into the surrounding culture.<sup>20</sup>

While the Confederacy was wooing Irish Catholics to join the Confederate cause, opportunities for Irish Americans in the North were degrading. Intense Irish opposition to both emancipation and conscription erupted violently in the streets of New York in July 1863 when Irish mobs targeted black citizens throughout the city. Kenny argues such assaults alienated Irish Catholics from mainstream Northern society and produced a wave of “sustained and virulent anti-Irish sentiment.” The Fenian Brotherhood further complicated the assimilation process for Irishmen in the North. The aim of the Fenians, which was a sister organization to the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood in Ireland, was to harness American money and manpower to provoke rebellions against Britain in both Canada and Ireland. Bands of Irish-American Fenians launched multiple attacks on Canadian towns in the spring of 1866, further souring public Northern opinions on the Irish. The increasing hostility toward Irish Catholics in Northern states contrasted sharply with the assimilative gains made by Irish Catholics living in Southern states. For them, the war had offered an opportunity to prove their loyalty to their new home, and they had done so convincingly.<sup>21</sup>

Don Doyle argues that it was in the wake of the Civil War that Nashville transformed into the embodiment of the ‘New South’ and began to set trends for the entire region. Its growing rail system pulled trade away from rivers and seaports toward the interior. As a result, the ‘Rock City’ became a diversified economic gateway between North and South. Manufacturing,

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<sup>20</sup> Wittke, *The Irish in America*, 148; Wilk, “Tennessee’s Irish,” 31.

<sup>21</sup> Kenny, *The American Irish*, 124, 128-129; Wittke, *The Irish in America*, 150; John A. French, “Irish-American Identity, Memory, and Americanism during the Eras of the Civil War and First World War” (PhD. diss, Marquette University, 2012), 205, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global; Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 156-157.

banking, insurance, education, and publishing all flourished. Above all, Nashville became a critical distribution hub for dry goods, groceries, liquor, hardware, drugs, and a range of other products. Fed primarily by the internal migration of native-born, rural farmers into its slums and suburbs, Nashville lacked the knee-jerk nativist reaction that characterized other major commercial hubs in the period. Its growth also occurred at a more reasonable pace than its Southern sisters, such as Atlanta, Birmingham, and even Memphis.<sup>22</sup>

This economic environment awaited the Timothys and other Irish Catholic families who arrived in the latter half of the 1860s. Though there were certainly many Irish laborers who lived and worked in ‘the Jungle,’ the unsavory, low-lying area along the river to the south of Public Square that would eventually become ‘Black Bottom,’ the same could be said for a host of other newcomers in areas across the city. German immigrants were also arriving during this period. Initially occupying a social rung above the Irish, German families were more religiously diverse, had greater access to financial capital, and settled in unorganized patterns across the city. As influential businessmen like Edward Stahlman, George Jacobs, William Gerst, and George Dickel raised the profile of Germans in Nashville social circles, sixty percent of the German community relocated to firmly middle-class neighborhoods in North Nashville that eventually became known as Germantown. Rural farmers and black freedmen, however, arrived in greater numbers than either the Irish or the Germans and, frequently, sparked even greater anxiety among Nashville natives. Not only did impoverished rural whites and freedmen occupy the lowest rungs of the economic ladder, but they also brought fundamentalist social and religious practices that made them appear more alien to Nashville’s urban, middle-class, evangelical

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<sup>22</sup> Don H. Doyle, *Nashville In The New South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 19-42; William Waller, ed., *Nashville in the 1890s* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1970), 11-12.

landscape than their foreign immigrant counterparts. After all, Irish and German Catholics communities included families of education, skill, and middle-class sentimentality that crystalized well with the city's existing middle- and upper-class population and posed less of a racial, political, and religious threat. Thus, the Timothys and Catholic families like them entered Nashville ready to lean on each other's successes and, in doing so, harness the upward mobility of the city's emergent merchant empire.<sup>23</sup>

When Humphrey and Patrick Henry Timothy left Kilkenny, Ireland, they did so with fellow Irishman John Gilgan of Slingo. The two families were from disparate parts of the island, and what connection might have existed between them prior to departure is unknown. Perhaps they met for the first time while departing from Dublin and discovered in each other kindred spirits. After all, Gilgan was only four years older than Humphrey Timothy, and both apparently had aspirations to enter the business world. Upon arrival in America, Humphrey and Gilgan immediately moved together to Louisville, Kentucky, where they both worked for the local dry goods firm, E.B. Nugent and Co. As they did so, Patrick H. Timothy was sent to the Christian Brothers' school in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, where he would remain for the next nine years. Humphrey Timothy and Gilgan were less sedentary. After one year in Louisville, they moved to Nashville and opened a humble dry goods store on Third Avenue just north of the Public Square. Finding success, they relocated south to 13-14 Public Square a few years later and named their new firm the Trade Palace. Though post war competition around the Public Square was fierce, the partners were "alive to the value of publicity" and made their store one of the most popular in the city.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Doyle, *Nashville In The New South*, 100-106, 121.

<sup>24</sup> "Summons Comes to John Gilgan," *The Nashville American*, January 27, 1908, 8; "Last Rites Held for P.H. Timothy," *Nashville Banner*, December 12, 1928, 17.

Around 1873, Gilgan sold his half of the business to Timothy to open his own store, the Southern Palace, on Church Street. Thereafter, Humphrey's firm became known as Timothy Dry Goods Company. Charming, kind, and charitable, Humphrey built a reputation for fair dealing and philanthropy that endeared him to the Nashville business community.<sup>25</sup> It was also around this time that his brothers, Oliver and P.H. joined him in Nashville to operate the business. Together, they climbed the city's social ladder, gaining not only wealth but also positions of leadership that helped steer the city's future. Oliver, for instance, served as a director of the Centennial Exposition of the 1890s, a charter member of the South Nashville Improvement and Development Company, and an original member of the Ryman Auditorium board of directors.<sup>26</sup>

Another important avenue to affluence harnessed by the Timothys and other Irish Catholic families in the city was lucrative intermarriages. All three Timothy brothers associated with Timothy Dry Goods married into well-established families that helped to augment their both their wealth and stature. For Oliver, that meant marrying Amelia Angelica Metz in 1879. Amelia's father, W.H. Metz, was the city's first clothing merchant, one of its largest taxpayers, and a resident of one of its oldest homes on South College Street. A devout German Catholic who was a member of several German fraternal societies, W.H. was nonetheless a member of the heavily Irish St. Patrick Catholic Church.<sup>27</sup> Humphrey Timothy expanded the family's connections to Chattanooga, marrying Julia Moore of Chattanooga in 1895. Julia, who was

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<sup>25</sup> "Retailers Honor Timothy's Memory," *Nashville Banner*, January 3, 1929, 6; "Timothy Rites Set Tuesday," *Nashville Banner*, April 23, 1945; "Last Rites Held for P.H. Timothy," *Nashville Banner*, December 12, 1928, 17.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid; "Centennial Matters," *Nashville Banner*, February 12, 1896, 8.

<sup>27</sup> "Pioneer Citizen of Nashville Dies," *Nashville Banner*, October 31, 1910; "In Society," *Nashville American*, August 19, 1898, 3.

named the city's "most popular young lady" the year prior, was the eldest daughter of Joseph Moore, the Irish-born and well-known manager of the Chattanooga River Brick Company.<sup>28</sup>

P.H. Timothy was perhaps the luckiest of the brothers, marrying Nonnie Simmons at the St. Mary's Catholic Cathedral at the corner of Fifth and Church Streets on the morning of September 10, 1889. The importance of the union was evidenced by the fact that the ceremony was personally conducted by the city's fourth Bishop, Joseph Rademacher. Nonnie was the only adopted daughter of James and Delia Simmons. An Irish immigrant who had found his way to Nashville in 1862 following stints in Quebec, New York, and Cincinnati, James Simmons had woven himself into the fabric of Nashville's financial sector, serving as a director on the boards of the Nashville Trust Company, Merchant's Bank, Fourth National Bank, the Nashville Gas Company, the National Fertilizer Company, and the North Nashville Building and Savings Association. As such, Nonnie was heir to an impressive estate, including two impressive brick homes at 204 and 206 Woodland Street in Eastfield. P.H. and his new wife were gifted the 206 Woodland home as a wedding gift. Though no detailed description of the home exists, news articles indicate that it had a library, reception halls, and chandeliers. The smaller property at 204 Woodland was immediately next door to the west. It had at least 10 rooms with a bath and modern updates, so the 206 Woodland address must have been impressive indeed. Nonnie also stood to benefit from a portion of her family's \$8,000 in stock for the Nashville Gas Company, \$3,000 in stock for the McGavock & Mt. Vernon Street Railroad Company, and \$5,000 in stock for the Nashville, Chattanooga & Louisville Railroad. The most valuable family asset from which Nonnie stood to gain, however, was the Simmons's primary residence and grocery

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<sup>28</sup> "To Be Wed," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, November 10, 1895, 10; "The Catholic Bazaar," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, December 20, 1894, 7; "Joseph Moore Dies At Advanced Age," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, June 29, 1921, 3.

business that had stood at the corner of High and Church Streets since 1862. The Nashville Trust Company called the address one of the most valuable properties in Nashville when it went for sale following Delia's death in 1907.<sup>29</sup>

By this time, the remaining Timothy brothers, Edward, John, Christopher, and Michael, had arrived in America. Edward arrived in Nashville around 1876 and immediately found employment with his brother, Humphrey. Edward, however, never married and died alone at the age of 30 at the Nicholson House hotel. He had suffered from a year-long battle against complications from typhoid fever that sometimes left him bedridden for weeks on end.<sup>30</sup> John Timothy lived longer and did better than Edward, but only slightly so. Like all the Timothys, John worked for Humphrey's firm from the time he arrived in Nashville, likely around the 1880s. He married Nannie Fitzgerald of West Nashville in 1890, and they had three sons and a daughter, though one son died infancy, an issue that would also plague some of his brothers. Unlike the successful Humphrey, Oliver, and P.H. Timothy, however, John Timothy never fully escaped the stereotype of the 'feisty Irish.' He and Nannie lived their entire lives in homes on 1023 Kayne Avenue and 1923 State Street, well within the 10<sup>th</sup> Ward "Little Ireland" area, a squarely middle-class neighborhood that extended west from the railroad gulch. Compared to the homes of Humphrey and P.H. in the West End and Edgefield neighborhoods, John's homes

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<sup>29</sup> "Married at the Cathedral," *Nashville Banner*, September 10, 1889, 4; "Marriage Licenses," *Nashville Banner*, September 9, 1889, 3; "Mrs. Timothy's Rites Wednesday," *Nashville Banner*, October 28, 1941; "Removal," *The Nashville Daily Union*, July 20, 1865, 3; "Auction Sale of Securities," *Nashville Banner*, May 1, 1907; "James Simmons Dead," *Nashville Banner*, August 12, 1897, 2; "James Simmons Will," *Nashville Banner*, August 17, 1897; "For Rent," *Nashville Banner*, November 10, 1894; "Messers J.S. and P.H. Timothy Entertain Chattanooga Guests," *Nashville American*, June 25, 1910, 7; "Auction Sale of Church Street Store House," *Nashville Banner*, May 2, 1907, 14; "Fertilizer Company," *Nashville Banner*, January 14, 1885; "Annual Election," *Nashville Banner*, January 10, 1893, 2.

<sup>30</sup> "Personal," *Nashville Banner*, January 29, 1884, 4; "Death of Edward F. Timothy," *Nashville Banner*, January 19, 1885, 4.

would have appeared modest. He was civically involved, representing the 10<sup>th</sup> Ward in the Young Men's Democratic Club, but he garnered nowhere near the social attention as his more affluent brothers. His Irish pugnaciousness was also on full display when he was accused of shooting John McTigue in the leg at the notorious Ben Brown's saloon on North Cherry Avenue (now 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue) in 1892. McTigue was attempting to break up a scuffle between John and Pat Dugan when John's pistol went off and struck McTigue in the calf. Though the resulting article in the *Nashville Banner* did not identify John beyond his first and last name, which would have been common, Brown's saloon sat between Union and Church streets, placing it within blocks of Timothy Dry Goods and increasing the likelihood that John was the man involved.<sup>31</sup>

In Chattanooga, the Timothy family's leading figure was Michael. Arriving first in Nashville, he relocated to Chattanooga in the early 1880s. Drawing on the connections between the Timothy and Metz families established by Oliver Timothy's marriage, Michael opened Timothy and Metz Dry Goods at 733 Market Street. Eventually absorbed as part of the growing Timothy Dry Goods empire, the firm also briefly employed two of Michael's brothers. Oliver Timothy briefly worked at the location as manager and Christopher Timothy served as its Vice President.<sup>32</sup> Christopher "Chris" Timothy had arrived in America with Michael but chose to initially settle in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Despite the distance, he visited Michael frequently and ultimately relocated to Chattanooga around the end of the 1880s, perhaps because his property in Hopkinsville was the victim of raids against his prized tomato plants. When deciding

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<sup>31</sup> "Rites Thursday for John J. Timothy," *Nashville Banner*, December 10, 1930, 17; "Nashville Society News," *Nashville Banner*, April 10, 1890, 4; "Democracy Organizing," *Nashville Banner*, September 5, 1892, 27; "Deaths of a Day," *Nashville Banner*, July 31, 1903, 2; "Shot in the Leg," *Nashville Banner*, November 24, 1892, 5; "Mrs. Nanna Timothy," *Nashville Banner*, October 19, 1894; Doyle, *Nashville In The New South*, 100-101.

<sup>32</sup> "Michael A. Timothy," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, December 11, 1916, 2; "Final Summons Michael Timothy," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, December 11, 1916, 10; "Looking Backward," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, December 12, 1941, 14.

between buying a shotgun to defend his property and joining his brother's growing firm, he chose the latter. It was the right choice. Once in Chattanooga, Chris blossomed as an influential voice in both business and politics. He married a local Chattanooga and was blessed with two daughters, three sons, and a personal estate composed of a Lookout Mountain property and other holdings worth \$13,500 by the time of his death in 1942.<sup>33</sup>

Back in Nashville, P.H. and Nonnie began the process of building their own family in 1900. It was not easy for the young couple. Only two of the five children they conceived over the next eleven years survived past infancy. Delia, William, and John all died before reaching one year old.<sup>34</sup> Only James Simmons and Patrick Henry, Jr., born 1892 and 1897 respectively, lived into adulthood. Additionally, family turmoil erupted at Timothy Dry Goods at the turn of the century. The company had struggled at the end of the 1880s, culminating in 1888 with Humphrey and Oliver assigning their company holdings to Oliver's father-in-law, W.H. Metz, to satisfy over \$200,000 in liabilities to creditors. Though the firm eventually recovered, it may have caused a rift between P.H. and his brothers over how Timothy Dry Goods should be managed. By 1900, their disagreements resulted in Humphrey and Oliver voting P.H. out as President and refusing his demands to be paid a dividend on his 120 shares of stock. P.H. filed suit, claiming that his brothers' actions were a coordinated effort to force him to sell his shares at

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<sup>33</sup> "Here and There," *Semi-Weekly South Kentuckian*, June 1, 1888, 3; "C.S. Timothy, 78, Dies on Mountain," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, October 3, 1942, 7; "Personal," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, October 29, 1886, 5; "Personal," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, February 28, 1888, 4; "Businessmen Protest," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, October 23, 1891, 5; "How They Talk," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, November 7, 1895, 5.

<sup>34</sup> "Death of Son Patrick F. Timothy," *Nashville Banner*, February 6, 1902, 2; "Notice," *Nashville Banner*, April 30, 1900, 5.

a loss. Instead, he demanded in Chancery court that he be paid a 50 percent dividend on the nearly \$37,000 in profits from 1899.<sup>35</sup>

Following P.H.'s departure, disaster struck the remaining Timothy brothers on September 1, 1903, when a devastating fire suddenly erupted in the southernmost building of Timothy's 200 feet of storefront along North College Street. The heat from the flames was so intense that firemen along the sidewalks described it as unbearable, and the spreading conflagration threatened to destroy the entire block. The three buildings composing Timothy's Dry Goods were three-story, all-brick structures extending from College Street to Printer's Alley. All were gutted, resulting in a loss of over \$200,000 in inventory and property. The brothers had just over half of that amount insured. Hill & Co., Metz & Co., and Keith, Simmons & Co were also severely damaged. Though Timothy Dry Goods would eventually reopen, it was a devastating blow. Making matters worse, authorities were unable to determine the fire's origins. Witnesses reported that the entire south store burst into flames around 10:50pm though patrolling police officers recalled seeing neither smoke or flames when passing the building just five minutes prior. Exactly why the building burned so suddenly and completely was never answered.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "Timothy Bros Failure," *Nashville Banner*, October 18, 1887, 3; "P.H. Timothy Wants Dividends," *Nashville American*, February 28, 1900, 5; "Brothers Disagree," *Nashville Banner*, February 28, 1900, 3.

<sup>36</sup> "Fire Consumes Timothys' Place," *Nashville American*, September 2, 1903, 1; "Destructive Blaze on College Street," *Nashville Banner*, September 2, 1903, 1.

The tensions between P.H. and his brothers did little to affect the affluent life that P.H. and Nonnie were building at 206 Woodland. P.H. moved on from Timothy Dry Goods to establish a new company at 426-428 Union Street with Humphrey's old business partner, John Gilgan. Gilgan had been operating his own business, the Southern Palace,

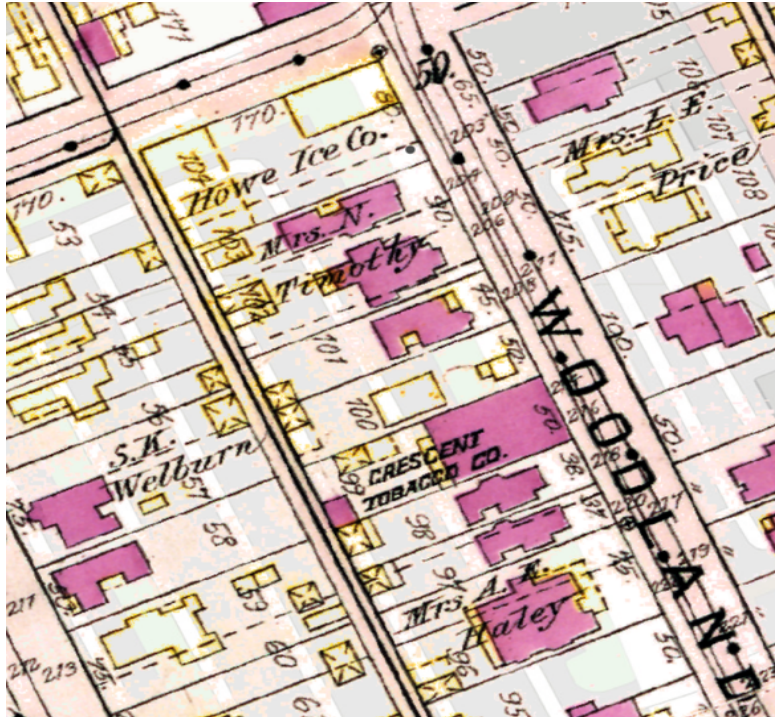


Figure 1: P.H. and Nonnie Timothy Residence and Adjoining Property, 204 & 206 Woodward Street, Edgefield, Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. <https://nashville.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=c14ec64626244f6d975c94c2f190edb1>.

with his brother, James, until his brother's death prompted him to sell the Palace and merge with P.H. Together, they formed the Timothy and Gilgan Company in 1902. Their venture flourished until 1908, when Gilgan suddenly died of pneumonia. P.H. then reorganized the firm as P.H. Timothy & Co., and the well-advertised inventory clearance that resulted on Wednesday, February 11 led to a mob of female shoppers that shut down traffic on Union Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue from 8am to 5pm. "The list of bargains published proved too much for Nashville femininity," quipped the *Nashville American*.<sup>37</sup> Despite "splendid" and "extensive" growth however, Timothy & Co. shocked the Nashville business community when it filed for

<sup>37</sup> "Summons Comes to John Gilgan," *Nashville American*, January 27, 1908, 8; "New Dry Goods Firm," *Nashville Banner*, February 17, 1902; "Timothy & Gilgan," *Nashville Banner*, September 28, 1903, 8; "Street Was Blocked," *Nashville American*, February 12, 1908, 8.

bankruptcy in December 1909.<sup>38</sup> In an even more surprising twist, Nonnie Timothy purchased the assets of Timothy & Co at auction block a month later for \$26,000 and immediately named her husband manager.<sup>39</sup>

Ultimately, the couple's legal maneuvers bought Timothy & Co. an additional year of operations. By December of 1910, however, they were ready to retire. Their employees presented them with an ornate cut glass punch bowl at their Christmas Eve retirement party. P.H. expressed regret in leaving the companionship of his longtime employees and promised his assistance should they need it in the future. For many, his offer would not be necessary as they were able to easily transition to working for P.H.'s brother at Timothy Dry Goods.<sup>40</sup> In the years that followed, P.H. and Nonnie Timothy remained socially active. Nonnie was especially visible, hosting major social events that at times reached 700-800 guests. The couple also spent time visiting their sons, now grown, in Delaware and New York.<sup>41</sup>

How much James and P.H. had been aware of the dramas that unfolded around their parents in the first decade of the 1900s is unclear, but evidence points to a comfortable childhood of privilege and circumstance. Birthday parties and family gatherings were events of sufficient pomp to garner attention in the local press. The *Nashville American* described James's 8<sup>th</sup> birthday as "quite elaborate in all its details," one attended by friends bearing prominent names like Lowe, Crockett, Cheatham, and Reeves.<sup>42</sup> A year later, Nashville's first Horse Show, which

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<sup>38</sup> "P.H. Timothy & Co," *Nashville American*, December 17, 1909, 5.

<sup>39</sup> "Mrs. Timothy Buys Stock," *Nashville American*, January 25, 1910, 10.

<sup>40</sup> "Employes [sic] Give Token of Esteem to P.H. Timothy," *Nashville American*, December 25, 1910, 7; "Dry Goods People Change," *Nashville American*, January 8, 1911, 15.

<sup>41</sup> "Benefit Ball and euchre Party Big Success," *Nashville Tennessean*, May 16, 1913, 7; "Brief Mention," *Nashville Banner*, December 22, 1915, 5; "Brief Mention," *Nashville Banner*, April 11, 1916.

<sup>42</sup> "From the Suburbs," *Nashville American*, November 25, 1900, 3.

honored Confederate Veterans, counted James among the participants.<sup>43</sup> When an 18-year-old James and 13-year-old Pat hosted forty of their friends to celebrate a visit of cousins from Chattanooga, the decorations and festivities were covered in painstaking detail. Patriotism was the dominant theme, and red, white, and blue flowers, bunting, and ribbons covered the library and reception hall. The color combination, however, was a nod to regional rather than national patriotism. Confederate flags hung prominently in the reception hall, and the legs of tables set in the dining room were molded in the form of “cannons and soldiers holding the tiny Confederate flags.”<sup>44</sup> Such events were indicative of a burgeoning Irish Catholic population seeking to cement their place in Tennessee society by displaying both affluence and loyalty to their Southern home. The carefree nature of James and Pat’s lives, however, overlapped with two periods of unrest for that challenged the progress of Catholic assimilation in Nashville.

### **The American Protective Association, Byrne the Builder, and *The Catholic Herald***

The first challenge came in the form of the American Protective Association (APA). Founded in 1887 by a second-generation German immigrant who believed Catholic institutions had deprived him of a public education, the APA was driven by both economic anxieties and growing fear of parochial school systems. Though originally a phenomenon in the American West, the organization boasted a million registered members nationally by the 1890s. The perpetuation of traditional anti-Catholic myths, including plots by Catholics to stockpile weapons in church basements in anticipation of a signal from the Pope to massacre American

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<sup>43</sup> “Nashville’s First Horse Show Will Be A Triumph,” *Nashville Banner*, September 30, 1901, 2; “Brilliant Scene Will Be Opening of Horse Show,” *Nashville Banner*, October 8, 1901, 10.

<sup>44</sup> “Messers J.S. and P.H. Timothy Entertain Chattanooga Guests,” *Nashville American*, June 25, 1910, 7.

Protestants, drove the group's growth in the North and West.<sup>45</sup> In the South, however, the APA had a harder time gaining traction.

Following the Civil War, Southern Democrats had cultivated close ties with concentrated Irish communities thanks to their ability to swing entire wards in city-level politics. Fierce opposition to temperance policies, however, created rifts between Irish neighborhoods and progressive Democrats. In Nashville, pushback against Irish conservatism manifested in the 1895 mayoral race, which resulted in APA candidate William McCarthy winning on a 'good government' platform that was explicitly pro-prohibition, pro-immigration reform, and anti-Catholic. Irish Nashvillians were incensed by the success of the APA "Goo Goos," a derogatory label referencing the 'good government' campaign. They quickly threw their political weight behind the 'regular' Democrats. As a result, the Irish-backed Richard Houston Dudley handily defeated McCarthy in his 1897 re-election bid and "all but finished the APA as a viable political force in Nashville."<sup>46</sup> Defeat of the Nashville APA coincided with a national decline in party popularity as issues like bimetallism, imperialism, and a recovering economy dampened the appeal of its anti-Catholic propaganda.<sup>47</sup>

The efforts of the Diocese of Nashville's activist, pro-Americanization Bishop, Thomas Sebastian Byrne, also likely blunted the impact of the APA in Tennessee. Like the Timothy brothers, Byrne was a first generation Irish-American who could move within the upper echelons of Tennessee's social structure with ease. Whether speaking with senators, congressmen, governors, or businessmen, Byrne represented himself and his flock in ways that gave no oxygen

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<sup>45</sup> Kenny, *The American Irish*, 158-159; Wittke, *The Irish in America*, 123-124.

<sup>46</sup> Doyle, *Nashville In The New South*, 103; Waller, *Nashville in the 1890s*, 92.

<sup>47</sup> Donald Kinzer, *An Episode of Anti-Catholicism: The American Protective Association* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), 255-260.

to anti-Catholic agitators. Though stern and, at times, cold, he was thoroughly patriotic and demanded that Tennessee Catholics follow him in effusive expressions of support for the United States. Beyond acceptance as Americans, Byrne also desired Tennessee Catholics to be more fully accepted as Southerners. He actively pursued the ordination of native priests and worked diligently to transition Nashville's ethnic parishes to geographic ones. He moved the Cathedral from its St. Mary location downtown to the newly constructed Immaculate Conception Cathedral on West End, adeptly following the city's expansion patterns toward newly affluent zones rendered accessible by the expanding electric trolley network. He also ensured that Catholics appeared at the forefront of medical advancement, building or encouraging medical centers in all four major cities. The naming of St. Thomas Hospital in Nashville after Byrne's patron saint is a testament to his influence.<sup>48</sup> Both literally and figuratively, Byrne's tireless work justifies his nickname in the Catholic history of the state: Byrne the Builder.

Byrne's determination to build Tennessee Catholicity as a lasting and influential presence was also evident in his willingness to give his blessing to the state's first diocesan approved Catholic newspaper, *The Catholic Herald*. Though smaller, personality-based Catholic publications had sprung up across the state during the



Figure 2: *The Catholic Herald*, April 30, 1898, Tennessee Library and Archives.

<sup>48</sup> Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 239, 243-248, 259, 269.

nineteenth century, *The Catholic Herald* reflected Byrne's hope of stimulating a more unified, organized diocese. Its leaders, J.M. Hussey and G.F. Connor, rewarded Byrne's endorsement by acting as a mouthpiece for his Americanizing agenda, starting with an article in the first issue entitled "The Duty of Catholics."<sup>49</sup> Speaking in the context of the United States's proclamation of war against Catholic Spain in Cuba, Byrne said:

Whatever may have been the individual judgment of American prior to the moment when war broke out as to its wisdom or the adequacy of the reasons advanced in its justification, there can be now no two opinions as to the duty of every loyal American citizen.... We are true Americans, and, as such, loyal to our country and to its flag and obedient to the highest decrees and the supreme authority of our nation.<sup>50</sup>

Stritch notes that American Catholic newspapers distributed Byrne's sermon throughout the country.<sup>51</sup> Though small, the paper thereafter garnered attention from both secular Tennessee papers like the *Nashville American* and distant sectarian publications like the *Connecticut Catholic*.<sup>52</sup>

The *Herald's* support of Byrne's patriotic messaging continued throughout 1898 and 1899. In article after article, the paper promoted the compatibility of Catholic faith and patriotic Americanism. In doing so, it also deployed tactics that would become standard in future Catholic newspapers. One was linking significant figures in US history, such as George Washington, Andrew Jackson, and Daniel Boone, to Irish heritage, Catholic faith, or both. Another was highlighting the patriotism of Catholic soldiers and chaplains in the Spanish-American War and

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 288.

<sup>50</sup> "The Duty of Catholics," *The Catholic Herald*, April 30, 1898, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 288.

<sup>52</sup> "Kind Words," *The Catholic Herald*, May 7, 1898, 6; "Kind Words," *The Catholic Herald*, June 4, 1898, 4.

other conflicts.<sup>53</sup> Other articles focused on advancing the cause of Southernization, tying aspects of Catholic history to either Tennessee or Confederate history and promoting the importance of local Catholic institutions to state well-being.<sup>54</sup>

There were limits, however, to how far the editors were willing to go in terms of promoting unabashed patriotism, especially once the Spanish-American War ended and American leaders were left to ponder whether to pursue imperialistic control of captured Spanish territories that were full of either practicing Catholics or those who might become so. “Are we but to drive out one tyrant,” the paper asked, “to assume his role ourselves in what may prove to be a far worse manner?”<sup>55</sup> Couching most of its argument in terms of traditional isolationism and democratic values, the paper also framed the issue through a distinctively Southern lens, insisting that “what the South suffered from the carpet-bagger in those dark days immediately after the civil war, those colonies would now suffer and in a much worse degree, owing to the

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<sup>53</sup> “My Country, Tis of Thee,” *The Catholic Herald*, April 30, 1898, 4; “Church and State,” *The Catholic Herald*, May 30, 1898, 4; “Washington’s Reply to the Congratulatory Address of His Catholic Fellow Citizens,” *The Catholic Herald*, May 14, 1898, 6; “Chaplains in the Navy,” *The Catholic Herald*, May 21, 1898, 8; “Among the First to Die for America,” *The Catholic Herald*, May 29, 1898, 1; “The Clergy in War: The Minister a Man and Should Shoulder a Musket,” *The Catholic Herald*, June 11, 1898, 2; “The Best Government,” *The Catholic Herald*, June 18, 1898, 3; “Catholic Chaplains,” *The Catholic Herald*, July 9, 1898, 3; “In God We Trust,” *The Catholic Herald*, July 9, 1898, 4; “Catholic Chaplains,” *The Catholic Herald*, July 16, 1898, 1; “Patriotic Outing,” *The Catholic Herald*, July 23, 1898, 6; “Forgotten History: The Irish and Their Record in the War of the Revolution,” *The Catholic Herald*, September 10, 1898, 1; “Catholic Chaplains,” *The Catholic Herald*, September 10, 1898; “A Bogus Patriot: An Aristocratic Jesuit Resigns from the Society,” *The Catholic Herald*, December 3, 1898, 1; “A Chaplain’s Heroism,” *The Catholic Herald*, December 3, 1898, 1; “The American People,” *The Catholic Herald*, December 31, 1898, 1; “Church and State,” *The Catholic Herald*, December 3, 1898, 1; “American Republic: Most Important Act in World’s Civil History,” *The Catholic Herald*, January 28, 1899, 1.

<sup>54</sup> “St. Thomas’ Hospital,” *The Catholic Herald*, April 30, 1898, 7; “Andrew Jackson As Courtier,” *The Catholic Herald*, May 21, 1898, 5; “Let Them Come In: A Strong Argument in Favor of Foreign Emigration,” *The Catholic Herald*, June 4, 1898, 2; “Father Ryan’s Last Poem,” *The Catholic Herald*, September 10, 1898, 3; “Soldiers Home Chapel: An Ernest Appeal Made for One at Old Hickory, Tenn,” *The Catholic Herald*, December 3, 1898, 3.

<sup>55</sup> “Imperialism: Shall It Be Said That We disregard the Monroe Doctrine?,” *The Catholic Herald*, August 27, 1898, 1, 8.

scope which locality and distance would afford.”<sup>56</sup> Despite additional ethnocentric and economic arguments, the motivating force behind the paper’s stance was likely the possibility of opening the previously Catholic-held territories to increased Protestant missionary activities if held as permanent U.S. territories.

The paper’s fears were justified a month later when the editors received a “local bigoted production,” *The Cottage Pulpit*. Written ostensibly by a Methodist, the upsetting pamphlet gloated that the war had opened “a great field of conflict” in which Protestantism could defeat Catholicism - its natural foe and the foe of “true religion” – in both Cuba and Porto Rico.<sup>57</sup> Though the *Herald* attempted a restrained response, saying it sought to address the publication “with a sense of pity and a desire to enlighten and set right the misguided and prejudiced author,” its tone was defensive and insulting. “We ask the author to please tell us where Protestantism got its Bible,” they quipped before dismissing the author as a “poor, deluded man.”<sup>58</sup> A January 1899 article clarified the paper’s position. “Now that we are about to enter a new era by elongating the folds of Old Glory,” the editors wrote, “it would be well for Catholics in this country to give a little more of their attention to the social and religious status of the inhabitants of our coveted possessions.”<sup>59</sup> Such rhetoric intensified the following month when the U.S. Senate ratified the treaty with Spain that transferred the Philippines to U.S. control. “The eagle found himself grasping the standard of our flag above the crimson ruins of liberty torn piece meal by his talons,” the paper lamented.<sup>60</sup> Worse, the paper argued that “humanity,

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> “Sordid Bigotry,” *The Catholic Herald*, September 24, 1889, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> “Catholicity and Ignorance,” *The Catholic Herald*, January 28, 1899, 4.

<sup>60</sup> “Purer Gospel,” *The Catholic Herald*, February 18, 1899, 4.

civilization and Christianity” had been used as a “pallium” by politicians to hide their real designs – “war for conquest.”<sup>61</sup> After the August imperialism article, the paper’s patriotic articles continued but at a slower pace than before.

Despite both its anti-imperialist language and distaste for Protestant missionary designs, the paper was not above goading rival denominations with prospects of growing Catholic power. Responding to an article in the *New York Sun* that northern Baptist leaders had expressed concern at a recent ministerial conference that the expansion of Catholicism in New England States was threatening the position of Baptist churches, the *Herald* chided Protestants for pushing Church-State separation to the point that they had de-Christianized their children and de-populated their pews. “If they would turn their attention [to re-Christianizing their children],” the article lectured, “they would find enough to do without sending missionaries to convert the Philippines, Cubans and Porto Ricans, who have already been made Christians.”<sup>62</sup> Exuding confidence that “the Catholic Church is undeniably progressing in these States, though they were at one time the stronghold of Protestantism,” the article cheekily reassured “our Baptist friends” that Catholic loyalty in the recent war proved that they need not fear being governed by the Pope when Catholics became a majority.<sup>63</sup> It is noteworthy that the article was playing off the fears of Northern Baptists. In 1890s Tennessee, the Southern Baptist Convention sat atop a quasi-establishment trifecta alongside the Methodists and Presbyterians. Though the Nashville Protestant trifecta likely did not share Northern anxieties over Catholic gains at the turn of the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> “Baptists Are Alarmed,” *The Catholic Herald*, October 29, 1889, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

century, their situation would change by mid-century when Catholic attention turned to the rural bastions of the SBC empire.

By February of 1899, however, the paper's confidence dissolved into pure rhetorical bile. The instigating incident was an editorial written by a man identifying himself as Alexander to the *Dresden Enterprise* of West Tennessee. Claiming to be a member of the First Tennessee Volunteers in Manila, the author criticized the grandeur of Catholic churches and questioned the motives of Catholic priests to truly Christianize the local inhabitants. The *Herald's* editors responded furiously, calling the man a "cornfed philosopher," "an unmitigated liar," and "a cowardly and ignorant traducer."<sup>64</sup> Noting the man's Scotch-derived name, the editors "respectfully" referred the "brutal, ignorant and brazen insulter from the swampy marshes of West Tennessee" to "the kilted Highlanders."<sup>65</sup> The vitriol of the article was both uncharacteristic and seemingly unjustified. Alexander's references were to Catholic actions in the Philippines, not Tennessee, and, importantly, the *Herald* article responding to him was only one of two such articles to appear in the entire lifespan of the paper. Despite the historical stereotype that Catholics in Southern states like Tennessee were constantly under siege from nativists, *The Catholic Herald* bears minimum evidence of such hostility. Perhaps, then, the editor's harsh treatment of Alexander is more telling of the insecurity surrounding their paper's future than Catholicity in Tennessee generally.

From its earliest issues, it was evident that the *Herald* faced significant headwinds. Though the paper launched with an ambitious plan rapidly gain readership by allowing families to register for a three-month subscription on a buy-now-pay-later basis, it became apparent that

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<sup>64</sup> "And Still Another Bigot," *The Catholic Herald*, February 25, 1899, 4.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

the pay-later side of the arrangement was going to cause problems. The paper's frustration was on display in a July article that browbeat local Catholics for not offering more financial support.

“We have received promises by the score,” the paper wrote, “but the fulfillment of the majority of them is set in the far distant future.”<sup>66</sup> Appealing to readers' faith, the paper reminded them that “it is actually a breach of the teaching of Catholic truth to



Figure 3: Timothy's Dry Goods Ad, *The Catholic Herald*, April 22, 1899, 2.

refuse aid in the dissemination of the truths of our Holy Religion when we are afforded the opportunity to do so.”<sup>67</sup> The paper also took aim at both secular and sectarian merchants for not purchasing ads. The excuses offered provide insight into lingering issues. According to the paper, Catholic merchants refused to advertise because they couldn't afford to attract only the business of Catholics. Non-Catholic merchants claimed that Catholic patrons were too clannish and often refused to trade with them, especially if they had displayed any connection with the APA movement earlier in the decade.<sup>68</sup> Timothy Dry Goods Company, however, was among a core group of advertisers that supported the paper from its earliest days. Starting in April 1898

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<sup>66</sup> “Catholics and The Herald,” July 16, 1898, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> “Catholic Patronage,” *The Catholic Herald*, August 13, 98, 4.

and continuing the paper's final issues a year later, the Timothys purchased a total of 14 ads of various sizes and received a special thank you from the editors in which they called the firm "too well and favorably known to need any introduction from us."<sup>69</sup> Such nods seemed to work as local businesses started to purchase increasing amounts of ad space throughout late 1898 and early 1899. Regardless of improving ad revenues, however, collecting debts for past-due subscribers proved costly, and by December the editors were asking locals to not subscribe unless they intended to pay. By January, the paper pleaded with readers to help it reach 3,000 paying subscribers or risk closure. It laid at least some of the blame at the feet of the diocese's priests. "If our several pastors, both in this and other cities, would exert themselves a little in our interest," the paper complained, "we could soon place before you a paper of which every Catholic may feel justly proud."<sup>70</sup>

The problems facing the *Herald* were not unique. Small Catholic papers were struggling across the country. For example, the *Connecticut Catholic* that had praised the *Herald* in early June 1898 closed its own doors later that same month. Even with diocesan sanction, there simply wasn't enough appetite for a weekly Catholic paper. The problem, however, may have been neither a small Catholic population nor a lack of funds within that population. Instead, the large amount of positive coverage given to Catholics by mainstream secular papers like the *Nashville Banner* and *Nashville American* may have caused Catholic Tennesseans to have less

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<sup>69</sup> "Timothy's," *The Catholic Herald*, June 25, 1898, 6; "Timothy's," *The Catholic Herald*, July 2, 1898, 8; "Timothy's," *The Catholic Herald*, July 9, 1898, 8; "It Seems Absurd," *The Catholic Herald*, September 24, 1898; "It Seems Absurd," *The Catholic Herald*, October 1, 1898, 8; "It Seems Absurd," *The Catholic Herald*, October 8, 1898, 8; "Timothy's," *The Catholic Herald*, April 22, 1899, 2; "Timothy's," *The Catholic Herald*, April 29, 1899, 2; "Timothy's," *The Catholic Herald*, May 6, 1899, 2; "Timothy's," *The Catholic Herald*, May 13, 1899, 2; "Timothy's," *The Catholic Herald*, May 20, 1899, 2; "Souvenir Week," *The Catholic Herald*, June 3, 1899, 3; "Souvenir Week," *The Catholic Herald*, June 10, 1899, 2; "Souvenir Week," *The Catholic Herald*, June 17, 1899, 2.

<sup>70</sup> "Don't," *The Catholic Herald*, December 10, 1898, 3; "We Want," *The Catholic Herald*, January 7, 1899, 8; "Pastors and the Press," *The Catholic Herald*, January 21, 1899, 4.

need for a dedicated Catholic publication. In a sense, the Bishop Byrne's Americanization and Southernization efforts were already bearing fruit, though to the detriment of Connor and Hussey's experimental paper.

On the other hand, the issue may have been that the diocese's endorsement was not full-throated enough to convince Tennessee Catholics that the paper truly spoke for Catholic interests. Though Byrne officially recommended the paper, he also reminded readers the diocese did so "without...assuming any responsibility for the opinions of the editor or others whose writings may appear in its columns."<sup>71</sup> He took no steps to harm the paper, but he also extended no special treatment to help it.<sup>72</sup> Regardless of the exact cause, the *Herald* closed its doors in July 1899 after just fifteen months of operation. Tennessee Catholics would have to wait sixteen years for another organization with a broader mission, higher soapbox, and deeper pockets to fill the void the *Herald* left behind.

### **Anti-Hyphenism and the Shadow of War**

The second major challenge to Catholic assimilation during this period targeted the still hyphenated linkage between being both Irish and American. "To be Irish," Joseph O'Grady once wrote, "was to be Catholic."<sup>73</sup> Except for pockets of German and Italian Catholics, the opposite was also true for Catholics in Tennessee: to be Catholic was to be Irish. In previous decades, ethnic-religious dominance by the Irish had been a political and economic boon to Catholics. Not only had Irish families like the Simmons, Moores, and Timothys augmented each other's

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<sup>71</sup> "Episcopal Approval," *The Catholic Herald*, March 30, 1898, 4.

<sup>72</sup> Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 290.

<sup>73</sup> Joseph O'Grady, *How the Irish Became Americans* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1973), 107.

wealth through marriage and business co-ownership, but the tendency of Irishmen to live near each other had won them attention in state- and city-level politics. Whether residing in the seedy ‘Jungle’ district or respectably middle-class ‘Little Ireland,’ Irish Catholics had proven their ability to swing political contests like the 1897 mayoral contest. The political, economic, and social relationships of the merchant-elite Irish living in the affluent suburbs augmented Irish influence further. The Irish-assisted successes of the political machines of Hilary Howse in Nashville and Edward H. Crump in Memphis were also proof of the importance of winning the Irish vote. The same was true of Catholic Thomas J. Tyne’s run for the governor’s office in 1912. In fact, the impulse to lean Democratic was so strong that it even drew the Irish to vote for Woodrow Wilson in the Election of 1912 despite his label as “perhaps the most notable anti-German, anti-Irish, and anti-Catholic dogmatist” of the era.<sup>74</sup>

Beginning in 1915, however, Irish Catholics came under heavy fire nationally by prominent leaders, including Wilson, in a nativist attack called ‘hyphenism.’ Largely a response to the pro-neutrality stance of many Irish-Americans, hyphenism once again called Irish loyalty into question.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, few traits remained so inherently Irish as Anglophobia. An intervening century had done little to slack the abiding hatred for Britain that smoldered just beneath the surface of most every Irishman’s breast. As the storm clouds of World War I gathered, no topic consumed the Irish imagination more than the looming possibility of an Anglo-American alliance. Despite gains in respectability in their adopted homeland, Irish Americans were unwilling to abandon the dream of Irish Home Rule.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> French, “Irish American Identity,” 225.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 220.

<sup>76</sup> Michael Mulcrone, “The World War I Censorship of the Irish-American Press,” (PhD. diss., University of Washington, 1993), 104, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

The Irish press, however, once again framed support for Ireland as patriotic Americanism. Attempting to align Anglophobia with American foreign policy interests, the Irish press tapped ideals from the American Revolution to cloth Irish independence in colors of red, white, and blue rather than green and orange. The anti-hyphenites countered by advocating for a form of “Anglo-conformity” that fused American patriotism and Anglophilia and excluded groups claiming dual loyalty.<sup>77</sup>

The use of hyphen as a derogatory term originated with Theodore Roosevelt in 1894. He argued that “some Americans need hyphens in their names because only part of them has come over.”<sup>78</sup> Woodrow Wilson and his anglophile cabinet then popularized the term prior to American entry into World War I. In a speech to the Daughters of the American Revolution in October 1915, Wilson declared that “very large numbers of our fellow citizens, born in other lands, have not entertained with sufficient affection and intensity the American ideal.” Roosevelt went even further, declaring that “there is not room in this country for hyphenated Americans.” He insisted that citizens who voted as “a German-American, an Irish-American or an English-American” were traitors to American institutions. Though the Irish press challenged Roosevelt’s charges, the campaign “left an enduring scar upon the public image of the Irish,” especially in the North.<sup>79</sup>

The turning point came on April 6, 1917, when the United States officially declared war on Germany. In the chaotic atmosphere that followed, Mulcrone chronicles how Northern Irish newspapers “scrambled to demonstrate their patriotism while the major secular papers went to

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 73, 163.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 165, 179.

torturous lengths to reconcile their conflicting sentiments.”<sup>80</sup> Insisting that a declaration of war on Germany was not analogous to a declaration of alliance with Britain, Irish newspapers extolled the patriotic loyalty of their readers. Ironically, Irish hopes for an independent Ireland now depended on Wilson and his Fourteen Points. Toward that end, Irish and Catholic organizations coordinated war drives nationwide to display their loyalty. The *Chicago Citizen* declared that “the Stars and Stripes were a prouder ensign for Irish-Americans...than even the wearing of the green.” Harking back to the contributions of Irish soldiers in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, the *Western Watchmen* argued that immigrants and their children were more likely to enlist than their unhyphenated brethren.<sup>81</sup> The Irish cause was further helped by intense war-driven backlash against German-Americans. In Tennessee, Luke Lea’s *Tennessean* newspaper fanned anti-German sentiments as growing public vitriol forced Germans Catholics to abandon their heritage rather than highlight it as the Irish did. German businesses, banks, and families changed their names to avoid backlash, but boycotts still bankrupted many German establishments.<sup>82</sup>

As World War unleashed political, social, and economic ripples across the country, Irish Catholics were well positioned to harness war mobilization as a springboard from pluralism of toleration to pluralism of inclusion. When Tomas D’Arcy McGee wrote in 1866 that Irish Catholics in America were “camped but not settled,” he meant that the Irish were still largely an “alien population...with foreign hopes and aspirations unshared by the people among whom they

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 184-186.

<sup>82</sup> Doyle, *Nashville In The New South*, 106.

live.”<sup>83</sup> Fifty years later, Irish Catholics living in the Diocese of Nashville defied this stereotype. Ruling over broad merchant empires, families like the Timothys, Moores, and Simmons were securely camped within the upper echelons of Tennessee society even if their 100 percent Americanism was not fully settled. For middle-class Irish living in enclaves like Nashville’s ‘Little Ireland,’ new opportunities in employment and improving public transit meant that the old ethnic encampments were rapidly dispersing into the developing suburbs that were now accessible by electric trolley. Viewed against the social upheavals inherent in New South urbanization, the loyalty and relative conservatism of Irish Catholics seemed a welcome respite from incessant change.

As the mobilization process progressed, Humphrey, Oliver, Christopher, and P.H. watched their sons depart for Europe. Both of P.H.’s sons were swept into the fray, but only one returned. Though he did not know it, James Simmons Timothy was about to become a state hero whose sacrifice provided his fellow Catholic Tennesseans with a symbol on which to stake their claim to 100 percent Americanism.

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<sup>83</sup> Thomas D’Arcy McGee, *The Irish Position in British and in Republican North America: A Letter to the Editors of the Irish Press Irrespective of Party*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Montreal: M. Longmoore Printing House, 1866), 6, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001958865>.

## Chapter 2

### That Truth and Freedom Might Live: Catholic Southernization In War and Peace

#### James Simmons Timothy

By 1916, a 23-year-old James Simmons Timothy had settled into the role of paymaster at the DuPont de Nemours plant in Wilmington, Delaware.<sup>1</sup> Though he had been offered an appointment to West Point from Democratic Congressman Horatio Claypool of Ohio, his poor eyesight caused him to repeatedly fail the physical exams.<sup>2</sup> Not wanting the opportunity to go to waste, James requested that his spot pass to his brother, Patrick Henry “Pat” Timothy, instead. As a result, James was still working at DuPont when the United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917. Answering the “call of the colors of his country,” he enlisted in the Officer’s Training Camp at Plattsburg, New York, in August. Commissioned as a Second Lieutenant by November, he set sail for France in January 1918. At



Figure 4: James Simmons Timothy, “Timothy, James Simmons,” Tennessee World War I Gold Star Records, 1918-1924 (RG 53), Tennessee Virtual Archive, <https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll26/id/11000/>

<sup>1</sup> Parts of the following chapter are adapted from my previous study, “A Flame Upon the Hearthstones: *The Columbian, The Cresset*, and Tennessee Catholicity, 1915-1932,” MA thesis, MTSU, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> “Captain Timothy Talks Nazi Commander Into Surrendering Garrison, Wins DSC,” *Nashville Tennessean*, September 23, 1945, 11.

their last meeting, Nonnie cautioned her son: “In danger and out of danger, my son, do not forget your God, your Creator.”<sup>3</sup>

Once in France, James entered the French War College, receiving the third highest rating in his class. By March, he was with the 80<sup>th</sup> Company, 6<sup>th</sup> Marines, on the front lines and quickly gaining a reputation for heroism and devotion to his men. He also remained true to his mother’s admonition. In the moments before battle, he would kneel and pray with his men before exclaiming “Boys let us go over the top in God’s name – let it be for God and Country!” According to a soldier under his command, Timothy’s platoon would “go through fire and water and worse” for their “gallant” Lieutenant.<sup>4</sup> During the Battle of Belleau Wood, many did just that when Lt. Timothy led 200 of them out of their trench and into no man’s land. The lieutenant was one of only five to return. In battle after battle, Timothy continued to expose himself to danger to stay by his platoon’s side.<sup>5</sup> His superiors took notice and praised him for immortalizing the marines “in the hearts of the French people.”<sup>6</sup> On May 31, Timothy was sent to the front lines of Chateau Thierry. That same day, a poison gas attack left him seriously injured, but he refused to leave his platoon.<sup>7</sup> Though weakened, he continued to lead his men. With each charge, his legend grew. Then came Friday, June 14.

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<sup>3</sup> “Timothy, James Simmons,” Tennessee World War I Gold Star Records, 1918-1924 (RG 53), Tennessee Virtual Archive, <https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll26/id/11382/rec/1>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> “Death of Lieut. Timothy,” *The Chattanooga News*, October 18, 1918.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> “Regarding Death of Lieut. Timothy,” *Nashville Banner*, October 17, 1918, 3.

Back in the states, Pat Timothy was reveling in “one of the most notable and picturesque weddings ever celebrated” at old St. Bernard’s Catholic Church in Easton, Pennsylvania.<sup>8</sup> Only two days prior, he had graduated second in his class from West Point. Now he awaited his bride, Veronica Marie Troxell, who was one of the best-known young ladies in Easton. When she entered the church, her white satin gown, court train, and overflowing bouquet of St. Joseph lilies made her the picture of youthful beauty. An unusually large crowd looked on as the opulent affair unfolded against the church’s brightly-colored gothic backdrop. For P.H. and Nonnie, the day must have felt like a pinnacle event. Though they had lost three children in infancy, their surviving sons were rapidly advancing in life. Pat was slated to return to West Point to accept a teaching position in the Mathematics department, and James was winning wide acclaim in France. For the moment, all was well with the Timothys.<sup>9</sup>

On the front lines near Chateau Thierry, James Timothy’s world on June 14 was one of blood and smoke rather than satin and lilies. Nonetheless, James’s mind remained on his little brother. According to James’s Captain, Bailey M. Coffenberg, James was excitedly discussing Pat’s wedding when his position fell under heavy German artillery fire from three sides. In the din and confusion that followed, shrapnel from a nearby shell-burst struck Lt. Timothy in the mid-back. In his last moments, the devoted son’s mind drifted to his mother and her final command. As he lay dying in Coffenberg’s arms, he kept his promise. “Into Thy hands, My God, I give my soul,” he uttered.<sup>10</sup> Moments later, Lt. James Timothy was gone. In a letter to Nonnie, Capt. Coffenberg expressed his admiration for the 25-year-old lieutenant: “my dear Mrs.

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<sup>8</sup> “Timothy-Troxell Wedding,” *Nashville Tennessean*, June 19, 1918, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> “Timothy, James Simmons,” Tennessee World War I Gold Star Records.

Timothy, it makes me feel proud to write to one who is the mother of such a splendid specimen of a real American officer as was Lieut. James Simmons Timothy.”<sup>11</sup>

Two weeks passed before news of Timothy’s death reached Nashville. “All Nashville will sympathize with Mr. and Mrs. P.H. Timothy,” the *Nashville Banner* wrote, because he “made the great sacrifice that his country might live and that Christianity should continue to dominate and direct the world’s civilization.”<sup>12</sup> His parents received dedications from both secular and sectarian organizations, including St. Cecilia Academy and the United Daughters of the Confederacy.<sup>13</sup> The *Nashville Tennessean* wrote in a front page story that another of Nashville’s sons had given his life so “that truth and freedom might live.”<sup>14</sup> Even General John Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, noted Timothy’s “fearlessness and fortitude” when announcing the posthumous awarding of the Distinguished Service Cross to his family.<sup>15</sup>

Lt. James Timothy’s patriotic death, however, cannot fully account for the memorial. Battlefield deaths like his were common, and there were certainly other local boys through which Nashvillians could have channeled their collective memory of the war. Pvt. Lambert H. Mocker had been the first Davidson County resident to die in the war several months before Timothy. His ship, the *Tuscania*, was torpedoed off the coast of Ireland in February 1918. As

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<sup>11</sup> “Death of Lieut. Timothy,” *The Chattanooga News*, October 18, 1918.

<sup>12</sup> “Decisive Battles,” *Nashville Banner*, June 28, 1918, 8; “Simmons Timothy Killed In Action,” *Nashville Banner*, June 28, 1918, 4; “Nashville Gives Another Son in Freedom’s Cause,” *Nashville Tennessean*, June 28, 1918, 1.

<sup>13</sup> “Cherish Memory of Lieut. Timothy,” *Nashville Banner*, July 5, 1918, 13; “Hickman Chapter Meets,” *Nashville Banner*, July 4, 1918

<sup>14</sup> “Nashville Gives Another Son In Freedom’s Name,” *Nashville Tennessean*, June 28, 1918, 1.

<sup>15</sup> “Pershing Honors Nashville Hero,” *Nashville Banner*, September 3, 1918, 1.

the son of a well-known businessman, a graduate of Nashville's public school system, and a member of Second Presbyterian Church, which was the third largest denomination in the city behind Southern Baptists and Methodists, Mocker appeared a far more obvious candidate for 'hero son' status than James.<sup>16</sup>

John Williams Overton, who was killed just five days after Timothy while leading the same 80<sup>th</sup> Company of Marines, was an even likelier candidate. Handsome, athletic, and born into a bloodline of Tennessee aristocracy extending back to the state's founding, the Yale University-educated track and field champion exuded "moral and physical strength."<sup>17</sup> His appeal was especially strong given the growing "Muscular Christianity" movement, which positioned physical fortitude as an avenue to obtaining higher individual morals and the propagation of Christian belief.<sup>18</sup>

Nor was James the only Timothy to die in battle in 1918. His cousin, Second Lieutenant Christopher Timothy, Jr., fell at Chateau Thierry just a month after James. Having spent 117 days in the trenches in the early spring, Chris Timothy was even more battle-worn than James. His graphic description of life on the front lines in a letter to Chattanooga Mayor Jesse Littleton was published in the *Chattanooga Daily Times* in April of that year. According to his superiors,

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<sup>16</sup> "Mocker, Lambert Henry," Tennessee World War I Gold Star Records, 1918-1924 (RG 53), Tennessee Virtual Archive, <https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll26/id/8703/rec/1>.

<sup>17</sup> Karl Miran, "Muscular Christianity, Military Hero John Williams Overton in the Great War," *Cogent Arts and Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2019): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2019.1600208>.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel S. Hill, ed, *Religion*. Vol 1 of *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, Charles Reagan Wilson, James G. Thomas Jr., and Ann J. Abadie, ed (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 150.

Chris was also highly admired among his men and died valiantly leading a charge against German machinegun nests during the crossing of the Qurcq River.<sup>19</sup>

Yet none of those young men drew the large crowd to Centennial Park on that sunny Saturday afternoon in May 1919. Neither did they receive individual memorials. The only soldier to receive such an honor was Lt. James Timothy. Why? The answer reaches far beyond the individual. While James Simmons Timothy was universally hailed as “popular and well thought of” young man, his memorialization speaks more to the long struggle by Irish-Americans to gain acceptance into mainstream Southern society than to his individual attributes.<sup>20</sup> I argue that James and the memorial tree in his honor became conduits for a deliberate effort by the Catholic press to advance the cause of assimilation via participation in World War I. As the son of a prominent family situated in the political, economic, and social heart of the state, James was an ideal candidate to advance the cause of Catholic claims to 100% Americanism. His family’s connection to Centennial Park, primarily through his Uncle Oliver, who had helped lead the Centennial Exposition, undoubtedly helped facilitate access to the prominent location. Though his cousin died just as bravely, James Timothy’s connection with the capital city augmented the potential impact of his memorial. In the end, the Diocese likely chose James Timothy for the similar reasons to those that drove the Montgomery Improvement Association to select Rosa Parks as a symbol for the Civil Rights Movement a generation later: he was the right face in the right place at the right time. As of May 1919, he was a cog in a much

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<sup>19</sup> “Lieut. Timothy Among Dead,” *Chattanooga Daily Times*, August 13, 1918, 5; “Fell In The Ourcq Fight,” *Chattanooga Daily Times*, December 2, 1918; “News From Front Lines,” *Chattanooga Daily Times*, April 28, 1918, 9.

<sup>20</sup> “Timothy, James Simmons,” Tennessee World War I Gold Star Records.

larger assimilative machine that sought to settle the issue of Americanism for Irish Catholics for good.

### **Assimilation In War and Peace**

Mid-twentieth century historians emphasize how Irish Catholics used World War I to display patriotism and, as a result, convince skeptics of their ‘100 percent Americanism.’ Carl Wittke argues that both Irish-Americans and German-Americans abandoned their isolationist tendencies to harness war mobilization as a means of assimilation. “The hyphen,” Wittke insists, “dissolved in the heat of war.”<sup>21</sup> Joseph Edward Cuddy agrees that WWI transformed “Celtic patriotism” among Irish Americans “into a militant devotion to the land of their adoption.” Irish Catholics, he argues, were “continually anxious to prove that they were truly part of American society.”<sup>22</sup> Lynn Dumenil notes that the anticommunist rhetoric adopted by Catholic Americans during the 1920s was an extension of this deliberate strategy that sought to capitalize on war-time assimilative victories and further solidify Catholicism’s place in a more pluralistic American society.<sup>23</sup> Given the animus between capitalist republicanism in the United States and Bolshevism in the Soviet Union, planting a flag firmly in opposition to communism strengthened Catholic claims to unmitigated patriotism. Richard Gid Powers disagrees. He frames Catholic anticommunism as an act of collective defiance by Catholics against a nativist mainstream society. In his view, anticommunist sentiment was in line with “eating fish on Fridays, going to

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<sup>21</sup> Carl Whittke, *The Irish in America* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1956), 283.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Edward Cuddy, *Irish-America and National Isolationism, 1914-1920* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 138-139.

<sup>23</sup> Lynn Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties: ‘Assimilated’ Catholics’ Response to Anti-Catholicism in the 1920s,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11, no. 1 (Fall 1991): 22-23, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27500903>.

church on Sundays, and going to their own schools and colleges” as a “badge of defiance proudly worn as a sign of religious and communal identity.” It was an outgrowth of estrangement, not a solution for it.<sup>24</sup> Additional scholarship focuses on Catholic declarations of patriotism as a directed counter to specific nativist entities, such as the Ku Klux Klan and *The Menace*, rather than a broad push for inclusiveness.<sup>25</sup>

Joseph O’Grady concurs that the war “changed the structure of Irish-American nationalism,” but he frames support for the war as an effort to advance Irish independence internationally rather than obtain social acceptance domestically.<sup>26</sup> Michael P. Mulcrone agrees that Irish newspapers begrudgingly replaced expressions of Anglophobia and Irish nationalism with overtly pro-American language only after the Congressional war declaration left them with few alternatives. After all, newspapers that criticized Allied objectives faced potential backlash from both the public and government.<sup>27</sup>

Other historians break with the assimilation narrative completely and insist that American Catholics became more isolated during the 1910s and 1920s. Malcolm Campbell argues that many Americans found Irish-American opposition to Britain in the early days of World War I incongruous with American patriotism and suspected a global Catholic plot to slow the allied

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Gid Powers, “American Catholics and Catholic Americans: The Rise and Fall of Catholic Anticommunism,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 22, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 34, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25154931>.

<sup>25</sup> For monographs focusing on specific nativist organizations, see Kenneth C. Barnes, *Anti-Catholicism in Arkansas: How Politicians, the Press, the Klan, and Religious Leaders Imagined an Enemy, 1910-1960* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2016); Donald L. Kinzer, *An Episode in Anti-Catholicism: The American Protective Association* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964); Justin Nordstrom, *Danger on the Doorstep: Anti-Catholicism and American Print Culture in the Progressive Era* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); Philip N. Racine, “The Ku Klux Klan, Anti-Catholicism, and Atlanta’s Board of Education, 1916-1927,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1973), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40579872>.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph P. O’Grady, *How the Irish Became Americans* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1973), 125.

<sup>27</sup> Michael P. Mulcrone, “The World War I Censorship of the Irish-American Press” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1993), 104. ProQuest Dissertations & Thesis Global.

war effort.<sup>28</sup> Timothy Meagher insists that U.S. entry into the war did not result in a shift toward Americanization for Irish-Americans but rather a “militant American Catholicism” at odds with mainstream Protestantism.<sup>29</sup>

As is typical for the historiography of Catholic assimilation, what is lacking most is a consideration of how localism, especially as it was expressed in the inland South, affected assimilative campaigns. When place is considered, it invariably centers around Northern urban centers like New York, Chicago, and Boston. Mulcrone’s work, for example, focuses exclusively on Irish newspapers from New York, Chicago, St. Louis, and San Francisco. Each city had significant, rapidly multiplying Catholic populations thanks to successive waves of immigrants that began arriving in the second half of the nineteenth century. As a result, these locations were fertile soil for anti-Catholic rhetoric from native-born Protestants concerned about the Catholicism’s potential social, political and religious influence.<sup>30</sup> Dumenil argues that Catholic sources from the 1920s “teemed” with accounts of local and national outrages against Catholics that “reveal unhappiness, insecurity, and anxiety about Catholic’s ambiguous identity within American society.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Malcolm Campbell, *Ireland’s New Worlds: Immigrants, Politics, and Society in the United States and Australia, 1815-1922* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 174.

<sup>29</sup> Timothy J. Meagher, *Inventing Irish America: Generation, Class, and Ethnic Identity in a New England City, 1880-1928* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>30</sup> Lerond Curry, *Protestant-Catholic Relations in America: World War II Through Vatican II* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties,” 25-26.

The few historians who consider issues related to the inland south focus on states like Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, and Arkansas.<sup>32</sup> Their attention is likely due to the heightened nativist and Ku Klux Klan activity in those states, which is then assumed to be the status quo in other inland states. I argue, however, that the tone and content of Nashville's Catholic newspapers during the 1910s and 1920s indicate that Catholics living in the Diocese of Nashville achieved social acceptance earlier and experienced anti-Catholic antagonism less than Catholics living in other southern states.

### **Knights of Paper and Ink: The Knights of Columbus and *The Columbian*, 1915-1923**

During the late nineteenth century, fraternal orders rapidly expanded across the country. Whether the consequence of a lack of European-style social hierarchies or the basic need for professional networks amid "the social chaos of modern life," these societies proliferated to the point that up to one out of every five American men belonged to at least one fraternal order.<sup>33</sup> Irish Catholics, however, are frequently excluded from histories of fraternal societies because of the assumption that papal edicts forbade such membership. As a result, the experience of middle-class Protestants dominates the existing literature.<sup>34</sup> The assumption that Catholics shunned fraternal orders because of adherence to Vatican policy, however, is as deeply flawed as nineteenth-century nativist claims that Catholics were incapable of loyalty to the United States

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<sup>32</sup> Andrew S. Moore, "But We Were A Group Apart: Alabama Catholic Subculture and Twentieth-Century Southern Society," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 18, no. 3 (Summer 2000), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25154733>; Brendan J. Buttimer, "Turning Away from Georgia toward Rome: The Diocese of Savannah and the Growth of the Anti-Catholic Movement in Georgia, 1870-1970," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 21, no. 4 (Fall 2003), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25154875>; Barnes, *Anti-Catholicism in Arkansas*.

<sup>33</sup> Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 2.

<sup>34</sup> Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood*, 4.

for the same reason. In reality, Catholic fraternal lodges thrived at the turn of the century. Prominent examples included the Knights of St. Patrick, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, the Sons of Erin, the Catholic Order of Foresters, the Red Knights, the Irish Catholic Benevolent Union, the Hibernian Society, the Catholic Benevolent League, and the St. Vincent's Death Benefit League.<sup>35</sup> *The Catholic Herald* listed six such organizations in Nashville alone in 1899.<sup>36</sup> No society, however, achieved the long-term impact of the Knights of Columbus.

On a cold evening in February 1882, a group of mostly Irish Catholic men gathered in the basement of St. Mary parish in New Haven, Connecticut, to form a society dedicated to projecting a vision of Catholic-American manhood based on duty to family, faith, parish, and country. They named their order the Knights of Columbus (KoC) in honor of the revered Catholic explorer. Over the next two decades, the Knights grew into a national network that actively countered anti-Catholic narratives that Catholicism was incompatible with American patriotism. The predominately Irish society provided an alternative to Protestant visions of manly citizenship by uniting “multiple layers of individual, familial, religious, and social obligation into a singular, coherent code of conduct” that portrayed Irish immigrants as “exemplars rather than aberrations” to the American ideal.<sup>37</sup> The society’s core qualities of “good citizenship, service to the community, help for the unfortunate, fraternity, and above all, patriotism” were meant to make clear that Catholicism was more than congenial to American

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<sup>35</sup> Amy Koehlinger, “Let Us Live for Those Who Love Us: Faith, Family, and the Contours of Manhood Among the Knights of Columbus in Late Nineteenth-Century Connecticut,” *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 455-456, <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/stable/3790447>.

<sup>36</sup> “Catholic Societies,” *The Catholic Herald*, April 29, 1899, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Koehlinger, “Let Us Live,” 461.

democracy – it was an embodiment of it.<sup>38</sup> A critical aspect of their mission was the dissemination of pro-Catholic literature via the press. For the original Knights of New Haven, *The Columbiad* provided articles on the convergence of family, fraternity, Catholicism, and Americanism.<sup>39</sup>

As Catholics initiated new KoC councils across the country, corresponding Catholic newspapers spread with them. Though growth was initially confined to the Northeast and Midwest due to hesitation by insurance companies to issue policies in the epidemic-racked Southeast, the Knights eventually found their way into the South in the winter of 1900 by extending associate (non-insurance) memberships.<sup>40</sup> On December 30 of that year, over 150 Knights from across the country, including New Haven, Chicago, Cincinnati, and Louisville, gathered in Nashville to initiate the first council of the Knights of Columbus south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Meeting first in the basement of old St. Mary's Cathedral, the group then marched to the posh Duncan Hotel. Fatefully, P. H. Timothy, his brothers, and M.T. Bryan, the prominent local judge who would one day officiate at James Timothy's memorial ceremony, were among the seventy founding members. Following speeches by Bryan, Bishop Byrne, and Thomas Tyne, Nashville's Council No. 544 was officially tasked with pioneering the expansion of Catholic Knighthood throughout the rest of the South.<sup>41</sup> As a result, the Nashville chapter assumed immense importance in making a case not just for the Americanization but, more specifically, the

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee: A Sesquicentennial Story* (Nashville: Catholic Center, 1987), 282.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 459-461; Christopher J. Kauffman, *Columbianism and the Knights of Columbus: A Quincentenary History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 15.

<sup>40</sup> Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 283; "New Council," *Nashville Banner*, December 31, 1900, 6.

<sup>41</sup> "America's Greatest Lay Body," *The Columbian*, December 1921.

Southernization of Irish Americans. Its newspaper, *The Columbian*, assumed the mantle left by *The Catholic Herald* in 1899 but it achieved far greater success. Running from 1915 to 1927 with only a brief interruption in publication between 1918-1921, *The Columbian* served as a potent new ally to the assimilative programs of both Bishop Byrne and his successor, Bishop Alphonse J. Smith.<sup>42</sup>

*The Columbian* debuted in January 1915. From the beginning, the paper displayed a palpable need to defend the honor and loyalty of Irish Catholics. Often referencing previous struggles against the Know Nothings and the APA, its articles expressed a sense of general anxiety over continued anti-Catholic activity, especially from papers like *The Menace*.<sup>43</sup> The ability of “fair-minded” and “intelligent” Protestants to resist or, at least, ignore the religiously bigoted press, however, was just as frequently expressed.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, the paper did not portray Catholics as dependent on the benevolence of their fellow citizens. It printed numerous articles in its first year that emphasized Knights of Columbus efforts to harness the growing internal strength of Catholic communities.

The paper’s first issue noted how the “wealth and political power” of Tennessee Catholics in 1915 far exceed that of previous decades. “The Church,” the article stated, “was stronger and more revered in 1894 than in 1854; more in 1914 than in 1894.” It further argued that “only in small towns where Catholics are rare, and thus misunderstood, can *The Menace* do harm.” It commended Nashville as particularly friendly to Catholics, noting that “a city, large and educated as Nashville, naturally frowns upon bigotry.” Its coverage of *The Menace* was

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<sup>42</sup> “Knights of Columbus – Nashville #1,” Aquinas College Library, Nashville, TN.

<sup>43</sup> “Religious Bigotry,” *The Columbian*, April 1915, 3; “The Menace,” *The Columbian*, January 1915, 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

only necessary, the paper insisted, because Nashvillians had found copies of the paper “thrown upon their porches, unsolicited and unwelcome.”<sup>45</sup> The May 1915 edition noted the “glorious spectacle” of Catholic Easter celebrations that year compared to their “weak and futile” non-Catholic equivalents. The “steady, ever continuing manifestation of Catholic faith” in Nashville was a point of great pride.<sup>46</sup> In fact, the paper echoed the arguments made by Confederate leaders a half century before, advertising Tennessee as a more attractive option than Northern cities for immigrants seeking economic and social advantages.<sup>47</sup>

*The Columbian*'s emphasis on the growing place of Catholicism in Southern society contradicts much of the existing historiography. Historians point to diminutive Catholic influence as justification for excluding Irish Catholic Southerners from the broader historical debate. Portrayals in *The Columbian*, however, point to an expanding Catholic population whose wealth and prominence were broadly accepted by “honest Protestants” who viewed them as “friends and neighbors.”<sup>48</sup>

Another prominent feature of *The Columbian* was its constant reference to national loyalty and patriotism as hallmarks of Catholic faith rather than aberrations from it. “We love the country and our non-Catholic fellow-citizens as truly as they ever loved it or us,” the paper proclaimed.<sup>49</sup> A “deep interest in public life” was the essence of being a Catholic man. “Be proud of your citizenship and of the city, state and nation,” the paper asserted.<sup>50</sup> In response to

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Untitled Article, *The Columbian*, May 1915, 11.

<sup>47</sup> “Progress and Immigration,” *The Columbian*, July 1915, 3; “Southern Prosperity,” *The Columbian*, September 1916, 6; “Nashville Progress,” *The Columbian*, September 1916, 7.

<sup>48</sup> “The Menace,” *The Columbian*, January 1915, 7.

<sup>49</sup> “K. of C. Commission on Anti-Catholic Movement,” *The Columbian*, February 1915, 7.

anti-Catholic rhetoric that cast doubt on the ability of Catholics to display loyalty to both Pope and country, *The Columbian* insisted that “the Church teaches that patriotism is the highest duty of the citizen of the state, and the voice of history gives ample proof of the devotion of Catholics to their country’s cause.” Referencing the escalating war in Europe, the paper argued that “the spectacle of Catholics fighting shoulder to shoulder with their Protestant fellow-countrymen” against the Catholic and Protestant soldiers of the Central Powers was “obvious proof” of the compatibility of Catholicism and patriotism.<sup>51</sup>

Membership in Catholic fraternal orders like the Knights of Columbus was likewise defended as “the very essence of Americanism, the loftiest kind of patriotism and the sure pledge, warrant and guarantee of a deep and abiding love of country.”<sup>52</sup> “We Catholics,” the paper insisted, “lose no opportunity of affirming publicly and privately our loyalty to both State and Church.”<sup>53</sup> The paper had “no patience” for suggestions of a Catholic conspiracy against the United States. “The American Catholic,” it argued, “may take his theology from Rome, but he takes his politics from home – from the genius of our [American] institutions.” Another article insisted that the Catholic man was “as loyal to his party and to his government as the citizen of any church or denomination.”<sup>54</sup>

*The Columbian* also introduced the ‘liberty tree’ as a recurring symbol for Catholic patriotism. In response to accusations that Catholics were an alien population that threatened

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<sup>50</sup> Untitled Article, *The Columbian*, March 1915, 3.

<sup>51</sup> “Reform and Reformers,” *The Columbian*, June 1915, 5.

<sup>52</sup> “State Deputy’s Address to Knights,” *The Columbian*, July 1915, 4.

<sup>53</sup> “Committee on Prejudice,” *The Columbian*, September 1915.

<sup>54</sup> “A Human Buzzard,” *The Columbian*, August 1915, 5.

American liberty, the paper retorted that Catholics “transported the tree of liberty to these shores and helped to plant it.” It then asked if anti-Catholic activists believed Catholics were “foolish enough to destroy it” now that it was “bearing fruit.”<sup>55</sup> A speech from T. D. Hogan, a Catholic ex-attorney-general of Ohio, echoed the tree motif in the final edition of 1915. “I need not remind my fellow-citizen who worships at an altar different from mine that my rights on American soil are as firmly planted as his,” he argued, “and that every citizen, be he Jew or Gentile, Catholic or Protestant, has equal rights under the stars and stripes.” Hogan recounted a conversation with a Protestant judge on Ohio’s Supreme Court where he was told that “from the time that the [liberty] tree was planted here,” no group had been more active in defending it than the Catholics.<sup>56</sup> The image of Catholics defending of the tree of liberty alongside their Protestant and Jewish brethren perhaps inspired the designers of Lt. James Timothy’s memorial four years later.<sup>57</sup>

An important break with the tone of religious unity in the early issues, however, concerned the Young Men’s Christian Association, or Y.M.C.A. Framing the institution as wholly Protestant and inconsistent with Catholic values, the paper called on the Knights of Columbus to “go after the boys and hold them as the Y.M.C.A. holds them.” Once the U.S. entered World War I, the mistrust between the Catholic Church and the Y.M.C.A. became a critical sticking point that opened the door for Catholic participation in the training and care of American soldiers overseas. As of 1915, however, the Y.M.C.A.’s general secretary insisted that

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> “Catholic Citizenship,” *The Columbian*, December 1915, 8.

<sup>57</sup> “Catholic Loyalty,” *The Columbian*, November 1915, 4.

“it seems impractical for Catholics and Protestants to co-operate effectively and directly in a single organization of this kind.”<sup>58</sup>

Additional schisms with the current historiography also appear in the first years of *The Columbian*. Most historians insist that the Irish were at least partially aligned with German-Americans in their desire for a German victory over Britain. For the Irish, the argument goes, a German victory would ensure an independent Ireland. While issues related to Ireland and Irish Home Rule appear in at least eight articles over the first two years of *The Columbian*, there was no hint of an Southern Irish / German-American alliance.<sup>59</sup> Only a single mention of Irish sympathy toward German-Americans appeared in the March 1916 issue, but it was only in reference to Irish activities in New York, not Nashville.<sup>60</sup> In fact, the Kaiser was more frequently blamed for the war than any other single figure. Nashville’s Catholic community may have called for neutrality like their Northern brethren out of a shared revulsion for an Anglo-American alliance, but this stance did not equate to explicit support for Germany or German Americans.

A poem in the May 1915 edition equated “Kaiser, King, and Czar” as co-equal orchestrators of the “maddened course” of war. “Thy people have been led astray / By rulers, war-insane,” the poem read, “Through lust of power and jealous hate / Two million men are slain.” Emphasizing American patriotism, the poem then proclaimed, “Columbia, our favored land, / The nations look to thee; / To heal the wounds of cruel war / Thy mission soon shall be.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> “Catholic Y.M.C.A.,” *The Columbian*, July 1915, 5.

<sup>59</sup> “Irish Recruits,” *The Columbian*, January 1915, page number illegible; “A.O.H.,” *The Columbian*, February 1915, 6; “Erin,” *The Columbian*, March 1915, 1; “Home Rule and War,” *The Columbian*, August 1915, 5; “The Irish Soldier,” *The Columbian*, March 1916; “The Irish Rebellion,” *The Columbian*, May 1916, 6-7; “Ireland’s Sorrow,” *The Columbian*, June 1916, 5; “Home Rule,” *The Columbian*, August 1916, 5.

<sup>60</sup> “War Bulletins,” *The Columbian*, March 1916, 9.

<sup>61</sup> “The European War,” *The Columbian*, May 1915, 7.

Even word of the sinking of the Lusitania did not alter the dual-culpability of England and Germany as warmongers. A poem entitled “The Lusitania” read,

Of what avail to place the blame  
 On England’s cruel, dark design,  
 To starve a race? This deed of shame  
 Doth mock the laws, human and divine.  
 Are Germans mad with war’s wild rage?  
 Do Britons guard with human life  
 Their hidden arms? Can naught assuage  
 The horror of this awful strife?<sup>62</sup>

Yet another article equated England and Germany with the twin beasts of the Apocalypse in Revelations.<sup>63</sup>

The lack of criticism for Woodrow Wilson despite the anti-hyphen campaign was also noteworthy. A June 1915 opinion article by W.V. Barry, a newspaper publisher in the small West Tennessee town of Lexington, insisted that “no recent President, either Republican or Democratic, has been inclined toward religious bigotry, nor could any of them be led to demonstrate such feeling.”<sup>64</sup> The only cracks in support for Wilson appeared not over domestic policy but over his handling of the Mexico issue. Concerned about the Carranza Administration’s treatment of Mexican Catholics, *The Columbian* accosted Wilson for his role in helping Venustiano Carranza overthrow Victoriano Huerta. Though the paper ultimately laid blame at the feet of anti-Catholic advisors in Wilson’s inner circle, it worried that Wilson might “leave these murderers with their blood-stained hands on the throats of the Mexican people.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> “The Lusitania,” *The Columbian*, June 1915, 9.

<sup>63</sup> “Prophecy and the Present,” *The Columbian*, October 1915, 8.

<sup>64</sup> “Letter to the Columbian,” *The Columbian*, June 1915, 10.

<sup>65</sup> “Carranza,” *The Columbian*, November 1915, 1.

Admonitions from the Knights of Columbus to deny the new Mexican regime official recognition, however, left Wilson unmoved.<sup>66</sup>

By 1916, *The Columbian* began focusing on two themes: Catholic links to historic Anglo-American figures and the importance of military preparedness. The first theme represented a concerted effort to strengthen Catholic claims to Americanness through a shared mythical past. The May 1916 edition hailed new evidence that suggested George Washington was a direct descendant of Louis IX, the only canonized king of France.<sup>67</sup> In an effort to weaken veins of Anglophilia, the following month's cover story claimed that Catholic Jesuits had actually written Shakespeare's works.<sup>68</sup> The tendency toward rewriting elements of Americana in favor of greater Catholic influence was on full display in an August 1916 article that featured a version of the song "America" rewritten by Carmelite nuns.<sup>69</sup>

The second theme of preparedness appears more often in the 1916 issues than nearly any other topic. *The Columbian* emphasized the war's positive economic prospects but stopped short of endorsing direct military engagement.<sup>70</sup> Its hesitation continued to stem from issues with Britain, "the Perfidious Albion."<sup>71</sup> As circumstances edged the U.S. closer to allying with Britain, however, the paper began emphasizing how the war might affect Britain in ways favorable to Irish-American interests. The paper claimed that the combination of high Catholic

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<sup>66</sup> "K.C. and Mexico," *The Columbian*, December 1915, 7.

<sup>67</sup> "Washington A Descendant of St. Louis," *The Columbian*, May 1916, 8.

<sup>68</sup> "Shakespeare or Jesuits," *The Columbian*, June 1916, 1.

<sup>69</sup> "America," *The Columbian*, August 1916, 11.

<sup>70</sup> "War Bulletins," *The Columbian*, February 1916, 9; "War News," *The Columbian*, January 1916, 10; Untitled article, *The Columbian*, March 1916, 7; "War Bulletins," *The Columbian*, March 1916, 9; "The War," *The Columbian*, April 1916, 6-7.

<sup>71</sup> "Perfidious Albion," *The Columbian*, June 1916, 6.

birthrates and the changes wrought by war might turn both the United States and Britain away from Protestant and toward Catholic majorities.<sup>72</sup>

A final aspect of preparedness concerned Mexico. Carranza and his administration continued to be a point of friction between Catholics and Wilson in the early months of 1916.<sup>73</sup> Once Wilson called for volunteers to pursue Pancho Villa in retaliation for his attacks on the town of Columbus, New Mexico, however, discontent vanished. In its place came a vehement patriotism specifically designed to silence anti-Catholic critics and emphasize the superiority of Catholic patriotism over its Protestant counterparts. *The Columbian* proclaimed in August 1916 that “the blatant exponents of anti-Catholic bigotry in this country...will be filled with consternation when they read of the magnificent response made by the Catholic organizations and regiments to the President’s call for troops to uphold the honor of the flag.” The paper listed anti-Catholic organizations and their leaders by name and mocked their inferior contributions to the President’s agenda in Mexico. “All honor to the loyal American soldiers who have offered their services...in defense of the flag,” the article continued, “all honor to their Catholic fellow-citizens no less loyal and brave, who, in the hour of the country’s need, are true to the loftiest inspirations of patriotism and Catholicism!”<sup>74</sup>

During the opening months of 1917, *The Columbian* continued to build a case for Catholics’ place in American society. The March issue featured a four-page article on how the Knights of Columbus celebrated Washington’s birthday. “The Knights of Columbus,” said Grand Knight F. J. McCarthy, “[take] advantage of every opportunity to instill into the minds and

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<sup>72</sup> “War Changing Many Things,” *The Columbian*, June 1916, 3.

<sup>73</sup> “Mexico,” *The Columbian*, February 1916, 10.

<sup>74</sup> “Preparedness,” *The Columbian*, August 1916, 1.

hearts of its members a feeling of love and loyalty for their native land and of veneration for those heroic men who dug deep the foundations of this republic.” The real threat to American society, he insisted, was “the ghost of evil suspicion” in religion, politics, and business.<sup>75</sup> The same issue included articles pointing out that both Buffalo Bill and William H. Moran, President Wilson’s chief of security, were Catholics.<sup>76</sup>

The “clarion call” to Catholics, however, came with the U.S. declaration of war against Germany in April 1917. The May edition reproduced the “patriotic address” of Reverend Thomas S. Byrne, Bishop of Nashville, to the clergy and laity of his diocese. He called on the Catholics of Nashville to “follow such course as will stamp them notable among American citizens.” “We are at war,” Bishop Byrne reminded his listeners, “and no matter what our sentiments may have been or our sympathies prior to the declaration of war, our country’s foes are our foes and our country’s friends are our friends.” “We are all American citizens,” Byrne intoned, “proud of our privilege, of the traditions of our past and of our institutions, and to preserve them we are ready to go where patriotic duty calls.”<sup>77</sup>

From the war declaration onward, the language of *The Columbian* became singularly patriotic in nature, proclaiming the loyalty, obedience, and “patriotic zeal” of all Catholics to serve their “beloved country” as “instruments of God” against an “alien enemy.” Irish Catholics

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<sup>75</sup> “Washington’s Birthday,” *The Columbian*, March 1917, 1-4.

<sup>76</sup> “Buffalo Bill Died a Catholic,” *The Columbian*, March 1917, 5; “He Guards the President,” *The Columbian*, March 1917, 4; “William H. Moran, Aided Presidents; Secret Service Ex-Chief Dies – Counterfeit Expert Had Been With Agency 54 Years,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1946, 7.

<sup>77</sup> “Clarion Call to Catholics,” *The Columbian*, May 1917, 1-2.

were particularly noted for their willingness to sacrifice.<sup>78</sup> When the American Irish Historical Society pledged its “ardent and continuous support, morally, materially and physically, of the righteous war which the United States is waging,” the paper printed President Wilson’s reply that he had “entire confidence in their pledges.”<sup>79</sup>

Any animosity toward Wilson or Roosevelt that lingered in Irish Catholic communities elsewhere in the country was nowhere expressed in 1918 issues of *The Columbian*. Nor were the expressions of support given to Wilson and Roosevelt begrudging. References to both gushed with praise for their intellect, character, and leadership. One article described Roosevelt as a “romantic figure” who “inspires confidence and enthusiasm in vast numbers.”<sup>80</sup> Wilson and Roosevelt’s support for Irish independence intensified the paper’s praise further.<sup>81</sup> *The Columbian* noted that “Wilson had a golden opportunity to show a magnanimous spirit, and he has done so.”<sup>82</sup>

The year 1917 also marked a defining moment for the Knights of Columbus as political activists. The society successfully petitioned the War Department to assume responsibility for the physical and spiritual wellbeing of Catholic soldiers in the American Expeditionary Force.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid; “Our Nation’s Flag,” *The Columbian*, May 1917, 4; “American Cardinals Make Patriotic Appeals,” *The Columbian*, June 1917, 1; “K.C. Patriotism,” *The Columbian*, June 1917, 3; “The Star Spangled Banner,” *The Columbian*, July 1917, 5; “President Replies to Archbishops,” *The Columbian*, July 1917, 9; “Catholic Patriotism,” *The Columbian*, August 1917, 6; “Kentucky Governor’s Tribute,” *The Columbian*, August 1917, 10; “Greatest Republican Institutions,” *The Columbian*, August 1917, 12; “The Knights of Columbus,” *The Columbian*, October 1917, 2; “K.C. at Camp Pike, Arkansas,” *The Columbian*, December 1917, page number obscured.

<sup>79</sup> “Society Goes on Record,” *The Columbian*, December 1917, 4.

<sup>80</sup> “The War Situation,” *The Columbian*, May 1917, 6; “American Cardinals Make Patriotic Appeals,” *The Columbian*, June 1917, 1.

<sup>81</sup> “Ireland’s Freedom,” *The Columbian*, June 1917, 6; “John Redmond Endorsed,” *The Columbian*, June 1917, 12; “Roosevelt Writes to Knights of Columbus,” *The Columbian*, October 1917, 10.

<sup>82</sup> “Catholic Patriotism,” *The Columbian*, August 1917, 6.

In August, the Knights made an initial pledge to raise \$1,000,000 for the construction of Catholic-based recreation and religious buildings for troops abroad and at home.<sup>83</sup> Up to this point, the sole responsibility for these types of services had rested with the Y.M.C.A., which the Catholic church still broadly mistrusted as a corrupting force on young Catholic men. From the summer of 1917 onward, the Knights cared for Catholic soldiers while the Y.M.C.A. continued work on behalf of non-Catholics. The initial million-dollar pledge quickly swelled by October to \$3,000,000.<sup>84</sup>

The dramatic increase in funding was due in part to the KoC realizing the degree to which patriotic service could forward its assimilative campaign. The U.S. government also realized the tremendous amount of material support the Knights could muster and, therefore, actively encouraged their participation.<sup>85</sup> Other organizations soon joined the Knights. The Ladies' Catholic Benevolent Association, for example, gave President Wilson direct control over a fund of \$2,500,000 that had taken them twenty-seven years to accumulate.<sup>86</sup> The Nashville community was noted as particularly successful in supporting the war effort, ranking higher than any other Southern city for Liberty Loan subscriptions.<sup>87</sup>

The war effort also advanced the struggle against anti-Catholic publications and substantiated Catholic warnings that the bigots were the true non-Americans.<sup>88</sup> When Arkansas

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<sup>83</sup> "\$1,000,000 for Soldiers' Needs," *The Columbian*, August 1917, 1.

<sup>84</sup> "K.C. War Fund," *The Columbian*, October 1917, 1.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> "Ladies Offer President \$2,500,000," *The Columbian*, August 1917, 4.

<sup>87</sup> "Nashville Praised for Liberty Loan Efforts," *The Columbian*, August 1917, 5.

<sup>88</sup> "Our Warning Proven," *The Columbian*, September 1917, 6; "He Prefers the Catholic to the Watsonian Type of Citizen," *The Columbian*, October 1917, 12.

Governor Charles H. Brough addressed one of the recently opened Knights of Columbus war camps, he reflected how “people of all religious denominations” had “joined hands” in “this hour of our nation’s stress and strife” despite forces that could otherwise divide them.<sup>89</sup>

*The Columbian* printed only six issues in 1918 before suspending publication until the end of 1921 due to war-related funding challenges.<sup>90</sup> Those issues were filled with much of the same rhetoric that characterized 1917. Leaders from both the Church and U.S. government continued to exchange compliments and promises of continued support.<sup>91</sup> Irish independence remained an important issue, though one that was now taken as a near guarantee after the war’s conclusion.<sup>92</sup> Toward that end, the Ancient Order of Hibernians were particularly active in harnessing war mobilization so that “the members of [their] Order and of [the Irish] race will justify the esteem of their fellow citizens.”<sup>93</sup>

The 1918 editions of *The Columbian* also displayed a radical shift in the public facing relationships of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish organizations. On the front line in Europe, Catholic and Protestant chaplains worked together to form the “White Knights” of the 101st regiment. Open to both Catholics and Protestants, the group was a joint effort to promote purity among the soldiers.<sup>94</sup> The Knights of Columbus, the Y.M.C.A. and the Young Men’s Hebrew

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<sup>89</sup> “K.C. at Camp Pike, Arkansas,” *The Columbian*, December 1917, 1-2.

<sup>90</sup> “Knights of Columbus – Nashville #1,” Aquinas College Library, Nashville, TN.

<sup>91</sup> “Pershing Approves K. of C. Field Work,” *The Columbian*, January 1918, 3; “Local K.C.,” *The Columbian*, February 1918, 8; “Cardinal Gibbons Aids Peace League,” *The Columbian*, May/June 1918, 5; “Rampant Capitalism Gone, Says Prelate,” *The Columbian*, May/June 1918, 13.

<sup>92</sup> “Irish Unrest,” *The Columbian*, January 1918, 7; “Irish Priests,” *The Columbian*, February 1918, 9; “An Irish Prayer,” *The Columbian*, March 1918, 8; “Ireland’s Case Decided,” *The Columbian*, April 1918, 4; “Irish Wit,” *The Columbian*, May/June 1918, 12; “Old 69<sup>th</sup> New York Has 200 Wounded,” *The Columbian*, July 1918, 5.

<sup>93</sup> “Call for A.O.H. War Fund,” *The Columbian*, February 1918, 3.

<sup>94</sup> “Soldier Boys At Mass In France,” *The Columbian*, February 1918, 4.

Association (Y.M.H.A.) also began working more closely. The Knights of Columbus declared that they intended to work “shoulder to shoulder” with the Y.M.C.A. and reminded readers that “an All-American war” demanded “All-American” unity.<sup>95</sup>

The spirit of inter-denominational cooperation also appeared in Nashville. When Council No. 544 announced a campaign to raise an additional \$10,000 for the war effort in April 1918, it did so in cooperation with the city’s Protestant and Jewish communities. According to *The Columbian*, the groups worked “side by side in war welfare work.” When the Nashville Knights exceeded their goal by \$15,000, the paper credited non-Catholics who “took up a large part of the undertaking with fine generosity and success.”<sup>96</sup>

During *The Columbian*’s publication hiatus from July 1918 to December 1921, word of James Simmons Timothy’s death reached Nashville. In the paper’s absence, the secular *Nashville Banner* provided the a secular perspective on Timothy’s sacrifice. Its articles praised Lt. Timothy’s valor and adopted him as a hero son of the entire community. “Lieutenant Timothy was one of the most popular and well thought of young men that Nashville has given to the service,” wrote the *Banner* in July 1918. Coverage of his memorial ceremony was equally laudatory. While each article referenced Timothy’s Catholic faith in some form, the tone was neither exclusionary nor judgmental. There was nothing alien about his attendance of mass, his parochial education, or his personal statements of Catholic faith. He was an American. He was a Nashvillian. He was fully and unconditionally a ‘hero son’ of Tennessee.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> “Bishop Gunn Addresses 25,000 Soldiers at Camp Shelby,” *The Columbian*, February 1918, 5; “K.C. War Fund,” *The Columbian*, March 1918, 8.

<sup>96</sup> “Knights of Columbus War Campaign Fund Drive,” *The Columbian*, April 1918, 11; “Nashville K.C. Drive,” *The Columbian*, May/June 1918, 7.

<sup>97</sup> “Timothy, James Simmons,” Tennessee World War I Gold Star Records; “Memorial to Lieut. Timothy,” *Nashville Banner*, June 1, 1919; “To Hold Timothy Memorial Saturday,” *Nashville Banner*, May 27, 1919; “Memorial to Lieut. Timothy,” *Nashville Banner*, June 1, 1919.

When *The Columbian* returned to print in December 1921, it opened with a history of the Knights of Columbus, reestablishing both its national and local pedigree. It also emphasized the positive effects of the war effort on Nashville Catholics. “The unselfish patriotism of the Knights of Columbus in war work,” it argued, “introduced them to the world in their true colors, as they had not before been known.” Their effort “for God and country during the hardships of war” established “the high standard ideal [sic] of patriotism.”<sup>98</sup> The new mission of the Nashville Knights was to not only foster “good Catholics” but to break down barriers between Catholics and Protestants.<sup>99</sup> The paper also highlighted the positive relationships between the Knights and prominent national figures like Secretary Herbert Hoover, Secretary Charles Hughes, Vice President Calvin Coolidge, and President Warren Harding.<sup>100</sup>

From 1922 to 1923, anti-Catholic anxiety shifted away from the nativist press to entities like the Ku Klux Klan. While religiously bigoted newspapers caused a general sense of social assault in the pre-war years, the Klan gave bigotry in the postwar period a face against which Catholic publications like *The Columbian* could contrast Catholic Americanness. Catholic communities saw natural allies in “tolerant Protestants, respectable Jews and helpless negroes.”<sup>101</sup> The Church framed the fight against the Klan as not “in the especial interest of the Catholic, or the Jew, or for certain races of colors of our citizens” but rather as a crusade against “a movement which is dangerous to the Protestant, the white citizens and all classes of our

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<sup>98</sup> “America’s Greatest Lay Body,” *The Columbian*, December 1921, 10-11.

<sup>99</sup> “A Loyal Knight,” *The Columbian*, December 1921, 14.

<sup>100</sup> “America’s Greatest Lay Body,” *The Columbian*, December 1921, 11; “Harding an Enemy of Bigotry,” *The Columbian*, September 1923, 5.

<sup>101</sup> “Knights Take Over Klan Lecturer’s Meeting,” *The Columbian*, May 1923, 6.

people.”<sup>102</sup> While *The Columbian* worried that the Klan might flourish in the period of post-war economic “reconstruction,” it successfully framed the Klan as an alien force emblematic of a type of bigotry not seen in Nashville for “some time”.<sup>103</sup> The paper argued that Catholics had earned their place in society through “the wonderful display of service by the soldiers of Catholic faith, and the self-sacrificing devotion of the Catholic chaplain, and the war record of the Knights of Columbus themselves.”<sup>104</sup>

### **Southernization**

The evidence suggests that Irish Catholics in Nashville were actively involved in or, at the very least, exposed to a purposeful assimilation campaign via the Knights of Columbus and *The Columbian*. While broad gestures of patriotism, loyalty, and general sacrifice in past wars mirrored sentiments expressed in Irish newspapers elsewhere, a close analysis of *The Columbian* reveals unique components that made the campaign in Nashville one of Southernization rather than traditional Americanization.

First, Irish Nashvillians did not find common cause with German-Americans or the German war campaign. Instead, animosity was focused against both England and Germany as unjust actors. As such, there was far less pre-war tension with President Wilson on issues other than Mexico. Democratic dominance in the South during the period contributed to a greater sense of loyalty to both country and party. *The Columbian*’s rapid, full-throated endorsement of

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<sup>102</sup> “Missouri Congressman Flays Invisible Empire,” *The Columbian*, November 1922, 6.

<sup>103</sup> “Psychology of Anti-Catholic Propaganda,” *The Columbian*, October 1922, 6; “No Religious Test,” *The Columbian*, September 1922, 6.

<sup>104</sup> “Joseph Scott on Latest Outburst by Bigoted,” *The Columbian*, November 1922, 10.

Wilson and other prominent anti-hyphen officials contrasted sharply with lingering mistrust in Irish communities outside the South.

There was also significantly less tension between Catholics and their Protestant neighbors in Nashville. While there was a palatable anxiety over anti-Catholic movements in the first years of *The Columbian*, threats were often framed as emanating from other parts of the country. Though the relationship between Catholics and Protestants in Nashville was not wholly harmonious, evidence suggests that tensions were lower than in the large urban centers in the North. While the current historiography attributes the lower tension to the diminutive presence of Catholics in the South, *The Columbian* challenges that premise by highlighting the growing wealth and influence of the Nashville Catholic community. Catholic numbers in the city were indeed falling at the turn of the century, but it would be inaccurate to call their presence diminutive. Even after decreasing from 6,000 congregants to 5,845 by 1916, Catholic numbers still exceeded both Southern Baptists and Southern Presbyterians. In fact, the only denomination of greater size were the Southern Methodists and National (Black) Baptists.<sup>105</sup> Within the Irish Catholic population, the Timothys provided a visible example of the degree of material and social success available to Irish Catholics.

The dedication of the Timothy memorial provides a final glimpse into the Southernization process. Not only did it require a large degree of interdenominational cooperation among Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, but it also enmeshed those organizations in a burgeoning Southern progressive agenda charted by the political figures involved, including A.H. Roberts, Anne Dallas Dudley, M.T. Bryan, and Luke Lea. Each played a crucial role in defining Nashville's future, and each sought the support of the city's potent Catholic community.

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<sup>105</sup> Don H. Doyle, *Nashville In The New South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983),123.

Yet the moment was not completely forward looking. The presence of Confederate veterans harkened to a time when Southern Catholics, seeing themselves as part of a distinct Southern culture whose values they were duty-bound to defend, threw in their lot with the Confederacy. Like the Confederate banners that hung throughout 206 Woodland during James Timothy's 8<sup>th</sup> birthday party, the veterans' presence pointed to the narrow path between loyalty to country and loyalty to region that Irish Catholics adeptly walked in their bid to belong in Southern society.

### **Inclusion**

As Judge Bryan approached the conclusion of his speech on that bright May Saturday in 1919, he paused to assess the symbolism of planting a tree as a war memorial. He envisioned the birds that would come from far and wide to nest among its branches and raise the next generation of their kind. He described the children who would play beneath its shade and inquire in their youthful curiosity about the story of the young soldier it honored. "Visitors of all ages," Bryan intoned, "seeking rest and recreation here, may likewise find in this memorial a quickening sense of patriotism, as they are reminded of the valorous deeds of this heroic son of the Volunteer State."<sup>106</sup> "Monuments are for the benefit of the living," he reminded the crowd gathered round the sapling, "not the dead."<sup>107</sup>

Thus, the soil shoveled onto the roots of Timothy's tree evoked in the most literal sense a claim by Irish Catholics to belong on Southern soil. The moment marked an inflection point at which Irish Catholics passed from pluralism of tolerance, which had permitted Timothy's family to gain wealth and influence, to pluralism of inclusion, which opened the door for Tennessee

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<sup>106</sup> Memorial to Lieut. Timothy," *Nashville Banner*, June 1, 1919.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

Catholics become Catholic Tennesseans. For the Nashvillians who filed out of Centennial Park that afternoon, the dreaded hyphen was nowhere to be found.

An opened door, however, is an opportunity, not a guarantee. There was still much work to be done for Catholic Tennesseans to reach full participation. Luckily a new generation of figures was emerging to further cement Catholicism as a state institution. Within the halls of diocesan power, Bishop Alphonse Smith picked up the assimilative campaign where Byrne had left off. For the Timothy family, the twenties also marked a period of significant change as the patriarchs passed away and their sons carried the Timothy legacy forward.

## Chapter 3

### A Flame Upon the Hearthstones: Catholic Identity In An Age of Extremes

#### Changing of the Guard

In the late 1920s, P.H. and Humphrey Timothy, the founding patriarchs of the family's empire, died within a year of each other.<sup>1</sup> Earlier in the decade, P.H. and Nonie had moved away from 206 Woodland to a downsized apartment in the Polk building on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue North. As a result, Nonnie needed a suitable place to hold the funeral when her husband P.H. passed in 1928. Despite their dramatic falling-out nearly three decades prior, Humphrey Timothy opened his West End Avenue home for his brother's service. Final rites for P.H. were said at Nonnie's beloved St. Mary's Catholic Church downtown. Eulogized by the *Nashville Banner* as both "a native of Ireland" and "long prominent in Nashville's business and religious life," P.H.'s passing was described as a loss to the community.<sup>2</sup> Even at the time of P.H.'s death, his own son's death in World War I was a prominent part the obituary.

Humphrey Timothy had remained an active part of Timothy Dry Goods and the greater Nashville community until the firm's liquidation two months prior to P.H.'s death. Within a year, Humphrey also died.<sup>3</sup> Both the Humphrey and the business he had started a half century

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of the following chapter are adapted from my previous study, "A Flame Upon the Hearthstones: *The Columbian, The Cresset*, and Tennessee Catholicity, 1915-1932," MA thesis, MTSU, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> "Death Calls P.H. Timothy," *Nashville Banner*, December 11, 1928, 1; "Last Rites for P.H. Timothy," *Nashville Banner*, December 12, 1928, 17.

<sup>3</sup> "Many Veterans Served Historic Firm," *Nashville Banner*, October 14, 1928, 2; "Heads Firm," *Nashville Banner*, December 6, 1928, 1.

prior were remembered as “integral [to the] business life of Nashville.” The *Banner* noted his “genial nature,” “kindly disposition,” and “quiet integrity” as qualities that “endeared him to those who knew him well.” “As a citizen,” the paper wrote, he “played his part well and favorably and was always available for community service.”<sup>4</sup> After causing one of the greatest commercial spectacles in the history of downtown Nashville, the storefront at 311-313 Third Avenue North closed and was quickly remodeled to house Greenspan’s department store.<sup>5</sup> In an echo of earlier articles that praised the young John Gilgan and Humphrey Timothy for being

“alive to the value of publicity,” the *Nashville Banner* assessed the throngs of people that gathered at Timothy’s on its final day in a single phrase: “It Pays to Advertise.” As one generation Timothys passed away, however, the next was rising.

P.H.’s youngest

son, Patrick Henry “Pat” Timothy, Jr., was emblematic of the rising profile of both the Timothy family and Catholics generally. After graduating from West Point in 1918, Pat taught

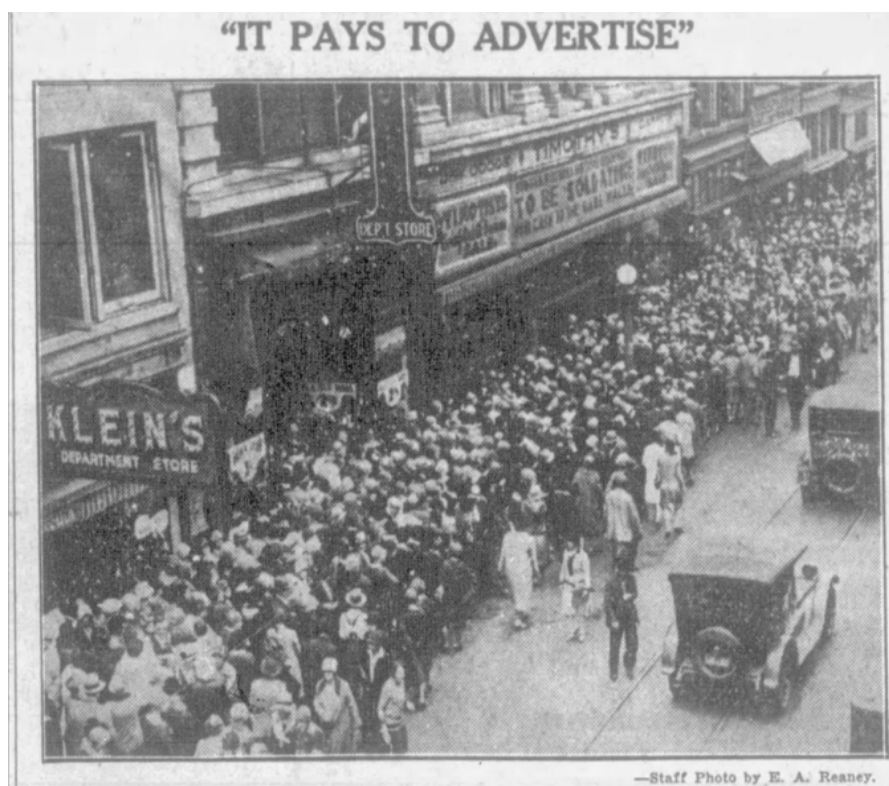


Figure 5: Closure of Timothy Dry Goods, Nashville, Tennessee, *Nashville Banner*, October 17, 1928, 13.

<sup>4</sup> “Humphrey W. Timothy,” *Nashville Banner*, January 2, 1929.

<sup>5</sup> “Greenspan’s To Open Monday,” *Nashville Banner*, March 3, 1929, 1.



Figure 6: Patrick Henry "Pat" Timothy, "Capt. Pat Timothy Goes to West Point," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, April 5, 1929, 17.

mathematics there until he was sent to the Massachusetts Institute for Technology to study civil engineering. From MIT, Pat was sent to the Philippines to command the 14<sup>th</sup> Engineer Regiment for two years. He then transferred to San Antonio, Texas, and then Chattanooga as a district engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.<sup>6</sup> While in Chattanooga, Pat focused on a survey, under the supervision of Major Lewis H. Watkins, of the Tennessee River Basin to investigate waterpower resources, navigation, and flood control. The survey's findings pointed to a potential power output that was "beyond reason," especially if harnessed by a single, interconnected system of management.

Unknowingly, Pat Timothy was leaving his fingerprints on what would become the foundations of the Tennessee Valley Authority.<sup>7</sup> By 1929, Pat was once again on the move, accepting an appointment as chair of the mathematics department at West Point. There he stayed until another great war called him to distant battlefields as it had his brother and cousins two decades earlier.<sup>8</sup>

Back in Centennial Park, Lt. James Timothy's hackberry tree was at least 13 feet tall by 1929. The fragile root system exposed during the memorial's dedication in 1919 had already

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<sup>6</sup> "Capt. P.H. Timothy Receives Honor," *Nashville Banner*, April 8, 1929; "Capt. Pat Timothy Goes to West Point," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, April 5, 1929, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Rodger Swingle, "A Review of the Report on the Survey of the Tennessee River Basin Made by the Corps of Engineers U.S.A." (Master's Thesis, University of Tennessee, 1929), 25, [https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_gradthes/14375](https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes/14375)

<sup>8</sup> "Retired General, Patrick Timothy, Services Slated," *The Tennessean*, October 31, 1981, 23.

sank deep into the Southern soil.<sup>9</sup> As the living embodiment of the assimilative campaigns of World War I, its symbolism became even more important as Nashville, the Timothys, and the Southern Catholic community navigated rapidly changing social and economic conditions in an “age of extremes” during the 1920s.<sup>10</sup>

## Hate Resurrected

Largely because of their successes during the war years, Catholics became a lightning rod for Protestant anxiety during the 1920s. Though Catholic organizations like the Knights of Columbus pointed to an impressive wartime record as evidence of their patriotism and loyalty, new and existing nativist groups continued to paint the Catholic community as an alien, menacing foil to their brand of 100 percent Americanism. Of all the nativist groups of the 1920s, the revived Ku Klux Klan was the most outspoken and politically potent. Reorganized by William Simmons beneath Stone Mountain, Georgia, in 1915, many of the second Klan’s principles were rehashes of decades-old APA arguments. While the new Klan retained much of the symbolism and violence of the original, there were also key differences.<sup>11</sup> Simmons’s Klan took great pains to control its public image and build off the widespread popularity of the 1915 blockbuster movie, *The Birth of a Nation*. The heroic notion of a Klan ready to patriotically defend pious Protestant virtue was carefully curated through self-produced movies, plays, and

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<sup>9</sup> “Memorial to Lieut. Timothy,” *Nashville Banner*, June 1, 1919; Forest Service, “*Celtis occidentalis* L.,” United States Department of Agriculture, accessed April 30, 2022, [https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/misc/ag\\_654/volume\\_2/celtis/occidentalis.htm](https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/misc/ag_654/volume_2/celtis/occidentalis.htm).

<sup>10</sup> Lynn Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties: ‘Assimilated’ Catholics’ Response to Anti-Catholicism in the 1920s,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11, no. 1 (Fall 1991): 22-23, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27500903>.

<sup>11</sup> Craig Fox, *Everyday Klansfolk: White Protestant Life and the KKK in 1920s Michigan* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 33-34; Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (New York: Liveright, 2017), 27.

romantic novels. Though Klansmen of the 1920s still relished secret rituals and masked parades, they were increasingly willing to reveal their affiliations publicly. Many 'legitimate' Klansmen distanced themselves from egregious practices like lynching, but they continued to employ actions of social terrorism, sometimes with police participation. Additionally, while the Reconstruction era Klan focused primarily on limiting African American suffrage and punishing 'scalawag' whites, Simmons's Klan was more wide-ranging in its discriminatory habits. Race was no longer the core issue. Instead, religious and cultural issues tied to immigration took center stage in a nation "already wrestling anxiously with the notion of the melting pot."<sup>12</sup>

The entrenchment of white supremacy and Southern Jim Crowism by 1922 contributed to the shift. With legal institutions effectively subordinating African Americans, Klansmen came to view "Catholics, Jews, immigrants, bootleggers, moonshiners, labor organizers, criminals, moral reprobates and even modernists" as greater threats to their vision of Americanism. Local organizers targeted community anxieties and offered the Klan as a solution.

The Klan's diversified portfolio of hate imbued them with a re-energized level of middle-class, mainstream legitimacy and allowed it to become an "institutional mechanism" for spreading its core prejudices. On its public face, however, the second Klan consistently denied overt prejudice against Catholics, at least to the degree that they were opposed to Jews and non-whites. Drawing on concepts of stadial development, the Klan insisted that Catholics were redeemable. They need only practice their faith without Roman, meaning the Vatican, influence to be welcomed by Klansmen as authentic Americans. Catholics, of course, were also welcome

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<sup>12</sup> Fox, *Everyday Klansfolk*, 33-34.

to convert to Protestantism. Jews and non-whites, on the other hand, were irredeemably lost to the blessings of Americanism.<sup>13</sup>

As the Invisible Empire took its first steps out of the shadows, Catholic Americans were busy solidifying their wartime gains into permanent entrenchment within American society. Despite consistent antagonism by the Klan and others like them throughout the 1920s, Lynn Dumenil argues that Catholics were too deeply rooted in large Northern cities to be ousted by nativist movements. Instead, nativism galvanized Catholic unity and emboldened Catholic Americans to articulate their vision of a pluralistic society in which Catholicism played an indispensable role.<sup>14</sup> Ironically, the Klan operated in much the same way. Opposition strengthened their resolve and swelled their membership. For example, Klan membership swelled in Michigan after the state moved to prohibit wearing masks in public in an effort to dampen Klan activity.<sup>15</sup> In what Dumenil calls “a political coming of age for Catholics in America,” Catholic Americans, particularly those of Irish descent, “sought to participate in American institutions and society on an equal footing with ‘mainstream’ Americans, without sacrificing their religious identity.” Adopting the same “nationalistic patriotism” as their nativist attackers, Catholic Americans appropriated “American history, heroes, and political ideas as their own.”<sup>16</sup> They also stepped confidently into the public sphere through the growing Catholic Action movement.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid; Kenneth C. Barnes, *Anti-Catholicism in Arkansas: How Politicians, the Press, the Klan, and Religious Leaders Imagined an Enemy, 1910-1960* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2016), 4, 92-95; David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), 33; Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK*, 28.

<sup>14</sup> Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties,” 28.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK*, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties,” 28.

Like their fellow Catholics worldwide, Southern Catholics adopted Catholic Action as a core means of pursuing their domestic interests. As both an organizational structure and an ideological framework, Catholic Action promoted greater ecclesiastical and political self-esteem within the laity while allowing for the modification of specific goals to suit local socio-political conditions. In America, echoes of the Red Scare earlier in the decade provided a ready-made foil against which Catholic activists could patriotically fight while still serving the edicts of their faith. Pope Pius XI framed Bolsheviks as servants of a modern antichrist bent on the destruction of religion in all its forms. Catholics actors thus took on a mantle of righteous anti-communism in an interwar “age of extremes.”<sup>17</sup>

To be certain, nativism was a ubiquitous presence in 1920s America, and that included various areas in the South. Having been born in Atlanta, the second Ku Klux Klan dominated that city’s political system for decades. The Atlanta Board of Education fought prolonged battles over the perception that the city’s small minority of Catholics were gaining undue influence over the public education system.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Georgia had a deep vein of anti-Catholic nativism given its history as one of the few Southern strongholds of the irksome American Protective Association in the 1890s.<sup>19</sup> Anti-Catholic print culture and Klan political activism were also prevalent in Arkansas. According to Kenneth Barnes, Arkansas was the type of “largely Protestant state in the Upper South” where “anti-Catholic sentiments were most intense in the

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<sup>17</sup> Klaus Grobe Kracht, “Campaigning Against Bolshevism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 53, no. 3 (July 2018): 551-559, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26500310>; Gerd-Rainer Horn, *Western European Liberation Theology: The First Wave (1924-1959)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 66-67.

<sup>18</sup> Philip N. Racine, “The Ku Klux Klan, Anti-Catholicism, and Atlanta’s Board of Education, 1916-1927,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 63, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40579872>.

<sup>19</sup> Brendan J. Buttimer, “Turning Away from Georgia Toward Rome: The Diocese of Savannah and the Growth of the Anti-Catholic Movement in Georgia, 1870-1970,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 21, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 27, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25154875>.

twentieth century.”<sup>20</sup> The South, however, was not monolithic in its nativism. The Atlanta Board of Education largely dismissed the Klan’s anti-Catholic conspiracy theories.<sup>21</sup> Though local diocesan decision making, such the Diocese of Savannah’s proclivity for appointing European-born clergy and deferring to Vatican policies, fed anti-Catholic activity in specific Southern cities, it did not spread to others.<sup>22</sup> Instead, dioceses across the South acted independently in ways that reflected the social and economic conditions around them. This chapter uses the lens of *The Cresset* to explore how the Diocese of Nashville adapted *The Columbian*’s assimilative campaign to fit the city’s ever-changing environment in the second half of the 1920s.

### **Passing the Torch**

Spring 1927 welcomed a new era of Catholicity in Nashville with the first edition of *The Cresset*. Replacing *The Columbian*, the new paper also marked the passing of responsibility for Nashville’s Catholic press from the Knights of Columbus to the Diocese hierarchy. Holding sway over all three grand divisions of the state, diocesan leaders planned to expand *The Cresset*’s reach and to represent the activities of all the state’s parishes. As such, the first article in *The Cresset*’s first issue established nine broad goals, including diocesan unity, advancement of Catholic education, encouragement of traditional ideals, and promotion of “progressive patriotism,” which the editors explained as “the elimination of bigotry, intolerance and

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<sup>20</sup> Barnes, *Anti-Catholicism in Arkansas*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Racine, “The Ku Klux Klan,” 74.

<sup>22</sup> Buttimer, “Turning Away from Georgia to Rome,” 35.

misunderstanding in national affairs.”<sup>23</sup> The editors assured Catholic readers that they would “no longer be struggling as a more or less isolated unit” but instead “have the united power of the whole diocese back of you.”<sup>24</sup>

Although replacing the Knights of Columbus as publisher, the Diocese commended the Knight’s past work as substantial in growing Catholicity in the state. In fact, the takeover was posed as evidence of that success given that a paper of broader regional character was needed. In a testament to continuing local support for the KoC, the editors reassured readers that the paper not only still served KoC interests but served them better by contextualizing their local activities within the broader mission of the Diocese.<sup>25</sup>

Predating Pius XI’s global push for ‘Catholic Action’ in 1929, the Diocese used its paper to centralize authority, propagate the faith, and build a lasting state institution in ways that did not emerge elsewhere in the South until the years after World War II.<sup>26</sup> Historian Andrew Moore notes that Catholic communities in the South prior to the mid-twentieth century did not enjoy the luxury of the kind of well-provisioned, ethnically centered parishes of Northern Catholics enjoyed. Catholic leaders in Alabama and Georgia did not make a concerted effort to “expand the Church’s infrastructure in the region, strengthen parish life and encourage engagement with southern society” until the 1940s.<sup>27</sup> The Diocese of Nashville, however, began its institution

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<sup>23</sup> “What the Cresset Stands For,” *The Cresset*, May 1927, 3. *The Cresset* paginated its issues such that ‘front page’ material technically appeared on page three. Page one was a cover image, and page two was always blank.

<sup>24</sup> “Some Things The Cresset Hopes to Do,” *The Cresset*, May 1927, 7.

<sup>25</sup> “The Cresset Succeeds The Columbian,” *The Cresset*, May 1927, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Kracht, “Campaigning Against Bolshevism,” 551.

<sup>27</sup> Moore, “But We Were A Group Apart,” 75.

building programs in the 1920s using methods tailored to both the city's socio-political conditions and the needs of its predominantly Irish Catholic community. As *The Cresset* explained in November 1931, Catholic Action was both an ideal and a tendency. As an ideal, it was “merely the putting into practice of Christian principles.” As a tendency, it was the “the propagation of right thinking and right acting.”<sup>28</sup>

Expressly non-political in nature, *The Cresset's* brand of Catholic Action was a bulwark “against the encroachments of the world, and specifically the modern world, upon the prerogatives of Christ's teaching authority.”<sup>29</sup> Catholic societies like the Knights of Columbus, laymen groups, and, in Nashville's case, the Catholic press worked together to promote the “Catholic Movement” within regional contexts.<sup>30</sup> As Kracht notes, the slogan “Laity to the fore!” became a popular rallying cry for closer ties between the Catholic Church and its adherents throughout the 1920s, and the nature of those ties was often highly specific to conditions on the ground.<sup>31</sup> In the late 1920s and early 1930s, *The Cresset* positioned itself as the guiding light for Tennessee's Catholic laymen to leverage their assimilative successes toward the establishment of Catholicity as an enduring institution in the state.

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<sup>28</sup> “The Meaning of Catholic Action,” *The Cresset*, November 1931, 11, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Kracht, “Campaigning Against Bolshevism,” 552.

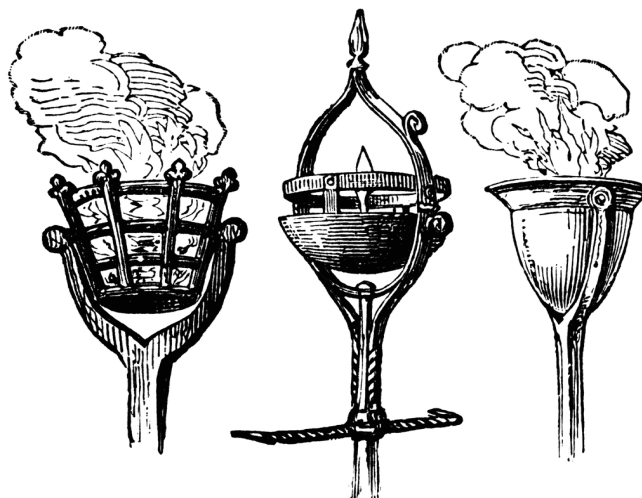


Figure 7: Sketch of Cressets, William & Robert Chambers. *Encyclopedia - A Dictionary of Universal Knowledge for the People* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co, 1881). [https://etc.usf.edu/clipart/21300/21307/cresset\\_21307.htm](https://etc.usf.edu/clipart/21300/21307/cresset_21307.htm).

The name change, explained the editors, also represented a shift in focus toward greater involvement and activism. Catholics had used cressets “in the splendid Catholic days of old England” to bear torches or other sources of light during religious ceremonies.

The editors proposed that *The Cresset* should become the “light-bearer in

Tennessee for the faith” in the hopes of creating “a fuller, more sincere, more enthusiastic and devoted Catholicity for the Diocese of Nashville” that harkened to earlier periods of “fervent, unquestioned” faith.<sup>32</sup> In a nod to the broad scope of articles they hoped to publish, the editors also reminded readers that cressets were once “woven into the intimate life of the people, a necessary adjunct of their business, or pleasure, or worship.” So too would *The Cresset* seek to become “a flame...upon the hearthstones” in Catholic homes and a guiding light in public life across the state.<sup>33</sup> If Lt. James Timothy’s death provided a spark for the assimilation process at the beginning of the nineteen-twenties, *The Cresset* provided a rhetorical vessel at the end of the decade to nurture it into a flame of community pride, including increasing claims of Catholic indigeneity.

While the type of Southernization promoted by *The Columbian* had rested on the assumption that Catholics were outsiders seeking un-hyphenated inclusion in a dominant culture,

<sup>32</sup> “The Cresset Succeeds The Columbian,” *The Cresset*, May 1927, 5.

<sup>33</sup> “The Cresset Succeeds The Columbian,” *The Cresset*, May 1927, 5.

*The Cresset* largely eschewed this outsider mentality. Instead, it reframed American origin stories to position English Protestants as interlopers who constructed their institutions atop inherently Catholic lands and Catholic ideals. Lynn Dumenil argues that Catholics in urban environments outside the South actively sought to “link American origins to their Church” through discovery narratives, discussions of natural rights, and Catholic military contributions.<sup>34</sup> Irish Catholics in Nashville deployed similar tactics, going so far as to situate Tennessee as a nexus for Catholic activity in America. “If ever a State had a birthright of Catholicity,” the paper insisted in May 1927, “that State is Tennessee.”<sup>35</sup>

Eleven articles devoted to the history of Catholicism in Tennessee appeared between May 1927 and October 1928. Reaching back to the colonial era exploits of Catholic conquistadors like Hernan De Soto, *The Cresset* systematically connected Catholic influence to significant locations, leaders, and events in Tennessee’s history. Fort Prudhomme in the west, Forts Loudon and Watauga in the east, and landholdings around Nashville were all imbued with deep Catholic roots. John Sevier and Timothy De Montbrun (Demonbreun) were portrayed as devout Catholics who worked to advance the faith in their frontier homes.<sup>36</sup> Drawing on language from Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis, *The Cresset* described early Catholic settlers as adventurers and “pioneers” who carried the light of Catholic faith into the dark, uncivilized recesses of America’s

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<sup>34</sup> Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties,” 28.

<sup>35</sup> “Story of Catholic Church in Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, May 1927, 13-14.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

“wilderness.”<sup>37</sup> The editors also reinforced the myth of a Southern *terra nullius*, devoid of indigenous and, more importantly, Protestant title. The articles portrayed Catholic civilization as paving the way for Southern settlement and development. When Protestants finally appeared, they were merely squatting on inherently Catholic soil, albeit in larger numbers. Even non-Catholic figures like James Robertson were portrayed as heavily influenced by the Catholic immigrants in their employ or in their acquaintance. “Catholicity is not an alien graft,” *The Cresset* argued, “but a native growth.”<sup>38</sup>

While many early Catholic linkages had Spanish or French roots, *The Cresset* was careful to tie the history of Tennessee Catholicism to Irish influences as well. The paper outlined how construction projects like the Cumberland River bridge first brought Irish Catholics south in the 1820s and incentivized Nashvillians to keep them contented because of their important role in the community. Of particular interest was the early construction of a dedicated Catholic church with help from local Protestants. The paper described it as a brick building located on Capitol Hill (then Campbell’s Hill) that took nine years to complete.<sup>39</sup> Beginning in 1921, the “little church” was finally completed in 1830, though the paper noted that some of the original Irish workers had by that time already moved on to other cities. The prolonged construction was blamed on the small number of Catholic men available to work on the building in their free time and the choice to use “more lasting and much more expensive” bricks instead of readily

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<sup>37</sup> “History of the Church in Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, August 1927, 11; “History of the Church in Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, November 1927, 5-7; “History of the Church in Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, January 1928, 5-6; “History of the Church in Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, October 1928, 5-6; Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” Historical Archives, American Historical Association, accessed January 9, 2018, <https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-ar...torical-archives/the-significance-of-the-frontier-in-american-history>.

<sup>38</sup> “Story of Catholic Church in Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, May 1927, 13-14.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

available, cheap lumber. *The Cresset* speculated that the choice in building materials meant that “the Catholics of Nashville must have felt that they were building permanently.”<sup>40</sup> The symbolism was clear: Nashville Catholicism was native, permanent, and built with Irish hands from the outset.

Repeated references to Irish influences also reinforced the distinctly Irish nature of Catholicism in the state. The paper cited the migration of Irish railway laborers as the key variable that first attracted Church leadership to Memphis in the 1840s. It referenced a request by a “respectable Catholic gentleman of Dublin” that the Church send a priest to families in Nashville, Franklin, Winchester, and Gallatin in 1828 as indicative of the extensive familial and fraternal ties that existed between Irish-Americans “exiled in the American wilderness” and their home island. It also highlighted the abundance of Irish names in the state, even if the persons to whom they belonged had strayed from the straight and narrow path of Catholicism generations ago.<sup>41</sup>

The editors of *The Cresset*, however, briefly broke with their *Columbian* predecessors by suggesting an ideological rift between Irish-Americans and Irishmen still living on Erin’s Isle. In August 1927, the paper ran a small article covering the assassination of Irish nationalist Kevin O’Higgins. While denouncing the “bolshevic [sic] methods” used against O’Higgins, the editors did not exempt “the rank and file of the Irish people” from fault. Instead, they suggested that the Irish were “asleep at the wheel” and unnecessarily divided by the issue of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. The treaty, which created the Irish Free State as part of the British commonwealth, was

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<sup>40</sup> “Story of Catholic Church in Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, June 1927, 7-8.

<sup>41</sup> “History of the Church in Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, August 1927, 11; “Story of Catholic Church in Tennessee,” June 1927, 11; “Old Irish Name Abound,” *The Cresset*, July 1927, 8.

a lightning rod of controversy between unionist and Irish nationalists. One of the most vexing aspects of the treaty for nationalists was its oath clause, which required a swearing of fidelity to the British crown.<sup>42</sup>

*The Cresset* attempted to chart a middle course by distinguishing between Irish and Irish American perspectives. Solving the problem was “something Irishmen in Ireland must do for themselves,” the paper argued, since Irish-Americans were “far removed from the seat of fractional strife and turmoil.” Purposefully using the phrase “their country” rather than ‘our country’ or ‘our homeland,’ the editors implied that time and distance had rendered Irish Americans distinct from their European brethren. There was certainly the suggestion that Irish Americans were better able to “focus on the real trouble” and envision a peaceful, democratic solution that their trans-Atlantic counterparts could not.<sup>43</sup>

Tellingly, *The Cresset*’s Irish American readers quickly rebuffed the editors for their stance. In the following month’s issue, Rev. Patrick O’Hanlon wrote an editorial accusing *The Cresset* and its editors of falling victim to British propaganda against the Irish. O’Hanlon had helped found *The Columbian* and, as a June 1930 edition of *The Cresset* joked, still loved the paper so well “that occasionally he threatens us with his shillalah if we go too far afield.”<sup>44</sup> *The Cresset* swiftly offered its apologies: “We most positively disclaim any intention of casting aspersions on the Irish people and just as emphatically disclaim any knowledge of any emissary of the British lurking in the background.” After reassuring readers that the editors’ roots ran

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<sup>42</sup> W.P.M. Kennedy, “Significance of the Irish Free State,” *The North American Review* 218, no. 814 (September 1923): 317-319; Keiron Curtis, *P.S. O’Hegarty (1879-1955): Sinn Fein Fenian* (London: Anthem Press, 2010), 2-16.

<sup>43</sup> “Assassination of O’Higgins,” *The Cresset*, August 1927, 19.

<sup>44</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Wir Duetchen,” *The Cresset*, June 1930, 14-15.

back to the Revolutionary War, rendering them incapable of “truckling to the arch-enemy,” *The Cresset* made a solemn promise. “Never again,” the editors proclaimed, “so long as we have anything to do with this or any other magazine, will we have anything to say regarding the internal affairs of Ireland.”<sup>45</sup>

The exchange with O’Hanlon marked the beginning of a period of relative silence regarding Irishness in *The Cresset*. Only two articles in the remainder of 1927-1928 directly referenced the Irish. The first was a short aside that praised the conservatism of dress in Irish beauty pageants compared to the “superfluous displays” found in America. “All praise the Irish,” the article trumpeted, who “may be depended upon to handle their affairs with propriety and ingenuity.”<sup>46</sup> The second article reversed earlier allusions to physical distance creating emotional and ideological differences between Irishmen and Irish Americans. Discussing Nashville’s 1928 St. Patrick’s Day celebrations, *The Cresset* insisted that “the Irish heart never ceases to beat for the homeland, for it is a love that never dies, though miles of land and sea divide them.”<sup>47</sup> The only other Irish reference prior to 1929 was on the cover of the March 1928 issue, which featured the cathedral at Armagh, Ireland.<sup>48</sup>

The speed and magnitude of *The Cresset*’s change in tone confirms that it likely received far more complaints than the one from Rev. O’Hanlon. It points to the prevalence of Irish-Americans within *The Cresset*’s readership and, correspondingly, in the Diocese of Nashville. Nashville’s Catholic community may have successfully navigated “Southernization” during and

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<sup>45</sup> “Kevin O’Higgins,” *The Cresset*, September 1927, 18-19.

<sup>46</sup> “Irish Beauty Contest,” *The Cresset*, November 1927, 24.

<sup>47</sup> “St. Patrick’s Day in the Morning,” *The Cresset*, March 1928, 15.

<sup>48</sup> Cover Image, *The Cresset*, March 1928, 1.

after the war years, but they were still distinctly Irish and would not tolerate suggestions to the contrary. When Irish themes reappeared in *The Cresset* during the period 1929-1930, they did so with a vengeance and transformed the paper into an even more distinctly Irish-American publication than before.

Perhaps because of the Irish issue, Catholic indigeneity required further reinforcement. Few historical or contemporary phenomena escaped having a distinctly Catholic spin applied to them. Figures as diverse as Roger Williams and Charles Lindbergh were placed in Catholic contexts.<sup>49</sup> Whether figurative or literal, the newspaper presented Catholicism as the foundational faith on which all other American institutions were built. “The United States is really a daughter of the Catholic Church,” one article insisted,

Turn wheresoever you will in the United States and study any institution or any ideal which has commonly been regarded as an aspect of true Americanism, and you will discover that no matter who is immediately responsible for its erection or formation, its embryo and antitype are to be found in Catholic theory or practice.<sup>50</sup>

Even Puritanism was not beyond inclusion in Catholic heritage. An article by E.E. Miller reprinted from *Southern Agriculturist* outlined the Catholic origins of religious freedom and referred to “our own revered Puritan ancestors.” Miller countered obvious Puritan antipathy for Catholicism in the colonial period by acknowledging historical examples of Catholic intolerance. “The point is,” he concluded, “toleration and the true American conception of freedom and of individual right are not confined to the members of any race, of any party, of any church or creed.” Instead, “they are possessions of the individual – possessed by men and women of every race and party and creed.” Each Catholic had a duty as an American to consistently display

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<sup>49</sup> “The Spirit of America,” *The Cresset*, June 1927, 19-20.

<sup>50</sup> “Daughter of the Catholic Church,” *The Cresset*, December 1928, 3.

loyalty and remain wary of those who claimed a monopoly on it.<sup>51</sup> “There never was and I doubt if there ever will be,” another article mused, “a one-hundred percent American.”<sup>52</sup>

Much as it had been in the days of *The Columbian*, war-time sacrifice was emphasized as proof of Catholic Americanism. While references to temporally distant wars like the American War for Independence and Civil War established a long lineage of Catholic sacrifice, reminders of Catholic participation in World War I, especially compared to that of Protestants, were the most direct and biting. “What body of men could be more devoted to country,” the editors asked, “than were the Knights of Columbus in the hour of need ten years ago – or now.” By *The Cresset*’s assessment, Catholics were “the earliest at the front” because their Catholic faith made them more loyal to American institutions, not less. The paper cited the first American casualty of the war, the first American death in the war, the first American death at the front, and the first death of a commissioned officer as Catholics.<sup>53</sup> The absence of James Simmons Timothy among the listed martyrs indicates that *The Cresset* was indeed making good on its promise to expand its focus beyond the confines of Nashville. It also indicates the level to which Nashville Catholics already felt their assimilated status symbolically secured at the local level.

Adopting the vernacular of their anti-Catholic foes and using patriotism as their base, the editors of *The Cresset* went on the offensive to reinforce the compatibility of Catholicism and ‘100 percent Americanism.’ Chief among their antagonists was the new Klan, which had been whipped into a fury by Al Smith’s Democratic presidential nomination in the Election of 1928. Smith, a second-generation Irish Catholic immigrant who grew up in the tenement districts of

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<sup>51</sup> “American Idea of Religious Freedom,” *The Cresset*, May 1927, 20.

<sup>52</sup> “Americanism,” *The Cresset*, November 1928, 8.

<sup>53</sup> “Has the Pope Political Power in United States,” *The Cresset*, October 1928, 3.

New York City, came to personify the “new American” so feared and loathed by the Klan. While Smith did not directly align himself with the progressive movement, nativists painted him as the embodiment of modernist, urban principles that were antithetical to core American values. Worst of all, his Catholic faith provided a ready-made target for Protestant anxiety over the rapid growth of Catholic immigrant communities. Florida sent school children home with flyers urging their parents to vote against Smith or risk having their Bibles taken away. Publishers in Georgia circulated a photograph of Smith at the dedication of the New York City’s Holland Tunnel, which they claimed was evidence that Catholics were building a secret passageway through which to smuggle the Pope into America following Smith’s victory. William Lloyd Clark, publisher of the Klan-affiliated *Railsplitter*, mailed thousands of postcards warning that “we now face the darkest hour in American history” as the “anti-Christ has won [the Democratic convention].” Lines of burning crosses lit up the night sky along the railway when Smith’s train crossed state lines into Oklahoma for a campaign tour in 1928.<sup>54</sup>

The most infamous attack on Smith, however, came in the press. In an open letter in the April 1927 edition of *Atlantic Monthly*, Episcopal layman and retired lawyer Charles C. Marshall asked a series of pointed questions related to Smith’s faith, especially his loyalty to the Holy See above other institutions. At its heart, the letter questioned whether Smith could be loyal to both the Roman Catholic Church and the U.S. Constitution simultaneously.<sup>55</sup> Leaked by the *Boston Post* and then rushed by special trucks to New York City for immediate distribution, the April *Atlantic* generated significant public interest in how Smith would react. Though fellow New

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<sup>54</sup> Robert A. Slayton, *Empire Statesman: The Rise and redemption of Al Smith* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), ix; Thomas J. Shelley, “‘What the Hell Is an Encyclical?’: Governor Alfred E. Smith, Charles C. Marshall, Esq., and Father Francis P. Duffy,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 87, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/25154585>.

<sup>55</sup> Barnes, *Anti-Catholicism in Arkansas*, 128.

York partisan Franklin D. Roosevelt had suggested earlier in the year that Smith should defend Catholic patriotism in the press to preempt inevitable nativist assaults, Smith had refused. He believed that his record as a four-time Governor of New York and champion of the workingman fully sufficed to prove his loyalty. Unlike the anti-Catholic materials distributed by fringe nativist publications like *Railsplitter*, however, Marshall's *Atlantic* letter couldn't be dismissed as extremist noise. The social prominence of both Marshall and the *Atlantic* lent a credence to his arguments that necessitated an official rejoinder.<sup>56</sup>

Reinforcing the national importance of the moment, *The Cresset* printed Smith's reply to Marshall in its entirety. The message was simple but absolute. Foreshadowing the assurances Senator John F. Kennedy would offer during his own presidential run in 1960, Smith calmly and frankly affirmed his belief in the supremacy of the Constitution, the sanctity of separation of church and state, the necessity of non-interference by foreign powers, the importance of public education, and the "absolute freedom of conscience for all men and in equality of all churches." While Smith's response did not accuse Marshall of nefarious intent, *The Cresset* was quick to invoke the Invisible Empire's hand, calling Marshall's letter a modern iteration of the same age-worn, bigoted questions posed by "Wizards and Goblins and others of a mean intelligence and an even meaner spirit."<sup>57</sup>

The paper was also quick to point out the unintended positive effect of Marshall's letter. In creating a medium for Smith to plainly reply to the accusations against him, Marshall handed Smith a well-defined platform from which to make a "notable contribution to the cause of

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<sup>56</sup> Oscar Handlin, *Al Smith and His America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), 3-4; Shelley, "What the Hell Is an Encyclical?," 88.

<sup>57</sup> "The Press on Governor Smith's Reply," *The Cresset*, May 1927, 11-12.

tolerance.” Tellingly for Catholicism in Nashville, *The Cresset* was not alone in its praise for Smith’s reply. In a display of solidarity, the paper thanked the *Nashville Banner* and the *Nashville Tennessean* for their support of Smith and their condemnation of a religious test for political office.<sup>58</sup> Like many of its fellow Catholic papers, however, *The Cresset* stopped short of calling on Catholic voters to act *en masse* to elect Smith. As Dumenil notes, Catholic leaders feared that direct calls to action on the behalf of individual candidates would trigger even greater anti-Catholic backlash and leave them vulnerable to accusations of election meddling. Instead, *The Cresset* and its compatriots stuck to attacking the intolerance of opposition campaigns.<sup>59</sup>

Given that Kenneth Barnes calls the Election of 1928 the “climax of the anti-Catholic movement of the early twentieth century,” Nashville was an exception rather than a rule. While Barnes claims the election was a “bookend” for anti-Catholicism in America that finally “calmed the fears of Catholic opponents” and “brought Catholicism more into the center of the country’s political life,” that process was already nearing completion in Nashville before the vote.<sup>60</sup> Smith’s candidacy did not trigger widespread anti-Catholic coverage in the Nashville press.<sup>61</sup> After all, Smith was the Democratic nominee and the *Nashville Tennessean* was staunchly Democratic. The unity among Nashville’s major newspapers mirrored the waning anti-Catholicism evident in post-war issues of *The Columbian* and was indicative of the ongoing success of the earlier Southernization campaign. While anti-Catholic campaigns found fertile ground elsewhere, they had minimal effect on 1928 Nashville.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties,” 37.

<sup>60</sup> Barnes, *Anti-Catholicism in Arkansas*, 127.

<sup>61</sup> John Wooley and Gerhard Peters, “The American Presidency Project,” UC Santa Barbara, accessed May 19, 2022, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/elections/1928>.

A lack of significant impact, however, did not imply the complete absence of anti-Catholic activity. In fact, *The Cresset* noted that religious prejudice was present “throughout the length and breadth of [the] diocese.” The key difference with earlier periods was that the lack of alarmist tones. There was no sense of broad social besiegement. Instead, bigoted speech was attributed to “a few vagrant 100 percenters” whose ilk had always existed “in every country and in every clime.” The paper presented them as non-threatening because “the people of the Southland” were a sound, law-abiding, and God-fearing people not easily swayed by bigoted outliers. According to the editors, if prejudice existed within the Protestant mainstream, it was due to a lack of education about Catholicism, the Constitution, or both rather than innate viciousness or intolerance.<sup>62</sup>

*The Cresset’s* editors even displayed sympathy for non-Catholics. “The average Protestant is a pretty repressed and self-conscious individual,” they mused in an August 1927 article.<sup>63</sup> They blunted criticism of their Southern Protestant neighbors, however, insisting that the “religious tolerance” and “chivalry” of the modern South inoculated the “vast majority” of Southerners against the influence of “bigoted pamphlets.” They also appealed to a common Southern political legacy by explicitly connecting Andrew Jackson and Al Smith in the article’s title.<sup>64</sup> *The Cresset* also explicitly thanked the conservative *Nashville Banner* in the fall of 1928 for its efforts in countering the anti-Catholic and anti-KoC literature that was circulated in the wake of the presidential election.<sup>65</sup> The editors also cheekily expressed the “sizable debt of

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<sup>62</sup> “Why Such Bigotry,” *The Cresset*, August 1927, 18-19.

<sup>63</sup> “Protestant Controversy,” *The Cresset*, August 1927, 21.

<sup>64</sup> “Andrew Jackson & Governor Smith,” *The Cresset*, September 1927, 15, 24-25.

<sup>65</sup> “Intelligence Sacrificed,” *The Cresset*, October 1928, 8.

gratitude” owed to their bigoted attackers “for exposing the almost incredible ignorance of a certain class of people in regard to Catholic doctrines and practices.”<sup>66</sup>

For the editors of *The Cresset*, the solution for countering such bigotry was clear: Catholic Action. Specifically, the paper called for deliberate effort by the laity to educate the general public on both the basic tenants of Catholicism and the foundational principles of religious and civil liberty. *The Cresset* pointed to a “lack of laborers in the vineyard of the Lord” as the primary catalyst to the continued existence of bigotry in the state. “Let us not be slackers,” the paper proclaimed, “and consign these people to the limbo of indifference.”<sup>67</sup> The first order business was to imbue laymen with ecclesiastical and civil knowledge necessary to answer questions from non-Catholics confidently.<sup>68</sup>

As a result, anti-Catholic propaganda by the Klan and Klan-affiliated politicians, such as Senator Thomas Heflin of Alabama, was deemed dangerous not because Southern minds were primed against Catholicism but rather because “confusion” was possible in a diverse region that knew so little about the basic tenants of Catholicism.<sup>69</sup> “American Catholics should stop talking and writing of anti-Catholic prejudices in the South,” wrote Rev. William J. Hafey, Bishop of Raleigh, North Carolina, “and remove the causes of misunderstanding by carrying their ritual and work into that section.”<sup>70</sup> Calls for education initiatives of this sort were in line with global

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<sup>66</sup> “The Circus Comes to Town,” *The Cresset*, April 1928, 11-12.

<sup>67</sup> “Why Such Bigotry,” *The Cresset*, August 1927, 18-19.

<sup>68</sup> “Ibid; “Protestant Controversy,” *The Cresset*, August 1927, 21; “Are We Proud of Our Faith,” *The Cresset*, September 1927, 19-21; “Catholic Editors’ Point of View,” *The Cresset*, September 1927, 22; “Up to Democratic Party,” *The Cresset*, February 1928, 3-4.

<sup>69</sup> “Declining Liberty and Other Papers,” *The Cresset*, April 1928, 18-19.

<sup>70</sup> “Plan to Banish Bigotry,” *The Cresset*, November 1928, 3.

calls for laymen “to show commitment to the interests of the church in their societal environment” as part of Pius XI’s plan for Catholic Action.<sup>71</sup>

In the American South, Catholic Action took on a distinct character that embraced liberal American principles as pillars of Catholic patriotism. While Catholic Action groups in Italy and Germany worked to reverse separation of church and state, American Catholics emphasized the importance of such principles for their own religious liberty as well as that of their non-Catholic compatriots.<sup>72</sup> Religious discrimination was framed as “alien to the spirit of...the principles upon which this government was founded.”<sup>73</sup> Those who proposed otherwise were charged with ignorance of the Constitution and the tenants of ‘true Americanism.’ Taking aim at their nativist antagonizes, *The Cresset* predicted that “probably not half the people who prate [talk foolishly] of Americanism or Jeffersonian Democracy could give an accurate definition of the terms they use.”<sup>74</sup>

In fact, the editors argued that religious bigots were so far askew from ‘true Americanism’ that they represented a greater threat to the country than the foreigners they denounced. “There is a mighty howling from them [the Klan] about the Catholics’ allegiance to the Pope,” a November 1927 article reads, “yet a Klan official, during the recent investigation in our neighboring state [of Alabama], preferred to spend time in jail because he held his duty to the Klan above that to his country.”<sup>75</sup> Division and criminality within Klan leadership became a

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<sup>71</sup> Kracht, “Campaigning Against Bolshevism,” 553.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> “Praise of Governor Smith,” *The Cresset*, February 1928, 3.

<sup>74</sup> “Read the Constitution,” *The Cresset*, September 1928, 3.

<sup>75</sup> “The Reign of Terror,” *The Cresset*, November 1927, 3.

perineal topic for *The Cresset* and was used as a foil for Catholic loyalty.<sup>76</sup> A 1922 article in the *National Catholic Welfare Council Bulletin* called the conflict “a battle of religious liberty against religious intolerance; true freedom against false freedom; real Americanism against bogus Americanism.”<sup>77</sup> Drawing an important connection between historically marginalized groups, *The Cresset* asked readers to “suppose Jews or negroes or Catholics had been accused of a fraction of the crimes Klansmen are laying...at each other’s doors.” The editors assured readers that “history would have something to tell then, sure enough.”<sup>78</sup>

*The Cresset’s* willingness to embrace outsiders and risk further backlash suggests the level to which Catholics had structurally integrated into American society by the 1920s.<sup>79</sup> It is unlikely that a group on the cusp of social acceptance would have jeopardized their position in this way. A more likely explanation is that Nashville’s Catholic community found itself assimilated well enough by the 1920s to leverage its social capital for the benefit of other groups with whom it shared common historical experiences. While the common interest between Catholics, Jews, and African Americans might have also spoken to continued oppression of each, *The Cresset’s* shift in tone from paranoid and defensive in the late 1910s to confident and dismissive in the 1920s suggests otherwise. Instead, the assimilative campaigns of *The Columbian* and *The Cresset* had already contributed to the acknowledgement of Catholicism as a longstanding, legitimate institution in Nashville.

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<sup>76</sup> “Daughter of the Catholic Church,” *The Cresset*, December 1928, 3.

<sup>77</sup> “The Challenge of the Bigots,” *National Catholic Welfare Council Bulletin*, September 1922, 12, quoted in Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties,” 30.

<sup>78</sup> “Klan Americanism Unmasks,” *The Cresset*, May 1928, 3-4.

<sup>79</sup> Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties,” 42.

Catholic assertiveness in Tennessee reached beyond commentary on the Election of 1928 and the Klan. It also advocated for freedom of choice in education, private property rights, rural values, and traditional gender roles. In each case, *The Cresset* positioned Catholics as bulwarks of ‘true Americanism’ against both internal and external threats to core American institutions. Historian Justin Nordstrom argues that anti-Catholic literature in the early twentieth century framed Catholicism as “the symbol of decadent modernity” in order to provide a foil for the agrarian, small-town America they feared was rapidly disappearing. By galvanizing rural resistance to the political and social machinations of distant urban hubs, nativists maintained their status as guardians of a genuine Americanism in the pastoral corners of the American heartland.<sup>80</sup>

*The Cresset* countered such assertions by espousing Catholicism’s devotion to the “village unit.” Claiming that the “counteracting and stabilizing tendency toward the smaller community unit” exceeded the forces of urbanization, *The Cresset* argued that Catholicism had a natural role in such communities. The revitalization of “the dying religious faith of an essentially religious element” in the rural South was presented as a calling second only to that of the original Apostles. “In this time of satisfying rural organization,” the paper insisted, “the Church may be, and will be...the center of the country village, as the village is the center of country life.”<sup>81</sup> The National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC) no doubt influenced *The Cresset*’s perspective. With the exception of rural Catholic colonies encouraged by the Catholic Colonization Society, the Church had long neglected rural Catholics in favor of their more

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<sup>80</sup> Justin Nordstrom, *Danger on the Doorstep: Anti-Catholicism and American Print Culture in the Progressive Era* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 58.

<sup>81</sup> “Rural America and the Village Unit,” *The Cresset*, November 1927, 12-13, 30.

concentrated and numerous urban brethren. Though Catholic leaders had maximized the impact of institution building by focusing on urban parishes during earlier periods, the cultural tension over modernism in the 1920s left the Church vulnerable to the nativists' accusations that they were at odds with wholesome, traditional lifestyles. David Bovée notes how the NCRLC actively participated in the Americanization process by promoting a vision of rural Catholic Americanism that evolved over time to fit the dominant values of the United States.<sup>82</sup>

Over its five-year life span, however, *The Cresset* covered few topics more frequently than education. Lynn Dumenil notes that efforts to regulate or eliminate private religious schools were among the most upsetting developments for Catholic Americans nationwide in the 1920s. Institutions as diverse as the National Education Association and the Masons united to encourage Congress to create a federal department of education. Shocked by the illiteracy rates revealed in Army surveys during World War I, the NEA proposed a bill in 1918 to standardize and elevate education curricula nationwide. The Masons and others later voiced their support in the hopes that it might offer a vehicle for indoctrinating their vision of one hundred percent Americanism. Catholics formed alliances with states' rights activists, former Progressives, and conservative elites to oppose such reforms as veiled extensions of nativist campaigns.<sup>83</sup> As a result, the right to privately educate Catholic youth had been a favorite topic in *The Columbian*, and the trend continued with *The Cresset*. Although Oregon was the only state to successfully (though temporarily) ban private schools *en masse* in the twenties, the Catholic press kept alarm

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<sup>82</sup> David S. Bovée, *The Church & the Land: The National Catholic Rural Life Conference and American Society, 1923-2007* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), xi-10.

<sup>83</sup> Lynn Dumenil, "The Insatiable Maw of Bureaucracy: Antistatistism and Education Reform in the 1920s," *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 2 (September 1990): 499-500, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2079181>.

bells ringing at high alert throughout the decade.<sup>84</sup> The creation and expansion of Catholic schools became one of the key facets of Catholic institution building in Nashville in the 1920s and 1930s.

*The Cresset's* early coverage of education issues dealt with need for religious education to counter the ignorance about Catholicism it claimed led to religious bigotry. In contrast to Catholic Action organizations in European countries, such as Italy or Germany, the paper did not argue for the integration of religious teaching into all schools. To have done so would have violated the principle of separation of church and state on which the Catholic community leaned as a key component of its patriotic loyalty. Nor did *The Cresset* claim that Catholic education was better than its secular counterpart in academic terms. A March 1929 article admitted that public schools were “just as good...on the score of mere book knowledge” but did not go far enough on “the most essential element in all education, the training of the child in matters of faith and morals.” The paper also displayed an air of sympathy for the public school teachers. It regretted that the “only safety” such teachers had from “drawing fire from some part of her parental constituency” was to remain utterly silent on religious matters. Speaking on the restrictions of serving a “polyglot citizenship,” the editors insisted that “it is not the fault of the schools so much as the fault of circumstances against which they can make no headway.”<sup>85</sup> It was the social utility of moral training, however, that the Church valued in its own schools, especially in regard to preparing laymen to either counter bigoted attacks or answer well-meaning questions as part of Catholic Action.

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<sup>84</sup> Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties,” 25; Lloyd P. Jorgenson, “The Oregon School Law of 1922: Passage and Sequel,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 54, no. 3 (October 1968): 1, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25018244>.

<sup>85</sup> “Why Catholic School,” *The Cresset*, March 1929, 7.

Much of *The Cresset's* educational focus in 1928 was on the construction of a “new and modern” building for the Catholic High School for Boys, which later became Father Ryan High School in Nashville.<sup>86</sup> The school was a focal point for Catholic pride and a testament to the rapid growing Catholic community. Opening on West End Avenue in 1925, the student body of what locals called “Irish High” exceeded its original building’s capacity in only three years. A fundraising campaign in March 1928 raised \$300,000 in just ten days to pay for a new, larger location at 2300 Elliston Place.<sup>87</sup>

*The Cresset* officially announced the school’s name change in April 1928 and then worked diligently to associate the school with Father Abram Ryan, the poet-priest of the Confederacy.<sup>88</sup> The son of Irish immigrants, Ryan spent his childhood in Maryland and Missouri, ultimately attending a Vincentian seminary in New York. While there, exposure to James McMaster’s *New York Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register* cultivated his anti-Union views. A vehement anti-abolitionist, McMaster shaped Ryan’s social and political perspectives. Ryan’s skill as an orator and dramatist during seminary ultimately gained him early ordination from Rome. His connections to Nashville began in February 1862 when he visited the city to appear alongside Confederate General Pierre Beauregard. Ryan again briefly visited the city for three weeks in October of that year, during which time he was arrested for “seditious utterances” against the Union.<sup>89</sup> Portraying the North as an aggressive outsider seeking to subjugate the

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<sup>86</sup> “New and Modern Catholic High School,” *The Cresset*, January 1928, 7,12.

<sup>87</sup> “Father Ryan Timeline,” Father Ryan Highschool, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://www.fatherryan.org/about-us/history>.

<sup>88</sup> “Nashville Catholic Boys’ High School Named for Famous Priest,” *The Cresset*, April 1928, 3.

<sup>89</sup> James M. Woods, *A History of the Catholic Church in the American South, 1513-1900* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 335-336.

virtuous Southland, he touted Southerners as the true heirs of the foundational American principles of republicanism, individual liberty, and states' rights.<sup>90</sup>

Ryan's next venture into Tennessee occurred in May 1864, when he appeared on the registry of St. Mary's Cathedral in Nashville. From St. Mary's, he continued to visit and minister to Confederate units during the war. In November 1864, Fr. Joseph A. Kelly appointed Ryan pastor of Clarksville and later, in 1865, Knoxville. While serving unhappily among pro-Unionists in the latter, he composed his two most notable poems, "The Conquered Banner" and "The Sword of Robert Lee." Ryan's poetry mingled southern pride in having fought a virtuous fight with a quiet resignation to final defeat and reintegration into the Union. "The Conquered Banner" read in part:

Furl that banner, softly, slowly!  
Treat it gently, – it is holy –  
For it droops above the dead.  
Touch it not – unfold it never,  
Let it droop there, furled forever,  
For its people's hopes are dead!

Six more pro-Southern poems followed. Historians James Woods and Kiernan Quinlan argue that Ryan's work provided a Catholic-derived salve for Southerners whose hearts still clung to the 'Lost Cause' despite reintegration into the Union.<sup>91</sup>

Ryan's perspective was therefore a convenient fit for twentieth century Catholics seeking to defend their religious educational institutions against encroachment by the federal government while still espousing devout patriotism with a distinctly regional flavor. *The Cresset* praised Ryan's "passionate devotion to the land of his birth and the subject of his love" while

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<sup>90</sup> Douglas J. Slawson, "The Ordeal of Abram J. Ryan, 1860-1863," *The Catholic Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (October 2010): 705-706, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25740970>.

<sup>91</sup> Woods, *A History of the Catholic Church in the American South*, 337; Quinlan, *Strange Kin*, 108.

emphasizing that he happily lived to see “at least a partial reunion of the sections and to see many of the wounds of that cruel strife healed.”<sup>92</sup> The reconciliation was credited to the yellow fever outbreaks of the 1870s. *The Cresset* frequently cited the outbreaks as the “proudest page of the whole history of the Church in Tennessee” thanks to the “heroic martyrdom” of Catholic clergy and laymen in service to their fellow countrymen. In fact, the paper insisted that only in the aftermath of the outbreak did “the page [brighten] and the real advancement of the Faith in Tennessee [begin].”<sup>93</sup> In emphasizing both aspects of Ryan’s personality – loyalty to region and loyalty to nation - Nashville Catholics walked the well-worn, carefully-balanced rhetorical path on which they had built their assimilated status over the previous decade.

Father Ryan High was also cited as a physical embodiment of the progress of Catholic institution building in Nashville. The paper boasted of the “Tennessee stone and brick” used in the school’s walls and hailed the upgraded facility as a “great step forward in the history of Catholicity and education in Nashville.”<sup>94</sup> In the most literal sense, Father Ryan High School was Tennessean from the ground up. Emphasizing the modernity of Catholic education, *The Cresset* proudly noted the school’s final “half million dollar” price tag.<sup>95</sup> The speed with which the first \$300,000 of that half million was raised also pointed the financial strength that the Nashville Catholic community achieved in the postwar period.

Part of what made that material success possible was American pluralism and capitalism. As such, *The Cresset* fell in line with many of its Catholic press brethren in attacking

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<sup>92</sup> “Nashville Catholic Boys’ High School Named for Famous Priest,” *The Cresset*, April 1928, 3.

<sup>93</sup> “The History of the Church in Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, October 1928, 5-6.

<sup>94</sup> “New and Modern Catholic High School,” *The Cresset*, January 1928, 7,12.

<sup>95</sup> “Nashville Catholic Boys’ High School Named for Famous Priest,” *The Cresset*, April 1928, 3.

Bolshevism. Historian Erica Ryan argues that Bolshevism came to “embody all that was challenging the American status quo” in the 1920s. It was easy for both conservative Protestants and Catholics to imagine feminism, modernism, socialism, and radicalism felt comfortably within Bolshevism’s hazy margins. As such, Bolshevism was hailed as the binary opposite of Americanism. Social conservatives, economic elites, and ‘super’ patriots congealed into what Ryan terms “a conservative consensus.”<sup>96</sup> While anti-Catholic printers attempted to join themselves to that consensus on behalf of rural America, the Catholic press laid claim to anti-Bolshevik convictions as axiomatic to Catholic dogma and proof of their indigenous Americanism. It became a banner of inclusion in the collective ‘we’ of American society that was juxtaposed to the Bolshevik ‘them.’ Nativists attempted to frame Catholicism as the urban, modernist antithesis of conservative, rural America, but Catholics used outlets like *The Cresset* to redirect fears away from themselves and onto Bolshevik threats at home and abroad.

In this respect, Bolshevism played a similar role to that occupied by the Kaiser in World War I. Bolshevik hostility toward religion, traditional gender roles, and private property offered a more menacing threat for mainstream Americans than did unsubstantiated claims of Papal conspiracies and priestly abuse. Emphasizing the Church’s respect for marriage, law and order, and property rights, *The Cresset* argued that Catholics embodied the American virtues that Bolsheviks lacked. “The beasts of the forest are tame,” the editors wrote, “compared to these lecherous vultures who stalk in the guise of human beings.” *The Cresset’s* editors even commended Britain, the ancient enemy of Irish Catholics at home and abroad, for turning away from the Bolshevik threat.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Erica J. Ryan, *Red War on the Family: Sex, Gender, and Americanism in the First Red Scare* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), 18, 25.

<sup>97</sup> “Great Britain Breaks With Russia,” *The Cresset*, July 1927, 4.

Another facet of Catholic anti-communism was the vehement defense of home values. On property rights and traditional gender roles, the American home became a cultural and political battleground in the 1920s. To the chagrin of anti-Catholics, the Church was well positioned ideologically as the legitimate defender of conservative home values. Deploring the growing influence of apartment living, for example, *The Cresset's* editors reminded readers that the spiritual connection between a man and his land was often lost in large urban environments. A March 1928 article declared that a citizen "is free because his bit of ground has made him free."<sup>98</sup> *The Cresset's* emphasis on private property as a source of individual freedom differentiated Church doctrine from communism, placing the former safely in the realm of Lockean values, which resonated well with landowners of the inland South.

Rapidly changing gender roles provided *The Cresset* with yet another avenue to promote Catholicism's defense of traditional values. Erica Ryan argues that American anxiety about destabilized gender roles after the World War I spilled over into the hazily defined realm of Bolshevism during the Red Scare. A broad socio-political coalition opposed to change was the result.<sup>99</sup> *The Cresset* attempted to integrate Catholics into that coalition by presenting an idealized vision of the female homemaker and fatherly provider that aligned with both Catholic dogma and American conceptions of republican motherhood and rugged individualism. As early as its December 1927 issue, the paper challenged the wisdom of women working outside the home. The cover of that issue uncoincidentally featured an image of sacred motherhood, Mary and the infant Christ. The male editors then patronizingly questioned whether women took the obligations of joining the workforce seriously. They argued that a woman's "business-life-cycle"

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<sup>98</sup> "Driftwood Gathered As Tide Came In," *The Cresset*, March 1928, 3.

<sup>99</sup> Ryan, *Red War on the Family*, 45.

began around twenty and ended some twenty years later, at which point she was left with neither future career prospects nor family life. Pointing to statements by Benito Mussolini in Italy equating family size and national strength, the paper implied that a woman's absence from her home jeopardized not only the happiness of her marriage but also the vitality of her nation.

Even if the pursuit of "little luxuries" motivated some working women, their materialism did not exonerate them from the Red Scare paranoia.<sup>100</sup> In fact, their decision could be read as overtly threatening their husband's economic masculinity. Historian Kirsten Delegard notes that activist women were often cast as both villains and victims during the social upheavals of the twenties. They were inadvertent but no less dangerous "hidden revolutionaries," abetting the work of socialist radicals intent on transforming the United States into a "Bolshevik-style dystopia."<sup>101</sup> By mirroring mainstream, masculine preoccupations with shifting gender roles at home, Catholic press outlets like *The Cresset* co-opted the mantle of conservatism away from their nativist foes and made it their own.

At the heart of many of *The Cresset's* conservative positions was Irish influence. Though other Catholic subgroups, such as the Germans and the Italians, lived throughout the state, the Irish dominated. Their language and ideological alignment with Southern conservatism, combined with lingering post-war suspicions of German culture, paved the way for Irishness to define both Tennessee Catholicity and *The Cresset*.

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<sup>100</sup> "Forty Years, Then What?," *The Cresset*, December 1927, 7-8.

<sup>101</sup> Kirsten Marie Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki: The Origins of Female Conservatism in the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 21.

### **Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Catholicity As An Irish Institution**

The years following Al Smith's run for the presidency in 1928 were a time of dramatic change for *The Cresset*. While Irish pride was restrained in the paper's early years, it burst forth in 1929-1932 to define nearly every issue. Efforts to connect Irish Catholics to both Tennessee and Southern history redoubled in the face of increased anti-Catholic activity nationally. A combativeness not prevalent since the early days of *The Columbian* reemerged but was flavored by a distinct new confidence. *The Cresset* focused on proper ecclesiastic education of both Catholics and non-Catholics as the key to silencing their nativist critics. It also vehemently argued for separation of church and state in public schools, freedom of choice for private religious schools, and its own potency as a vehicle for public enlightenment. By the paper's own reckoning, such changes were expected to bolster revenue. An April 1929 article announced that the paper was expanding back to 20 pages after having reduced its average length to 16 pages the year prior thanks to heavy debts and financial difficulties. The editors took pride in the fact that the increase was achieved "by strictly business methods" without a "single dollar" of donations. They also recognized that there were still significant challenges ahead. "We are not all out of debt yet," the editors admitted, "but we are coming on that way."<sup>102</sup> Part of the strategy for maintaining that trajectory was an all-out appeal to Irishness.

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<sup>102</sup> "The Cards Are on the Table Again," *The Cresset*, April 1929, 10.

By 1929, *The Cresset* embraced the perception that Tennessee's Catholic community was Irish at its core. The June 1929 issue introduced a series written by associate editor Mickey McGuire entitled "Shamrocks and Shillalahs."<sup>103</sup> Named for two emblems of Irish culture, the series spanned 18 issues from June 1929 to December 1930.<sup>104</sup> While the public at large would have recognized the shamrock as indicative of Saint Patrick and Irish Catholicity, the shillalah (sometimes spelled shillelagh) was a more obscure reference. A shillalah was a simple wooden cudgel that embodied the courage and pugnaciousness of the Irish people.<sup>105</sup> Originally used in Irish stick fighting, the shillalah became an emblem for Irish self-determination in song lyrics, cartoons, and other media. Academic journals of the time referred to Ireland as "the land of the shamrock and the shillalah."<sup>106</sup> As a result, the title of *The Cresset's* new series conveyed the deep association of Irish Nashvillians to both the Catholic Church and their home island.



Figure 8: Irish Shillalah, Allen & Ginter, *Shillalah*, from the Arms of All Nations Series (N3) for Allen & Ginter Cigarettes Brands, 1887, Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.18367866>.

<sup>103</sup> "Shamrocks and Shillalahs," *The Cresset*, June 1929, 10.

<sup>104</sup> Only the July 1929 edition did not contain a "Shamrocks and Shillalahs" during its run of 18 issues.

<sup>105</sup> John W. Hurley, *Shillelagh: The Irish Fighting Stick* (Pipersville: Caravat Press, 2007), 15.

<sup>106</sup> Charles Keith Uren, "The Succession of the Irish Free State," *Michigan Law Review* 28, no. 2 (December 1929): 153.

A notable characteristic of “Shamrocks and Shillalahs” (hereafter referred to simply as Shillalahs) was McGuire’s biting humor. Far from doctrinal, Shillalahs approached issues of Irishness, Catholicity, gender, and homelife in language that was blunt but approachable. McGuire frequently employed humorous anecdotes, poems, and proverbial wisdom to drive home his points. The Klan, bigoted politicians, spouses, and fellow Catholics were all fair game for the sting of his pen. While the Klan was guilty of “blind and naked ignorance,” McGuire blamed Catholic apathy toward ecclesiastical learning for the resurgence of religious bigotry.<sup>107</sup> He praised women as the heart of Catholic households yet jokingly wondered if men might ever actually civilize them.<sup>108</sup> Another Shillalah credited the Irish with carrying Catholic faith to America but deplored the level to which they “beggared themselves spiritually” once here.<sup>109</sup>

McGuire’s criticism of Nashville’s Irish Catholics, however, did not concomitantly grant others permission to levy similar critiques. When Frank War O’Malley, the famed Irish Catholic reporter for the *New York Morning Sun*, criticized American Catholics for displaying “all extremes and no middle” in debates regarding Irish independence, McGuire shot back that “I had rather be a dog and bay at the moon, than such a Roman [as O’Malley].”<sup>110</sup> Though O’Malley was taking a moderate stance toward Irish Home Rule that actually mirrored that of *The Cresset* in 1927, he was directing criticism against Irish-Americans rather than native Irish. As a result, McGuire portrayed O’Malley as a traitor to his people. Despite both writers deploying what *Time Magazine* called “Irish humor and sensitivity to pathos” to speak to their Catholic and non-

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<sup>107</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs,” *The Cresset*, June 1929, 10.

<sup>108</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Woman,” *The Cresset*, April 1929, 7.

<sup>109</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: St. Patrick,” *The Cresset*, March 1929, 7; “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Kelly, Burke, and Shea in America,” *The Cresset*, March 1929, 8.

<sup>110</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: A Shillalah,” *The Cresset*, November 1929, 18-19.

Catholic audiences, geography mattered.<sup>111</sup> While Irish-Americans in Northern cities felt the need to moderate their viewpoints to pursue acceptance, Irish Catholics in Nashville were already secure in their social standing, and *The Cresset* was aware of its responsibility to defend that stability against outside agitation.

Even Daniel O’Connell received a makeover in the effort to reinforce linkages with the Irish community. The rift created by O’Connell’s mid-nineteenth century pledge to join with Britain in the event of Anglo-American hostilities had disappeared by 1930. His image graced the cover of *The Cresset* in March, and he received a resounding endorsement from McGuire in that month’s Shillalahs. Calling him “the uncrowned king of Ireland,” McGuire took the daring step of placing O’Connell second only to St. Patrick in the pantheon of Irish heroes. Perhaps it was O’Connell’s reputation as “the Emancipator” that revived his reputation in a period of tension between Catholics and the federal government on the education issue. Perhaps his pro-abolitionist stance was no longer as irksome to Irish Southerners in a new era characterized by limited racial solidarity. Whatever the cause, the endorsement of O’Connell was one dimension of *The Cresset*’s more full-throated endorsement of Irish sovereignty.<sup>112</sup>

Large portions of *The Cresset* in 1929 and 1930 were also devoted to espousing Catholic linkages at the city, state, and regional levels. Citing the rapid growth of Tennessee Catholicity following the yellow fever outbreaks of the 1870s, *The Cresset* noted that the state’s total Catholic population had grown to 28,000 by 1929. It also praised the work of Bishop Alphonse John Smith in building up native clergy to serve that population.<sup>113</sup> Though his predecessor,

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<sup>111</sup> “The Press: O’Malley of the Sun,” *Time Magazine*, October 31, 1932, <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,769750-1,00.html>.

<sup>112</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Daniel O’Connell, Emancipator of Ireland,” *The Cresset*, March 1930, 7-8.

<sup>113</sup> “The History of the Church in Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, February 1929, 11; “The Nashville Diocese Looks Toward a Native Clergy,” *The Cresset*, March 1929, 4-5.

Bishop Thomas Byrne, was renowned as the “builder” for the nine churches erected under him, Smith found only a handful of native Tennesseans serving as priests and seminarians when he ascended to leadership in 1924. To remedy that problem, Smith was determined to build diocese’s human infrastructure from the grass roots up. His belief in the importance of localism defined his tripartite approach to administration – parish, school, diocese. In this way, he was far less engaged with state and national political matters, which was a crucial attribute for a Bishop who would lead the diocese through the controversies sparked by the Scopes Trial, Second Klan, and Al Smith’s candidacy. In each case, Smith’s approach was to remain publicly silent and focus instead on establishing a firmer institutional footing for the diocese in human assets. Much of that work started at the schoolhouse door.<sup>114</sup> As he worked, he was careful to avoid the anti-Catholic backlash experienced in cities like Savannah, Georgia, whose predominantly foreign-born clergy were seen as excessively alien and ‘Romanist.’<sup>115</sup>

By 1926, Smith could point to the 60 seminarians preparing for religious service in the Diocese as evidence of early success in ‘Southernizing’ the Tennessee hierarchy. He could also point to plans for new school and church plants across the state. In his eleven years as Bishop, he ultimately oversaw the establishment of Father Ryan High School, St. Vincent’s Church and School, and St. Mary’s Rectory in Nashville. In Memphis, he founded St. Agnes College, Sacred Heart High School, the Monastery of Poor Clares, and the Catholic Club. Knoxville gained St. Mary’s Hospital, Knoxville Catholic High School, and Holy Ghost Church. Chattanooga built Notre Dame School. Additional churches were built in Johnson City, Gallatin, Murfreesboro,

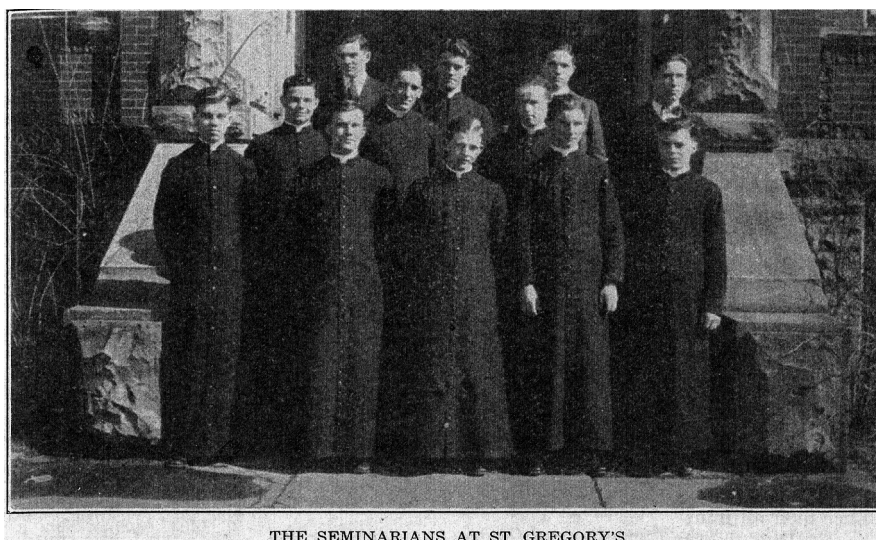
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<sup>114</sup> Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 303-307.

<sup>115</sup> “Former Bishops,” Diocese of Nashville, accessed May 5, 2022, <https://dioceseofnashville.com/former-bishops/>; Buttimer, “Turning Away from Georgia toward Rome,” 35.

Elizabethtown, South Pittsburg, and Paris.<sup>116</sup> Smith became so well-known for his tireless work that he even appeared in a “Who’s Who” list alongside other prominent Nashvillians.<sup>117</sup>

By March 1929, *The Cresset* counted 51 “Bishop’s Boys” studying in colleges in Alabama, Ohio, Maryland, New York, Arkansas, and Rome. They were the fulfillment of the



THE SEMINARIANS AT ST. GREGORY'S

Figure 9: The Bishop Boys, “The Nashville Diocese Looks Toward a Native Clergy,” *The Cresset*, March 1929, 4-5.

Bishop’s vision of “a day when Tennessee parishes shall have Tennessee priests at their altars.” Smith referred to the young men as “home boys” and praised their willingness to “offer their devotion and labor to their own kindred in their

own land.” The editors noted the young men were “peculiarly fitted for Southern work because of their Southern heritage” and knew “the things to be met and dealt with in the course of their pastoral work.”<sup>118</sup>

*The Cresset* also frequently featured the institution building efforts of earlier Catholics. McGuire was especially prone to listing prominent Catholics in Tennessee history as part of “Shamrocks and Shillalahs.” In an August 1929 article, he reminded readers that the first Congressman from Territorial Tennessee, James White, had a grandson, Ed Douglas White, who

<sup>116</sup> “Former Bishops,” Diocese of Nashville.

<sup>117</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Who’s Who,” *The Cresset*, October 1930, 13.

<sup>118</sup> “The Nashville Diocese Looks Toward a Native Clergy,” *The Cresset*, March 1929, 4-5.

later became a Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. He described the Whites as “a distinguished Southern Catholic family” and commended Ed White for being “a true Southerner, a Confederate soldier, a patriotic citizen and a devout Catholic.” In doing so, McGuire summarized the set of common characteristics that *The Cresset* promoted. By harmonizing regional, national, and religious loyalties, *The Cresset* aligned good citizenship with Catholic faith and religious education in a way that disarmed nativist attacks against Catholics’ 100 percent Americanism.

In February 1930, McGuire again turned his spotlight on Chief Justice White but added to his ranks the Louisiana Tigers, “a Catholic hell-cat regiment in the Southern confederacy,” U.S. General William S. Rosecrans, namesake of Fort Rosecrans in Murfreesboro, TN, Confederate Admiral Raphael Semmes, whose grand-daughter was a nun at St. Cecelia’s in Nashville, and Commodore Jack Barry, the Irish Catholic “Father of the American Navy” during the Revolutionary War.<sup>119</sup> McGuire’s choice to alternate pro-Union and pro-Confederate Catholic figures in his accounting of Catholicism’s patriotic contributions reflects the ongoing campaign to bolster Catholicism as native to the American South while simultaneously staking a claim to a more general nationalism.

At other times, however, all pretense of Catholic nationalism dropped in favor of unadulterated localism. In a November 1930 Shillalahs article, McGuire insisted that “the first white man [unnamed] to live in Tennessee was an Irish Catholic who settled east of Knoxville some years before Demonbreun came to Nashville.” He also cited a “French Catholic man and boy” as the first white adventurers to visit what would become Nashville. Their accounts were credited with inspiring later settlers like Demonbreun to also venture into the Tennessee

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<sup>119</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: White, Tigers, Rosecrans, Semmes, Barry,” *The Cresset*, February 1930, 7-8.

wilderness. In a final flourish, McGuire argued that even John Sevier, who is considered Presbyterian, had implicit connections to Catholicism via his surname. He claimed that Sevier's decision to change the spelling of his name from Xavier, which honored St. Francis Xavier, was due solely to the inability of "mountain folks" to pronounce or spell the original.<sup>120</sup>

For McGuire, connections to the South were also deeply personal. The March 1930 Shillalahs featured an account of how McGuire's grandfather arrived in America as "just one of Ireland's millions of heroes." Like many of the early Irish laborers cited in the first editions of *The Cresset*, McGuire's grandfather was drawn to Nashville by the lure of blue-collar work, especially on the railroads. McGuire cast his family as co-sufferers with their fellow Southerners in the both the cholera and yellow fever outbreaks and the Civil War. He only briefly broke with co-sufferer narrative to highlight the especially aggrieved status of Irishmen. "The hardships experienced by my people," McGuire wrote, "were only an example of the hardships experienced by every Irish family coming to this country during the 18<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>121</sup>

McGuire's grandfather aside, few local heroes received as much praise as President Andrew Johnson and Congressman Cordell Hull. Readers were repeatedly reminded that Johnson was the son of an Irish mother, had fought Know Nothingism in the 1850s, and was "the most sublime foe of religious proscription and persecution that this or any other country has ever produced among men classed as big or small in the halls of legislation." Johnson's "certain partiality" toward Catholicism, which included sending one of his sons to a Catholic school and

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<sup>120</sup> "Shamrocks and Shillalahs: I Have Just Learned," *The Cresset*, November 1930, 27-28; Holly Meyer, "See the Religions of Every Tennessee Governor," *The Tennessean*, October 25, 2018, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/religion/2018/10/25/tennessee-governor-and-their-religions/1760683002/>.

<sup>121</sup> "Shamrocks and Shillalahs: My Granddad," *The Cresset*, March 1930, 7-8.

giving fiery speeches in Congress in defense of Irish Catholics, made him not only the state's "greatest son" but "one of the noblest men that God created."<sup>122</sup>

Congressman Hull also received frequent compliments thanks to his opposition to federal education initiatives. "There is no getting away," the editors wrote, "from the fact that Hon. Cordell Hull's position on the education bill in Congress is the correct one."<sup>123</sup> Fearing the rise of "canned education," the paper praised Hull for fending off federal oversight that would have standardized American education to the detriment of Catholic institutions.<sup>124</sup> *The Cresset* emphasized Hull's loyalty to the Democratic Party and called him "one of the few statesmen left in American Congress." The editors also scolded Catholics who questioned Hull's loyalty to Al Smith in the 1928 election thanks to opposition propaganda. "Was he for Al Smith," McGuire asked, "Yes, Catholic dumbbell, yes, even though some wily Kluxer slipped it over on your shallow mind that he was not – he was." In a nod to Democratic unity among Catholics in the Diocese, the paper noted with pride that despite Klan efforts to undermine support for him, "Mr. Hull got the support of eighty to ninety percent of the Catholics in Tennessee."<sup>125</sup>

Another prominent feature of Nashville Catholicism was its willingness to find common league with groups beyond its own religious community. Quoting Al Smith during the previous year's election, *The Cresset* insisted that minority activism lay at the heart of American democracy. "A vigorous and intelligent minority," the paper declared, "is a necessary check

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<sup>122</sup> "Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Johnson," *The Cresset*, February 1930; "Shamrocks and Shillalahs: The Greatest Tennessean," *The Cresset*, March 1930; "Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Andrew Johnson," *The Cresset*, May 1930, 17-18.

<sup>123</sup> "Mr. Hull's Position on Education Bill," *The Cresset*, August 1930, 3-4.

<sup>124</sup> "Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Canned Education," *The Cresset*, August 1930, 9.

<sup>125</sup> "Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Hon. Cordell Hull," *The Cresset*, September 1930, 12-13.

upon the tyranny of the majority.” As it related to Catholics, positive change would occur only after a period of “persistent effort” to educate the public on the true nature of Catholicism.<sup>126</sup>

Catholic support for minority activism extended to both Jews and even some Protestant sects.

Though Richard Powers argues that Jewish communities often rebuffed Catholic appeals for aid, he cites evidence exclusively from the Northeast. In Tennessee, it appears that the two groups were not at odds. The Jewish Brotherhood sometimes invited Catholic priests to speak at events, and *The Cresset* regularly included Jews in the ranks of “real” Americans. In August 1929, McGuire boldly responded to bigoted statements from Evangelist Bob Jones, Sr., of Alabama by insisting that “it is the intention of all real American Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Gentiles, white and colored, to live in peace and tranquility, to love and not to hate, to support the Constitution, to uphold our laws and respect one flag, and honor our President....” McGuire insisted that “no rampant, bigoted, intolerant minister, whether he be priest, preacher or rabbi, shall prevail, so long as intelligence rules in the valleys of the minds of men and liberty echoes over the American hills.”<sup>127</sup> In a published speech to the Jewish Brotherhood at the Vine Street Temple, Rev. A.A. Seiner argued that “every liberal minded man” should promote “civil and religious harmony” by displaying tolerance toward “all Adam’s children.” Only by destroying “all those hateful distinctions of race and creed,” Seiner insisted, could the denial of constitutionally protected rights be rectified.<sup>128</sup>

Praise for supportive Protestants, historical and contemporary, was also employed to emphasize a common national brotherhood, though always with the caveat of including only

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<sup>126</sup> “Political Parties Defined by Governor Smith,” *The Cresset*, January 1929, 13.

<sup>127</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: A Holy Hater Harangues,” *The Cresset*, August 1929, 12-13.

<sup>128</sup> “Intolerance – Great Disturbing Evil of Our Day,” *The Cresset*, December 1929, 9; “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: A Holy Hater Harangues,” *The Cresset*, August 1929, 12-13.

‘real’ Protestants.<sup>129</sup> The paper’s challenge to Bob Jones, Sr., in August 1929 was a prime example. Jones was an Alabama native by birth but moved to Panama City, Florida, in 1926 to open Bob Jones College. A vehement anti-Catholic, Jones once called Catholicism “a Satanic counterfeit and an ecclesiastic tyranny over the souls of men, not to bring them to salvation, but to hold them bound in sin and to hurl them into eternal damnation.”<sup>130</sup> Though Jones and other fundamentalists blamed social issues like murder, divorce, and breaking the sabbath on the growing population of “lawless” Catholic foreigners in big cities, *The Cresset* was careful not to lump all Protestants into Jones’s camp when offering its retorts. Instead, it labeled Jones as a prime example of the “intolerant Protestants” who were driving “real Protestants” away from religion. McGuire quipped,

You said America is headed toward atheism. No! No! Bob, not headed toward atheism, just headed away from the Protestant churches, because such intolerants as you, Bishop Cannon, John Roach Stratton and Billy Sunday have made it impossible for liberty-loving, God-fearing, intelligent non-Catholic people to worship God in churches controlled by such as you.<sup>131</sup>

Nativists and religious bigots, not “liberty-loving, God-fearing” Protestants, were thus inherently un-American and excluded from the family of “Adam’s children.” The paper indicted Jones’s style of Protestantism as the cause of the social issues for which nativists typically blamed Catholic foreigners. It highlighted these negative social effects by critiquing Jones’s home state. “Bob, your own Birmingham, with the highest percent of pure Anglo-Saxon citizens, with the Methodist and Baptist churches in absolute control, with a Ku Klux in every office,” McGuire

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<sup>129</sup> “Protestants Save a Catholic Church,” *The Cresset*, October 1929, 25; “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Jasper Taylor,” *The Cresset*, November 1929, 19.

<sup>130</sup> “Bob Jones University: A Boot Camp for Bigots,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 27 (Spring 2000): 15, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2678968>.

<sup>131</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: A Holy Hater Harangues,” *The Cresset*, August 1929, 12-13.

chided, “leads the cities of the world in the percent of cold-blooded murders.”<sup>132</sup> Agnosticism and atheism were also excluded from the family, but against them, Catholics and Protestants could find common cause.<sup>133</sup>

Patriotic brotherhood with ‘real’ Protestants, however, only went so far. Anti-Protestant articles appeared sporadically throughout the middle years but with particular frequency during the summer of 1929. Most focused on doctrinal inadequacies and strife within Protestant denominations as evidence of Catholicism’s superiority. A May 1929 article accused a group of American Protestants in South America of “proselytizing in its worst form.” Instead of converting non-believers in “the hot Chaco” or “the cold wastes of Tierra del Fuego” like Catholic missionaries, *The Cresset* accused Protestants of settling down in large cities and “pleasant suburbs” to target the low hanging fruit of existing Catholics.<sup>134</sup> By July, attention turned back home as the paper mused whether the Methodist Church might split. The Protestant proclivity for getting involved in politics, something the Catholic Church staunchly denied doing itself, was blamed for the tension.<sup>135</sup>

Protestant political involvement became an important target for Catholics as they defended themselves against charges that the Pope sought to control the U.S. government. An article reprinted from *The Tidings*, the official newspaper of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, insisted that Protestants “honeycombed” the United States with religious political organizations to “direct political effort into what they considered the channels of righteousness.”<sup>136</sup> Constant

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> “The Mass Is The Thing,” *The Cresset*, February 1929, 3.

<sup>134</sup> “Proselytizing In Its Worst Form,” *The Cresset*, May 1929, 3.

<sup>135</sup> “Will the Methodist Church Split,” *The Cresset*, July 1929, 3.

<sup>136</sup> “What Our Contemporaries Are Saying,” *The Cresset*, January 1930, 19-20.

reassurance that Catholic allegiance rested with the United States government rather than the Vatican remained an important part of establishing Catholic patriotism. Ultimately, increasing Protestant involvement in political organizations during the 1920s helped Catholic papers draw clearer distinctions between themselves and their accusers.

Beyond Protestants and Jews, *The Cresset* also featured a racially inclusive tone that was rarely found in a Southern city like Nashville. The paper contrasted the willingness of Catholics to admit non-white worshipers to mass against the racial prejudice of some Protestant congregations. “While it is conceded that each race is happier and more efficient when working within itself,” *The Cresset* accepted in October 1929, “there is no justification whatever in refusing a welcome to any person of any race or color, who comes to the Altar of God with the right intention.” In rejecting what the editors dubbed “the color line,” *The Cresset* again positioned Catholicism as the guardian of Constitutional liberties and the embodiment of ‘true Americanism.’<sup>137</sup>

Racial inclusivity, however, also had its limits. Confederate heritage was still an important component to social acceptability, so Catholic overtures to black Tennesseans could only extend so far.<sup>138</sup> Other ethnic groups who were in direct competition with Irishmen for employment were also excluded from the “one family.”<sup>139</sup> For example, though Chinese immigrants were praised as “the longest lived and perhaps the most profound of all people,” the editors nonetheless posed the question: “But who wants to be a Chinaman?”<sup>140</sup> As W. Darrell

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<sup>137</sup> “Draws the Color Line,” *The Cresset*, October 1929, 6.

<sup>138</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs,” *The Cresset*, February 1930, 7-8.

<sup>139</sup> “Intolerance – Great Disturbing Evil of Our Day,” *The Cresset*, December 1929, 9.

<sup>140</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Don’t Laugh At a Chinaman,” *The Cresset*, December 1929, 19-20.

Overdyke notes, nativism did not necessarily imply religious rivalry or intolerance. Persons from vastly different denominations could find common ground in couching their nativism in racial rather than religious terms. “Many nativists have been anti-Catholic,” he argues, “but many have [also] been faithful members of the Catholic Church.”<sup>141</sup>

Racial schisms also manifested internally between the ethnic parishes that dictated the internal organization of many dioceses throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Historians like Andrew Moore argue that Southern parishes were too small to develop ethnic identities cohesive enough to spark intra-Catholic conflict. Adrift in a “sea of Protestants,” the argument goes, Catholics had no choice but to coalesce around their shared faith rather than ethnic identities.<sup>142</sup> Conditions in the Diocese of Nashville, however, challenge that assertion. Not only were there distinct ethnic enclaves in rural areas, such as the German Catholic settlements in Lawrence County, but ethnic communities also coalesced in the state’s urban centers. Germantown in north Nashville and Little Ireland in the Gulch area maintained distinct ethnic identities all the way through the first decade of the twentieth century. Only with the arrival of expansive electric trolley networks and, later, car ownership did the neighborhoods begin to dilute and significantly overlap.<sup>143</sup> Bishop Byrne had recognized the need for geographically defined parishes early in his tenure, but he experienced significant local pushback from priests who worried about lost funds and empty pews.<sup>144</sup> Even when the Vatican proscribed

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<sup>141</sup> W. Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Binghamton: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), 13.

<sup>142</sup> Moore, “But We Were A Group Apart,” 75.

<sup>143</sup> Doyle, *Nashville In The New South*, 100-104.

<sup>144</sup> Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 246.

ethnic parishes in the *Revised Code of Canon Law* of 1918, the diocese's ethnic parishes stubbornly persisted until Bishop Smith solidified clear geographic boundaries after 1924.

The result of those early ethnic parishes was acute intra-Catholic rivalry. Though individuals freely mixed in marriage and business, such as the union between Oliver Timothy and Amelia Metz, the Irish and German neighborhoods generally vied for diocesan influence. In a June 1930 edition of *Shillalahs*, McGuire highlighted the success of Nashville's Irish Catholics in overcoming their fellow German Catholics in Germantown's Assumption parish. Though he credited Germans in North Nashville with helping build Catholicism institutionally, McGuire asked "Oh where, oh where, is my little Dutch gone? Oh where, oh where, can he be?" He continued:

...Monroe Street is no longer the capital of little Germany. Wiener Wurst is no longer king. Not a Jake or a Gretchen within a mile of the old fire hall. There has not been a sermon preached in German at the Assumption Church in twenty years....Well, the Irishers have swallowed them entirely, through matrimony. It's the victory of corn beef and cabbage over wieners and sauerkraut. Shamrocks have taken the place of wooden shoes as family crests. St. Patrick is their patron saint, and they will live happily ever afterwards as the phonograph plays "Mother Machree" and "Danny Deever" in their castles on West End, and attend the Cathedral on Sundays.<sup>145</sup>

McGuire's overt air of ethnic and cultural superiority is striking. Using Andrew Moore's logic, such intense ethnic competition implies that Nashville's Irish Catholics were as tight-knit and well served by Catholic institutions as their Northern and Midwestern counterparts. It also implies that they were not as besieged by Protestant antagonists as Moore supposes. Had they been so, Irish and German Catholics would have displayed greater unity in diocesan politics.

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<sup>145</sup> "Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Wir Deutschen," *The Cresset*, June 1930, 14-15.

Four months later, McGuire doubled down on the supremacy of Nashville's Irish Catholics. "The only real natural folks left among the Catholic population in Nashville," McGuire insisted, "reside in the north end of St. Joseph's parish and attend St. Joseph's Church". He emphasized distinct ethnic characteristics of the "unadulterated Irish folk" that resided there:

Yes, we simple unspoiled children of St. Joseph's, still wear our red flannel undershirts in winter, and our summer underwear has "McCarthy's Self-Rising Flour" stamped all over it. Not only that but we drink our coffee from our saucers, entertain our friends in the kitchen, and by the pipe of the holy and Sainted Patrick we marry Catholics, that is, those of us who marry at all.<sup>146</sup>

Nativists elsewhere used such features as evidence of Irish inferiority, but in Nashville they were points of community pride that distinguished the Irish as a socially and religiously cohesive group. They were presented as affirming rather than degrading. Much like the Klan's flamboyant, highly public displays during the same era, prideful accentuation of ethnic markers implies a level of comfort derived from social and political legitimacy. Nashville's Irish did not hide their Irishness because they were already broadly accepted socially and could therefore turn their energy toward growing their identity.

Irish Catholic nativism in *The Cresset* also looked outward beyond the city of Nashville. In the same June 1930 edition that "Wir Deutchen" appeared, the paper bemoaned the loss of western railroad jobs to Greeks, Italians, Hungarians, and Japanese workers in the late nineteenth century. Insisting that those groups were "of no financial benefit to the Sisters or anybody else," the editors contrasted them with the "white men" who contributed to the country's civilizing mission. *The Cresset* included Germans, Swedes, and "a mixture of Americans" with Irishmen

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<sup>146</sup> "Shamrocks and Shillalals: Real Folks," *The Cresset*, October 1930, 12-13, 20.

as the key examples of whiteness on the Western railroads.<sup>147</sup> Supporting Moore's assertion that Catholic solidarity existed in areas where Catholicism was weak, it appears that the Irish and Germans could coexist in the historic West as Catholic brethren when outnumbered by their Anglo coworkers. Within the Diocese of Nashville, however, Irish Catholicism was established well enough to engender intra-Catholic competition and a strong ethnic identity.

Father Patrick O'Hanlon, the founder of *The Columbian*, watchfully guarded that Irishness from Memphis. Following the March 1930 article where McGuire criticized early Irish Catholics for begging themselves in the name of acceptance, O'Hanlon reminded him that the original Irish immigrants had in fact kept their faith and "blazed" across the country despite having been forcibly dumped in North America by Oliver Cromwell. He also criticized McGuire for his praise of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty. Father O'Hanlon insisted that the treaty had not in fact given Ireland its freedom but only made it a vassal state with nominal rights. He warned McGuire to "keep *The Cresset* free from false and lying propagandists."<sup>148</sup> O'Hanlon's status within the Irish Catholic community ensured that the paper published such tongue lashings verbatim. The editors knew that any effort to stifle O'Hanlon would have resulted in backlash from the Irish readers who were still loyal to him. As McGuire quipped in June 1930, O'Hanlon "still loves us [*The Cresset*] so well that occasionally he threatens us with his shillalah if we go too far afield."<sup>149</sup>

O'Hanlon, however, did not operate without challengers. Pat Keelan of Navasota, Texas, wrote an opinion piece published in the May 1930 edition that challenged O'Hanlon's doubts

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<sup>147</sup> "Catholic Life in the Early Days in the Far West," *The Cresset*, June 1930, 9.

<sup>148</sup> "How Much Freedom Does Ireland Enjoy," *The Cresset*, April 1930, 3, 14.

<sup>149</sup> "Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Wir Deutchen," *The Cresset*, June 1930, 14-15.

about Irish freedom under the 1921 treaty. "Ireland now has more liberty than Texas or Tennessee, or any other American state," he insisted. He compared the treaty's mandatory oath to King George to the allegiance Tennessee owed to Washington, D.C., under the Constitution. Though he looked forward to a day when Ireland could be fully free, he questioned the staunch anti-treaty stance of irreconcilables like O'Hanlon.<sup>150</sup> Keelan's appeal to states' rights and Southern issues with federal power was obvious. Even within Southern Irish squabbles like that between O'Hanlon and Keelan, Irish issues were carefully presented in terms that Southern readers of *The Cresset* could understand and find a sense of regional comradery. Keelan's contribution from Texas also pointed to the growing reach of Tennessee's Catholic press at the regional as well as state level.

O'Hanlon's response must have been swift within Diocesan circles. In the July 1930 *Cresset*, Keelan qualified his stance after a friend informed him that he was dealing with "*the* Rev. P. O'Hanlon [emphasis mine]." O'Hanlon's reputation as a "trained controversialist" was far reaching if Keelan's friend knew enough about him to warn Keelan about the prowess of the man he was challenging. Keelan restructured his argument to emphasize points of ideological agreement with O'Hanlon. "I have as little use for Britain as Father O'Hanlon dares have," he wrote, "and I am as proud of Ireland's past glory as he can be, but dreams of ancient grandeur are poor weapons against machine guns, bombing planes and armored trucks."<sup>151</sup> Keelan's shift toward the practicalities of war demonstrates his unwillingness to challenge O'Hanlon ideologically. Meanwhile, *The Cresset* remained unwaveringly loyal to O'Hanlon's point of

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<sup>150</sup> "The Question of Irish Freedom Again," *The Cresset*, May 1930, 3.

<sup>151</sup> "More About Irish Freedom," *The Cresset*, July 1930, 13.

view. The victorious “Wir Duetchen” article was part of its response to reassure O’Hanlon that the paper’s identity remained solidly Irish.

The increasing confidence of Nashville’s Irish Catholic community, however, drew the attention of groups like the KKK. Despite the Klan’s institutional decline in the late 1920s, it continued to command a large enough following to spark isolated anti-Catholic activity throughout the South. In Tennessee, Klan organizations were strongest in the eastern and western divisions, especially Chattanooga and Memphis, though major political defeats in the municipal elections of 1923 had greatly reduced their influence in those areas as well.<sup>152</sup> *The Cresset* reflected this power shift in its coverage of anti-Catholic activities. It opened 1929 with a warning to its readers that “the flood of anti-Catholic literature...appears to continue.” The paper’s tone in the rest of the article, however, implied a far less threatening anti-Catholic presence. “The longer [anti-Catholic literature] runs,” the editors argued, “the sillier and more absurd it seems to get.” Anti-Catholic materials were described as “ridiculous,” “trash,” and “genuinely amazing and amusing.” “Such statements need no comment,” the paper insisted. Not surprisingly, the editors billed readership of *The Cresset* as a primary avenue for educating both Catholics and non-Catholics and reducing the “public gullibility” on which the remaining religious bigots fed.<sup>153</sup> By presenting Catholicism as an “open book” devoid of the secret plots and devious rituals, *The Cresset* continued its mission of being a ‘flame upon the hearthstones’ capable of driving nativism from its shadowy hiding places.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Nancy Maclean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 177; Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 152-153.

<sup>153</sup> “Somebody Send them a Catechism?,” *The Cresset*, January 1929, 3.

<sup>154</sup> “The Secrets of the Catholic Church,” *The Cresset*, February 1929, 5.

McGuire even openly mocked the Klan and its agenda as more useful to Catholics than nativists. In an article entitled “Our Dictionary,” he defined the Ku Klux Klan as “an organization whose activities sent some indifferent Catholics to Mass” and labeled the Election of 1928, which the Klan attempted to harness as a catalyst to anti-Catholic sentiments, as “the best thing that ever happened for the good and welfare of the Catholic Church in these United States.”<sup>155</sup> Rather than weaken the Church, McGuire insisted that Klan activity in the 1920s advanced Church unity.

*The Cresset* continued to use anti-Bolshevism and humor as anti-nativist tools throughout 1929 and 1930. For example, the paper counted religiously motivated investigations by state legislatures against Catholic institutions as “a form of Russian bolshevism” that “cannot help but end in disaster.”<sup>156</sup> When Dr. John Moore, an anti-Catholic Baptist pastor from East Nashville, fell ill, McGuire seized the opportunity to display “true Christianity” by sending public wishes for his swift recovery.<sup>157</sup> The paper also pulled humor from its contemporaries. An article reprinted from *The Telegraph* mocked the Episcopal Bishop of Aberdeen, Scotland, for his “sugar-coated address to a group of Anglophiles” that emphasized the importance of continued Anglo-Saxon influence in America. “This will be pleasing to St. Peter,” the paper chided, “who may set aside a special place in the celestial kingdom for the Anglo-Saxon souls where they may toot on their Anglo-saxophones forever more without hindrance or annoyance on the part of foreigners.”<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Our Dictionary,” *The Cresset*, June 1930, 14-15.

<sup>156</sup> “Menaced by Madness of Intolerance,” *The Cresset*, March 1929, 3.

<sup>157</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Dr. John Moore,” *The Cresset*, August 1929, 12-13.

<sup>158</sup> “What Our Contemporaries Are Saying,” *The Cresset*, March 1930, 13-14.

By fall 1930, there were warning signs that not all was well with *The Cresset*. The August edition featured commentary on “The Catholic Hour” radio show. While the editors hailed the broadcast as an opportunity to spread truth about Catholicism to more Americans than ever before, they could not have escaped the sinking feeling that they were standing face to face with their replacement. Radio was new, flashy, and adored by an ever-widening audience. While it fit well with the Church’s educational mission and promised to “sweep away the dusty old cobwebs of doubt and suspicion,” radio also had the power to put *The Cresset* and its editors out of work.<sup>159</sup>

In the months that followed, the editors showed signs of frustration. They bemoaned the financial and personal challenges of publishing Catholic newspapers. “Who is more severely criticized than the Catholic editor,” they asked.<sup>160</sup> A September 1930 article described Charles Lord, editor and manager of *The Cresset*, as having “thirty days of tired ink stained fingers for which he does not receive as much as a cigarette, and only a couple of damyous as compensation.”<sup>161</sup> An October edition that listed all of the paper’s advertisers was doubtless an attempt to shame non-contributing Catholic businesses into joining the ranks of regular *Cresset* advertisers.<sup>162</sup> Another article in November highlighted how little compensation editors received for their long hours of work. Editors, the paper insisted, could “do better selling popcorn at baseball games.”<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: The Catholic Hour,” *The Cresset*, August 1930, 9-10.

<sup>160</sup> “Defends the Catholic Press,” *The Cresset*, October 1930, 11.

<sup>161</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Thanks, Father Hardeman,” *The Cresset*, September 1930, 12-13.

<sup>162</sup> “The Cresset’s Advertisers,” *The Cresset*, October 1930, 11.

<sup>163</sup> “The Difficulties Faced by Publishers of Catholic Papers,” *The Cresset*, November 1930, 36.

The sudden concern for finances reflected the worsening economic conditions related to the Great Depression. Despite dramatic financial crashes in Northern cities in late 1929, conditions in Southern cities deteriorated more slowly thanks to their less-speculative sources of economic growth during the 1920s. As a result, fears over the length and severity of the economic crisis rocking the rest of the country were slow to manifest in the South. Southern newspapers played a significant role in buoying the general sense of optimism by minimizing coverage of negative impacts and focusing instead on any sign that the pain was temporary. As late as spring 1931, Southern papers were predicting that the worst economic effects had already passed and substantial gains were just around the corner. Some papers, such as the *Atlanta Journal* and *Atlanta Constitution*, even credited the Southern climate as the cure-all for economic woes. Demonstrating what historian Douglas Smith calls “sunshine syndrome,” the papers insisted that cold winter temperatures had caused much of the unemployment problem and that prosperity would return with warm summer weather. They were wrong. Conditions continued along a steady decline with many cities not reaching their lowest ebbs until late in 1932. Smith argues that the South’s optimism is evidence that it retained a strong regional identity in which they viewed themselves as uniquely isolated from national and international events.<sup>164</sup>

*The Cresset* was a full participant in maintaining that identity. Only four articles dealt with negative coverage of economic issues from 1929 to 1931, and most of them did so in dismissive tones. The first appeared in a December 1929 Shillalah where McGuire gloated that the “much boasted Hoover Market” had collapsed. He blamed a “speculative craze” that had made the country into “one vast gambling resort” and brought it “to the edge of a volcanic

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<sup>164</sup> Douglas L. Smith, *The New Deal in the Urban South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 12-16.

panic.”<sup>165</sup> As McGuire saw it, the economic panic might have been averted if voters had chosen Al Smith over Hoover.

The implication that the country’s economic woes were the result of a poor choice of president in the Election of 1928 continued two months later in a February 1930 article that claimed to recount a story told by Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana. Wheeler, a Democrat and self-proclaimed friend to Irish Catholics, had settled in Montana almost 25 years prior after losing everything in an ill-fated poker game that left him stranded in Butte. Perhaps because of his own bouts of bad luck, he prided himself on championing the underdog.<sup>166</sup> In 1930, Wheeler allegedly told his fellow Congressmen the story of a young immigrant’s citizenship exam. “Who is President of the United States?” the examiners asked. The young man responded, “Al Smith.” When asked why he believed so, the young man said

All I know about it is the republican orators told us that if Al Smith was elected we would have a general panic in the country; that prices in Wall Street would drop; that men would get out of employment; that the farmers would go broke, and banks would fail. All of these things have happened, so I think Al Smith must be president of the United States.<sup>167</sup>

The Senator’s snide humor fit well with the “sunshine syndrome” displayed by Captain Patrick H. Rice in another article just one page later. Rice was the head of both the Knights of St. Gregory and the Catholic Laymen’s League of Georgia. In covering his recent visit to Nashville, *The Cresset* highlighted Rice’s belief that business prospects were beginning to lighten with each passing day. “Normal conditions are gradually being resumed,” he assured the Nashville

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<sup>165</sup> “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: The Lamb Is Shorn,” *The Cresset*, December 1929, 19.

<sup>166</sup> Burton K. Wheeler and Paul F. Healy, *Yankee from the West: The Candid, Turbulent Life Story of the Yankee-born U.S. Senator from Montana* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1962), 57-62.

<sup>167</sup> “Ought to Get His Papers,” *The Cresset*, February 1930, 3.

audience.<sup>168</sup> High hopes, however, did not prevent the Depression from catching up to Nashville.

In the last edition of 1930, the editors focused on the Diocese's acquisition of historical copies of the *Catholic Herald*. They praised the newspaper's regional and national focus, noting that it could have been read with just as much interest in Maine or California as in Tennessee. "There is little of trivial or purely local interests," the editors wrote. Commending its "upstanding, militant Catholicity" and "strong doctrinal and instructive articles," the editors perhaps saw a blueprint for their own future.<sup>169</sup> *The Cresset* was looking for ways to modernize and retain its popular appeal. Toward that end, the December 1930 edition was the first and only to feature a full-page photograph on its cover page. All previous and subsequent editions featured only sketched graphics. Perhaps the editors turned to the *Herald* when the flashy December cover failed to move the needle on subscriptions. Given the short lifespan and financial woes faced by the *Herald*, however, imitation was a poor choice. Change was coming for *The Cresset*, but not necessarily for its betterment.

### **A Flickering Flame: The Final Years, 1931-1932**

As the Great Depression worsened, *The Cresset* opened 1931 with a look ahead as well as a glance behind. Reaffirming the paper's educational role in the community, the editors noted that Bishop Alphonse Smith had "consented" to provide a "splendid series of doctrinal sermons" as well as provide "competent authorities" to answer questions submitted by the paper's

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<sup>168</sup> "Capt. Patrick H. Rice, Layman's League Head, Visits Nashville," *The Cresset*, February 1930, 4.

<sup>169</sup> "The First Catholic Paper of Tennessee," *The Cresset*, December 1930, 15-16.

readers.<sup>170</sup> Though the article's tone implied that Smith had been coerced to do so, structural changes to the paper alluded to a heavier diocesan hand at work.<sup>171</sup> Most strikingly, the first edition of 1931 did not contain a "Shamrocks and Shillalahs" section. Though the paper continued to list McGuire as an associate editor, his authorial voice was suddenly and completely absent. Gone were the tidbits of Irish wit and wisdom that characterized the paper during its middle years. Given that the outspoken McGuire did not indicate any intention of stopping his run in the final issues of 1930, it is likely that the order to remove the section came from above rather than from McGuire himself.

The absence of "Shamrocks and Shillalahs" was indicative of a larger tonal shift. Humorous and frivolous aspects were stripped away in favor of more cerebral lessons on Catholic doctrine. References to local anti-Catholic antagonism also vanished in favor of a more global perspective. The Church's complicated relationship with Italian fascism and the growth of Bolshevism in Spain and Russia became more frequent topics than the local Klan.<sup>172</sup> Reflecting ever increasing Diocesan control, *The Cresset* also began towing the Vatican line more closely even when it was unpalatable for American audiences. For example, the paper openly endorsed the rise of strongmen like Mussolini as the cure for the threat posed by international communism. Unlike earlier years, the paper did not attempt to frame anti-communism as evidence of its Americanism. Instead, it presented America as "part of the plot" with communist Russia, and, therefore, in desperate need for strongman leadership like that in

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<sup>170</sup> "The Cresset's Editor Looks Ahead," *The Cresset*, January 1931, 5-6.

<sup>171</sup> "What the Word Cresset Means," *The Cresset*, January 1931, 13.

<sup>172</sup> "Attacks on Church in Spain Soviet Plot," *The Cresset*, June 1931, 5-6; "The Real Vatican-Fascist Issue," *The Cresset*, August 1931, 12; "Catholic Action and Fascism," *The Cresset*, December 1931, 13, 16.

Italy.<sup>173</sup> Rather than an Eden of religious freedom, America was just another country in which Catholics were not wholly welcome. Only one article from 1931-1932 mentioned ‘true Americanism.’

Gone also was the insistence that U.S. law was supreme to all else, including the Vatican. Submission to secular law had long been a core feature of Catholic claims to patriotic loyalty, but the new *Cresset* ordered Catholics to test U.S. laws against Catholic doctrine before deciding to follow them. Asking “shall a citizen obey his God or his State,” *The Cresset* now answered firmly in favor of the former. “In case of an immoral or unjust law,” the paper argued, “a citizen has the duty in one case and the right in the other, to disobey because such a so-called law is no rule of right reason, is no law at all.” Instead, “the laws of God are superior to all human laws.”<sup>174</sup> The position was a dangerous one. Anti-Catholic nativists had long used Catholic ‘subordination’ to the Vatican as a key line of attack in questioning their patriotic loyalties. *The Catholic Herald* and *The Columbian* had worked diligently to counter that notion, but *The Cresset* now appeared to embrace it without reservation.

Though some articles continued to reference the history of Catholicism in Tennessee, they lacked the flare of earlier accounts and were largely reduced to lists of names and events.<sup>175</sup> The same was true for references to Irishness. A 1931 reprinting of Rev. George Flanigen’s St.

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<sup>173</sup> “Attacks on Church in Spain Soviet Plot,” *The Cresset*, June 1931, 5-6.

<sup>174</sup> “Liberty of Conscience,” *The Cresset*, February 1932, 13.

<sup>175</sup> “Tennessee’s Roll of Honor,” *The Cresset*, February 1931, 7-8; “Early Religious Education of Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, May 1931, 5-6; “Tennessee’s Roll of Honor,” *The Cresset*, May 1931, 9-10; “Early Religious Education of Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, June 1931, 9-10, 20; “Tennessee’s Roll of Honor,” *The Cresset*, June 1931, 15-16; “Early Religious Education of Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, August 1931, 9-10; “Tennessee’s Roll of Honor,” *The Cresset*, August 1931, 15-16; “Tennessee’s Roll of Honor,” *The Cresset*, January 1932, 16-17; “Early Days in Nashville,” *The Cresset*, March 1932, 7, 9; “Memphis Catholics in the News,” *The Cresset*, March 1932, 10.

Patrick's Day speech at St. Patrick's Church in Nashville was one of only two articles that dealt with Irish issues during the entire period.<sup>176</sup> The other came in February 1932 and chronicled plans for representatives from Tennessee to attend the Eucharistic Congress in Dublin.<sup>177</sup> Elsewhere, the Irish were shockingly omitted from lists of the peoples who contributed to the "great Unity" of the Church.<sup>178</sup>

The most dramatic changes, however, occurred when the paper announced in October 1931 that the Diocese was assuming full editorial duties. The new managing editor, Reverend George J. Flanigen, promised to raise the paper's editorial standards to make it more readable, interesting, instructive, and profitable. He also made it clear that the Diocese was not satisfied with the paper's former management, which meant a marked decrease in the paper's ethnic identity despite Flanigen's prominent Irish heritage. "The *Cresset* has its defects," Flanigen wrote, "in content, in circulation and advertising," which had attracted a "good deal of criticism." The paper's financial priorities also shifted to paying the remaining debt owed for the construction of Father Ryan High School. Flanigen reminded readers that *The Cresset* was the only periodical in the diocese "published under the approbation of the Bishop."<sup>179</sup> His comment not only stressed the importance of diocesan authority but also suggests that *The Cresset* may have faced competition by other Catholic newspapers

Under Flanigen's leadership, the newspaper emphasized the importance of Catholic Action. In three articles from November 1931 to February 1932, he contrasted Catholic Action

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<sup>176</sup> "St. Patrick and the Faith of the Irish," *The Cresset*, April 1931, 9-10.

<sup>177</sup> "Tennessee Pilgrimage to Dublin," *The Cresset*, February 1932, 9.

<sup>178</sup> "The Spirit of Catholicism," *The Cresset*, August 1931, 7-8.

<sup>179</sup> "The *Cresset* Announcing New Management," *The Cresset*, October 1931, 5.

in Italy and America. He criticized Mussolini for targeting Catholic Action societies as potential threats to Italy's Fascist Party. Blaming the rift between Vatican and Duce on the Fascist Party's attempt to make the Church a department of state while also limiting its authority, he questioned the desirability of centralization at a national level in America. "America is so vast, and the needs of its individual dioceses so various," he argued, "that no form of centrally governed organization would fulfill all its needs." Instead, he proposed "diocesan management" as the most effective means of carrying out Action objectives in the U.S.<sup>180</sup> The shift back toward diocesan localism revived opportunities for the paper to reflect Southern rather than national or international perspectives.

A December 1931 article titled "Depression Relief Begun by the Diocese" reflected how Catholic Action was reacting to the Great Depression through service to the poor. Reverend Flanigen recounted the dramatic effect of a Vatican call for Bishops to "mobilize all their spiritual and material forces and to launch a crusade of charity and relief." Bishop Alphonse Smith reacted by ordering three days of prayer in preparation for meetings across the Diocese to discuss the best ways to provide relief to the needy. Meetings in Nashville, Memphis, and Chattanooga preceded a formal conference in Nashville, which voted to organize a chapter of the all-male Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The men who joined the society were charged with aiding the Ladies of Charity with their ongoing efforts to ease the economic pain plaguing various parishes. Flanigen encouraged men "who have not the leisure or inclination to perform the active work of the Society" to contribute monetarily as the active members could not hope to provide all the needed resources "out of their limited means." While Flanigen praised the

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<sup>180</sup> "The Meaning of Catholic Action," *The Cresset*, November 1931, 11, 20; "Catholic Action and Fascism," *The Cresset*, December 1931, 13, 16; "Catholic Action in America," *The Cresset*, February 1932, 16-17.

Society's work as "splendid," he must have also yearned for some of that revenue to buoy the struggling paper.<sup>181</sup> Though not acknowledged at the time, *The Cresset* had only a matter of months remaining before it permanently closed its doors.

March 1932 marked the final edition of *The Cresset*. Emphasizing Catholicism's growth nationally, the paper cited 37 states that were "strongly Catholic, most of them predominantly so." It also praised the growth of the Catholic press, highlighting the 310 Catholic periodicals that served a total U.S. Catholic population of 21,887,606.<sup>182</sup> Another article noted with pride that the Diocese of Nashville had contributed to the annual collection for the Catholic University of America "far in excess of any previous collection."<sup>183</sup> These expressions of Catholic success, however, were accompanied by a worrying sign. For the first time in its history, the paper included a cut-out coupon that allowed the user to subscribe for \$1 a year or \$2 for three years if paid in advance.<sup>184</sup> The sudden appearance of the coupon suggests that the paper was experiencing issues with maintaining its cash flow. Perhaps the multi-year discount was meant to induce cash-strapped readers. Alternatively, the paper's new mission to fund Father Ryan High School's debts may have forced the paper to seek a rapid increase in revenue

On the last page of *The Cresset's* bound volumes, Reverend Flanigen taped a simple note announcing that the Diocese was discontinuing the publication. He blamed a lack of both reporting material and advertisers for the sudden shuttering. "The game was not worth the candle," the Reverend concluded. Whether or not Flanigen connected his candle reference to

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<sup>181</sup> "Depression Relief Begun by Diocese," *The Cresset*, December 1931, 6.

<sup>182</sup> "Some Statistics," *The Cresset*, March 1932, 6; "The Catholic Press," *The Cresset*, March 1932, 6.

<sup>183</sup> "Previous Catholic University Collections Greatly Exceeded," *The Cresset*, March 1932, 8.

<sup>184</sup> "Subscription Blank," *The Cresset*, March 1932, 9.

*The Cresset's* namesake is not clear. Regardless, the statement provided a poetic final sputter for a publication that once hoped to be the 'flame upon the hearthstones.'

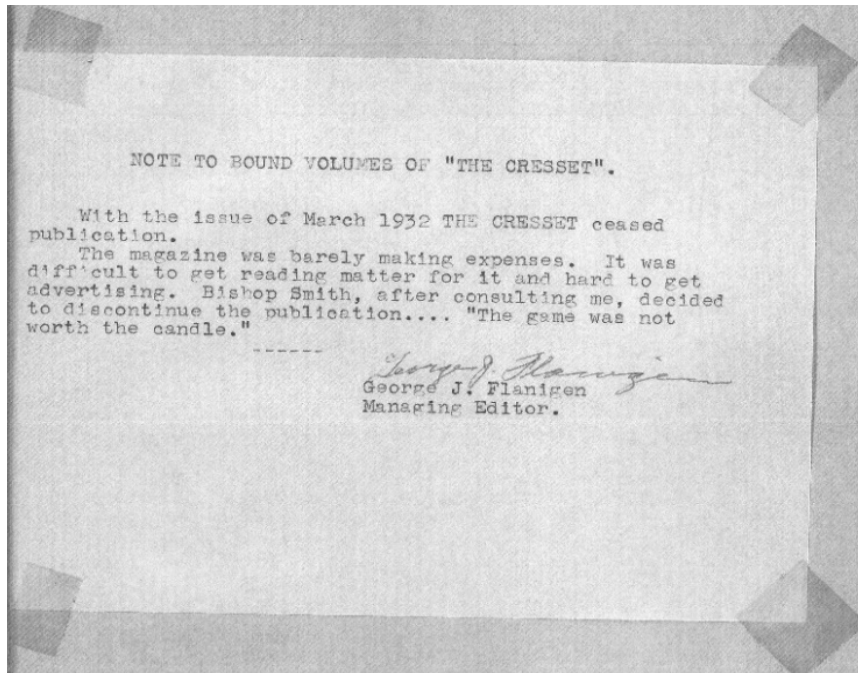


Figure 10: Final page of *The Cresset* in the bound volumes housed at Aquinas College in Nashville, Tennessee.

In reality, *The Cresset* likely failed because of a confluence of factors. First, the paper's core readership could not afford subscriptions in 1931-1932. Additionally, *The Cresset's* tone in the late 1920s pointed to Irish Catholics as primary consumers, and they were

likely displeased with the doctrinaire tone and lack of Irishness that Diocesan control brought. Catholicism in the Diocese of Nashville was synonymous with Irishness, and, as a result, a Catholic publication that neglected Irish issues stood little chance of success.

The worsening Depression also undoubtedly played a significant role. Readers already short on expendable income were unlikely to choose support of *The Cresset* over purchasing necessities. Unhappiness with the paper's content only magnified that effect. The delay of the Depression's arrival in Nashville bought the paper more time than it would have had in cities elsewhere in the country, but it ultimately had to face the same pressures as its Northern and Western counterparts.

The final pages of the March 1932 edition provide another possible explanation for the paper's demise. In one of the last articles, Flanigen reproduced a radio address by New York attorney Alexander I. Rorke over the Paulist Father's Station, WLWL. The speech, named 'The Catholic Origins of American Government,' mirrored the Catholic indigeneity narratives used in the early years of *The Cresset*. Rorke highlighted the important role Catholics played in the exploration, naming, and founding of institutions in North America. He also reaffirmed the indispensable role of Catholic principles in framing foundational American documents like the Declaration of Independence and Constitution.<sup>185</sup> These were well-worn themes by this point, but their dissemination via radio was not. The growing influence of radio held the power to usurp print as the preferred means to both educate and rally the masses. In fact, a nearly half-page ad promoting "K. of C. On the Air" appeared side by side with Rorke's speech. Despite the seminal role the Knights of Columbus had played in launching Catholic periodicals like *The Columbian*, it appears that they too were evolving to harness the power of radio.

The advertised Fiftieth Anniversary program was "to be Broadcast over a continent-wide Network from the Atlantic to Pacific, United States and Canada, National Broadcasting Co. (Red Network) and Associated Stations."<sup>186</sup> Neither *The Columbian* nor *The Cresset* could have hoped to match such geographic reach. Nor could they have hoped to freely enter so many Catholic and non-Catholic homes simultaneously. Unlike periodicals, which required deliberate action to subscribe and read, radio was essentially passive. A listener of any faith or political disposition could tune in and listen without significant effort or judgement. Periodicals were simply outmatched in fulfilling the core educational goals on which they had built their

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<sup>185</sup> "Some Pertinent Reminders," *The Cresset*, March 1932, 11-12.

<sup>186</sup> "K. of C. On the Air," *The Cresset*, March 1932, 13.

relevance. For families facing hard economic choices, tapping into free radio broadcasts using devices bought when the twenties were still roaring made more economic sense than paying an ongoing subscription for a physical newspaper.

It is also possible that *The Cresset's* readership declined as a result of its own ideological success. The paper's increasingly dismissive tones toward anti-Catholic activities in the years before 1931 suggests that Irish Catholics in Nashville no longer feared religiously bigoted attacks as existential threats. From the beginning, *The Columbian* and *The Cresset* presented their educational efforts as essential weapons against the forces of nativism. One of *The Cresset's* published goals in 1927 was "the elimination of bigotry, intolerance and misunderstanding in national affairs."<sup>187</sup> If bigotry had been largely eliminated in its most visible forms, then the paper's readers may have simply drifted away out of a sense of complacency and security, confident in their faith's status as a native institution rooted deeply in the Southern soil.

Visible bigotry, however, was only a surface aspect of the long struggle Catholics were still fighting. Beneath that surface, latent forms of discrimination persisted. One of the most onerous was the widespread dismissal of Catholic parochial schools as divisive and substandard. For Catholicism to become a fully established institution in Tennessee, the diocese had to ensure that its members were seen not only as economic, social, and patriotic equals but also intellectual equals. Ironically, the Great Depression provided an opportunity to do so. By refocusing resources on updating physical plants, acquiring accreditation, and launching programs that addressed the youth crisis generated by the depression, the Church sought to take another step

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<sup>187</sup> "What the Cresset Stands For," *The Cresset*, May 1927, 3.

toward total assimilation. Once again, the Timothy family provided an excellent yardstick against which to measure its success.

## Chapter 4:

### An Army of Youth: Catholic Education and Youth Culture in the Great Depression

#### Humphrey Timothy, Jr.

On August 1, 1930, 31-year-old Humphrey W. Timothy, Jr., died an educated and successful man. As the eldest son of Timothy family patriarch, Humphrey, Sr., Humphrey had enjoyed the same privileged childhood as James and Pat. Like his cousins, he was educated in Nashville's parochial school system and then served the U.S. military, fighting Pancho Villa's forces in Mexico before deploying to France as part of the 115<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery unit. Afterward, he attended the Catholic Spring Hill College in Alabama. Like so many others in his family, he then spent several years working at Timothy Dry Goods, excelling as a manager in the ready-to-wear department. While a resident of Nashville, he was a member of the Elks Club, the American Legion, and the Knights of Columbus. He then joined the Henry Rose & Sons firm of New York as a western representative in

#### DIES IN WEST



H. W. TIMOTHY, JR.

Figure 11: Humphrey W. Timothy, Jr., "Dies in West," *Nashville Banner*, August 2, 1930, 1.

New Mexico. He had only been in the West about six weeks when he succumbed to an unnamed illness. Humphrey's death was announced in the *Nashville Banner* the following day.<sup>1</sup>

Only four months prior to his death, Timothy's success in life was on full display in the 1930 U.S. Census. His address of record was 3508 Murphey (now spelled Murphy) Road. The newly constructed 2,300 sq. ft. home at that address was valued at \$8,000, the second most expensive on his block. Living with Humphrey was his wife, his two daughters, a brother-in-law, and a sister-in-law. The data confirmed that Humphrey Timothy was a prosperous, literate, native-born Tennessean. In nearly every aspect, he embodied a triumph of assimilation. Yet, there was one column that didn't seem to fit. Under "Attended School or College," the census taker recorded a terse "no."<sup>2</sup> Despite all his accomplishments, including a college degree, Humphrey was listed as never having attended school.

The census raises an important question: why was a man as successful and demonstrably educated as Humphrey Timothy, Jr., listed as not having attended school or college? The answer lies with the Catholic affiliation of Timothy's schools. Despite the greater levels of social, economic, and political inclusion that Catholics achieved in Tennessee in the opening decades of the twentieth century, the 1930 census suggests that Catholic parochial schools did not fully share in those gains. Explanations for why are sparse. As Timothy Walch points out, Catholic parochial education is "one of the most neglected [fields] in American historiography."<sup>3</sup> Like so

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<sup>1</sup> "Humphrey Timothy Dies in New Mexico," *Nashville Banner*, August 2, 1930; "Rites Tuesday for Humphrey Timothy," *Nashville Banner*, August 4, 1930.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population Schedule," [https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/68013485:6224?tid=&pid=&queryId=ac8a23af6f27716e3d64f0b8fe9b6ad7&\\_phsrc=eKW2&\\_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/68013485:6224?tid=&pid=&queryId=ac8a23af6f27716e3d64f0b8fe9b6ad7&_phsrc=eKW2&_phstart=successSource); "3508 Murphey Road," Zillow.com, [https://www.zillow.com/homedetails/3508-Murphy-Rd-Nashville-TN-37205/41128520\\_zpid/](https://www.zillow.com/homedetails/3508-Murphy-Rd-Nashville-TN-37205/41128520_zpid/).

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Walch, *Parish School: American Catholic Parochial Education from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Crossroads, 1996), 2.

many other areas of Catholic studies, literature is particularly sparse for the inland South, and the explanations that exist use the same well-worn trope: few Catholics lived there.

While Southern Catholics were certainly less numerous outside coastal bastions like New Orleans, Savannah, and Charleston, ignoring the contributions of inland Catholics has resulted in an incomplete picture of how the Church strove to establish its already extensive system of schools as a legitimate American institution. The omission is particularly onerous given the unique ways that Catholics pursued legitimization in those areas where their numbers were lower and, as a result, their presence less threatening to the Protestant majority. This chapter fills a portion of the historiographic gap by analyzing coverage of Catholic education by the fourth major paper of the Diocese of Nashville, *The Register*, from 1937 to 1940. The paper's 'call to arms' to Tennessee's Catholic youth blended approaches taken by Catholic reformers in other regions of the country to create a distinctly inland South approach to addressing anxieties about parochial education and youth culture in the 1930s.

### **The Great Education Debate**

Schooling is universally linked to concepts of democracy and good citizenship in the historiography of American education. When scholars disagree, they do so over the nature rather than the existence of those linkages. After all, what is a good citizen and what must education accomplish to produce one? Just as importantly, what is American democracy? Is it a system meant to ensure equity or protect freedoms? Does it serve the needs of an assimilative melting pot or highlight the kaleidoscopic variations of a social mosaic? Historians' approaches to answering those questions have produced remarkably diverse perspectives across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Edwin Dexter's *A History of Education in the United States* represents a classical approach to explaining the development of America's school systems. Written in 1906, Dexter work predates the national reform movements of later decades and, therefore, focuses on how distinct education systems developed in response to local issues in particular cities, states, and regions. He believed that a small, locally controlled system functioned more effectively than larger, state-based systems because the latter was too complex to avoid "total breakdown" at the slightest adjustment.<sup>4</sup>

Jonathan Neem echoes Dexter's faith in localism as an engine for innovation and democratization. "Our schools were democracy's schools," he contends, because they were local in origin, promoted a curriculum designed to prepare people for citizenship, and fostered disagreements that became part of the democratic process itself.<sup>5</sup> Sarah Mondale and Sarah Patton concur that "grassroots governance" provided the foundation for "democracy in education and education in democracy" that was essential for the republic's survival.<sup>6</sup> Neem, Mondale, and Patton's patriotic envisionment of education as an incubator for democracy is also present in Dexter's work, which is undergirded by faith in a collective American identity capable superseding social difference. Despite, or perhaps because of, the waves of immigrants arriving from southern and eastern Europe by 1906, Dexter clings to a vision of racial and cultural homogeneity centered on white, Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. His views, therefore, indicate why Catholics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries diligently guarded the wall of separation

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>5</sup> Johann Neem, *Democracy's Schools: The Rise of Public Education in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Mondale and Sarah B. Patton, ed., *School: The Story of American Public Education* (Boston: Beacon, 2001), 5-6, 8.

between church and state. During those formative years, the greatest threat to Catholic education was legally mandated absorption into the increasingly centralized, Anglophilic, and Protestant public system.

For Tracy Steffes, however, the history of American education is more directly tied to concerted efforts toward “state-building,” or the expansion of state-level authority over American society.<sup>7</sup> She argues that local education structures were slowly appropriated and embedded into state structures for curriculum design, funding, and administrative leadership.<sup>8</sup> Dexter also recognizes that strong tides of “unification and standardization” were pulling American schools into ever larger regulatory districts, but his use of the term ‘centralized’ refers only to consolidation at the state level as the federal government’s involvement in 1906 was limited to the feeble Bureau of Education. Regardless, such developments were troublesome for Catholic communities that treasured the complex and well-funded parochial school systems they had built throughout the nineteenth century. Too much state interference in the still potent ‘Protestant Empire’ could spell the end of Catholic education. In response, Catholic dioceses across the country doubled down on developing a mirror-universe of Catholic institutions that offered a viable alternative to their mainstream counterparts. While this impulse helped protect Catholic identity in the short term, it also fed into anti-Catholic narratives that accused them of un-American divisiveness.

Horace Mann’s ‘common schools’ were viewed as chief antagonists in the secular versus sectarian education battlefield. Theoretically free and universal, common schools eroded

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<sup>7</sup> Tracy L. Steffes, *School, Society, and State: A New Education to Govern Modern America, 1890-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Steffes, *School, Society, and State*, 3.

previous geographic designations at the town or district levels and increased the influence of state level politicians in areas once reserved for the family and church.<sup>9</sup> As Herbert Kliebard argues, the transition of schools from “direct instruments of a visible and unified community” to centralized “mediating institutions” between families and the “impersonal social order” shifted school curricula toward remote, state-dictated sources of knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

Nancy Beadie attributes that shift to the desire of politicians to convert school-based social capital to political capital. Rather than following the urban-centric industrialization narrative of colleagues like Kliebard and William J. Reese, Beadie builds on the work of Carl Kaestle and Maris Vinovskis, arguing that rural schools’ success at driving the market revolution was the key attribute that caught politicians’ attention.<sup>11</sup> She contends that interference by those politicians is what made American schools the sites of “political coalition and conflict” that they are today.<sup>12</sup> According to Reese, however, the shift also caused a significant increase in class divisions for the remainder of the century.<sup>13</sup> Wayne Urban, Jennings Wagoner, Jr., and Milton Gaither take a less pessimistic stance on centralization, pointing to the desire of politicians to use public schools “to bring the benefits of education to all citizens of a state” instead of just to the elite who had previously occupied America’s academies and chartered schools.<sup>14</sup> Despite

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<sup>9</sup> Wayne J. Urban, Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr., and Milton Gaither. *American Education: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 44, 83-84.

<sup>10</sup> Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Nancy Beadie, *Education and the Creation of Capital in the Early American Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 16, 320; Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*, 1; William J. Reese, *The Origins of the American High School* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), xiii.

<sup>12</sup> Beadie, *Education and the Creation of Capital*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Reese, *The Origins of the American High School*, xiii.

<sup>14</sup> Urban, Wagoner, and Gaither, *American Education*, 70, 82-83.

significant Catholic influence on the Democratic party, Catholics generally viewed the politicization of schooling as morally and socially dangerous throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Arguing that their parochial institutions produced citizens of equivalent civic virtue to those produced by public schools, Catholics dismissed the need for state oversight.

John Rury takes a very different approach than his fellow authors. In *Education and Social Change*, he explores how American schools both shaped and reacted to changes in the broader culture. Rury presents American schools as one of many institutions interacting within a dynamic socio-political ecosystem. When Rury asks “do schools change society, or does society change schools,” his answer is both. “It is possible,” he insists, “that education has been on either side of social change: both as a causal agent and as an activity influenced by others.”<sup>15</sup> In this way, Rury echoes the ‘reciprocating engine’ concept within American religious historiography and provides a more nuanced framework in which to consider the influence of competing institutions.

Rury’s approach also differs from his peers in the complexity with which he treats the purpose of education. Rather than echoing the ‘education for success of democracy’ stance of his peers, Rury discusses various types of capital (social, cultural, and/or human) that groups seek to transmit via the education systems they create.<sup>16</sup> In doing so, he manages to draw distinctions between competing impulses that other education historians treat as monolithic.<sup>17</sup> Given that the acquisition of social, cultural, and human capital is closely related to issues of assimilation, Rury again provides a useful lens to consider how and why social subgroups like

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<sup>15</sup> John L. Rury, *Education and Social Change: Contours in the History of American Schooling* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 6-9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 125-126.

Catholics engaged in education reform. From a Catholic perspective, however, Rury misses a critical fourth category: moral capital. Catholic leaders consistently argued schooling without sufficient moral instruction was destined to fail in its mission to produce democratic-minded, productive citizens. As a result, they presented Catholic schools as dual engines that preserved Catholic faith while also producing politically assimilated ‘100 percent’ Americans.

Ann Marie Ryan supports the argument that Catholics “managed their own assimilation” by funding “parallel but Catholic institutions.” In faithfully simulating the public-school structures, Catholics could “participate constructively in the larger society without undermining their own group’s...distinctive heritage.”<sup>18</sup> In this way, Catholics consciously existed in two realms at once. In Ryan’s account, Catholics established institutions, mobilized their parishioners, and “transform[ed] themselves from an immigrant church to an American one” in their own way and in their own time.<sup>19</sup> As a result, Catholic schools became physical expressions of social insiderhood that simultaneously proliferated the sacred beliefs that were markers of Catholic outsiderhood.

Neil G. McCluskey notes that “the history of Catholic education in America, like the history of the Church itself, is a story of survival and adaptation.”<sup>20</sup> In McCluskey’s view, the earliest days of American education afforded a limited common ground for Unitarians, Methodists, Congregationalists, Catholics, Jews, and deists. All had some experience in sectarian education, and all could agree that American republicanism “demanded an informed

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<sup>18</sup> Ann Marie Ryan, *American Catholic Schools in the Twentieth Century: Encounters with Public Education Policies, Practices, and Reforms* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 8-9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>20</sup> Neil G. McCluskey, S.J., ed, *Catholic Education in America: A Documentary History* (New York: Columbia University Bureau of Publications, 1964), 2.

and literate citizenry as its solid foundation.”<sup>21</sup> The influence of reformers like Horace Mann and John Dewey, however, put American Catholics in a “painful dilemma.”<sup>22</sup> As public schools became increasingly secular, Catholics wrestled with the knowledge that education remained the surest path to upward mobility. Their conscience, however, prevented them from fully embracing the public system. Given that Catholics contributed taxes to public schools, they asked that states utilize some of those tax dollars to provide basic auxiliary services, such as bussing and free textbooks, to their parochial schools. Alternatively, if Catholic children had no other option than to attend public schools, Catholics asked that their children be allowed to attend special ‘release time’ classes where they could learn Catholic dogma from Catholic bibles instead of the King James Protestant bibles that were commonly used in schools.<sup>23</sup>

McCluskey argues that when those requests were denied, it was not because of overt Protestant hostility toward Catholic doctrine per se. Instead, the influx of Irish and German Catholics in the mid-nineteenth created an association between Catholic schools, which were sometimes taught in languages other than English, and a type of foreignness that Protestants viewed as “a menace to the American way.”<sup>24</sup> While religion played a part in that ‘otherness’ it was not the sole factor. McCluskey also argues that the process of excluding parochial schools from public funding ultimately caused both systems to lose. In seeking to strip Catholic influence from schools, Protestants had to “stand by and watch helplessly, as all religious influence disappeared and a totally secular philosophy moved in.”<sup>25</sup> On the Catholic side, the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 12-13.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

1884 Plenary Council of Baltimore's call for "Every Catholic child in a Catholic school" was at least in part a reaction to that emerging secularism.<sup>26</sup> He insists that the resulting clerical domination of parochial school administration deemphasized the importance of well-trained teachers, overemphasized elementary education, and negatively placed the parochial school above the family as "the primary agent in the religious formation of the child."<sup>27</sup>

McCluskey's critical approach builds on earlier Church scholars like Archbishop John Ireland, who bemoaned the need for parochial schools to exist at all. Both McCluskey and Ireland, however, believed there was a compromise through which a common ground could be reestablished. In 1889, Ireland laid two possible solutions before the National Education Association. The first solution was to allow secular and non-secular schools to receive equal funding for their respective pupils if each could pass state examinations and, thereby, prove tax dollars were accomplishing core educational goals regardless of religious context. If the first plan was not operable, Archbishop Ireland proposed the so-called "Irish Plan" in which the state would take control of parochial school buildings, utilizing them for instruction as befit the dominant religion of the land, "be this religion as Protestant as Protestantism can be." The religious staff of the former parochial schools would retain their positions as long as they could prove appropriate licensure and, after teaching the state sanctioned curriculum during the day, be allowed to offer religious instruction after school hours.<sup>28</sup>

Ireland's recommendations immediately set off a storm of criticism that echoed across multiple decades of Catholic scholarship and deeply divided the Church hierarchy. Bishop

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>28</sup> John Ireland, "State Schools and Parish Schools," in *Catholic Education in America: A Documentary History*, ed. Neil G. McCluskey (New York: Columbia University Bureau of Publications, 1964), 137-138.

Bernard J. McQuaid of Rochester and Archbishop Michael A. Corrigan of New York were particularly critical. Standing alongside the more conservative German bishops of the Midwest, they worried that the voluntarily abandonment of parochial systems was “simply suicidal.”<sup>29</sup> Writing contemporaneously with Neil McCluskey, John G. Deedy, Jr., worried that shared-time models based on Ireland’s proposal left entire systems vulnerable to collapse.<sup>30</sup> Instead of rushing the marriage of secular and parochial systems, Deedy advocated for collaboration among stakeholders, including the National Education Association, the National Catholic Welfare Council Education Department, the National Catholic Educational Association, and the American Association of School Administrators.<sup>31</sup> A minority of Catholic reformers, such as Mary Perkins Ryan, framed Catholic education as overly divisive “auxiliary service” that wasted Church resources that would be better spent educating the adult laity or addressing various other charitable activities.<sup>32</sup>

Most Catholic commentators in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century took what Vincent P. Lannie called the “Church and School Triumphant” stance, asserting the absolute right of the Church in matters regarding education.<sup>33</sup> As Rev. John Doyle described it, “the common Catholic teaching is that the State has only a secondary and supplementary concern with

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<sup>29</sup> McCluskey, *Catholic Education in America*, 141.

<sup>30</sup> John G. Deedy, Jr., “The Shared-Time Experiment,” in *Federal Aid and Catholic Schools*, edited by Daniel Callahan (Baltimore: Helicon, 1964):110.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 110-11.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Perkins Ryan, *Are Parochial Schools the Answer? Catholic Education in the Light of the Council* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 6, 161-165.

<sup>33</sup> Vincent P. Lannie, “Church and School Triumphant: The Sources of American Catholic Educational Historiography,” *History of Education Quarterly* 15, no.2 (Summer 1976): 142, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/357660>.

education, subordinate to the responsibilities of the family and the Church.”<sup>34</sup> Authority over education was derived from scripture and what Pope Pius XI called the “supernatural motherhood” of the Church.<sup>35</sup> In light of Catholicism’s successes, the threat of secular school domination was low given the “condition of equilibrium” into which they had settled. For some scholars, Catholic schools not only matched public schools on standard measures of success but exceeded them.<sup>36</sup> Doyle cautioned, however, that the future of that equilibrium would depend on “continued and increased success of the parochial school in its work of making its pupils into good citizens and good Christians.”<sup>37</sup>

### **A Generation in Peril**

The 1930 census suggests that the success of parochial education in producing good citizens and good Christians had not yet translated into broad legitimacy. Though Tennessee’s parochial schools enjoyed a generally positive reputation for providing quality instruction, barriers between social perception and institutional respect persisted. Given that consensus on how to reconcile the religious and secular movements affecting American education in the first quarter of the twentieth century seemed near impossible, some Catholic leaders began approaching the youth problem through the establishment of extracurricular activities, especially sports. Building off the tenets of Protestantism’s ‘muscular Christianity’ movement, which

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<sup>34</sup> John Doyle, “Catholic Education and Its Relation to the State,” in *Essays on Catholic Education in the United States*, edited by Roy Joseph Deferrari (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), 25.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Harold A. Buetow, *The Catholic School: Its Roots, Identity, and Future* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 281.

<sup>37</sup> Doyle, “Catholic Education and Its Relation to the State,” 39.

emphasized sport and physicality as remedies for male anxieties over changing gender roles in the 1920s, these reformers sought to establish in-school and out-of-school organizations that could provide an outlet for young Catholics who might otherwise fall to the temptations of their increasingly secular communities.<sup>38</sup> Bishop Bernard J. Sheil launched the first Catholic Youth Organization in Chicago, Illinois, in 1930. Like the Catholic camps run by the Knights of Columbus in the European theatre during World War I, Sheil's C.Y.O. program was meant to keep youth away from "secularism, materialism, and Communism" through physicality and sportsmanship.<sup>39</sup>

Sheil, known broadly as the "Apostle of Youth," was a son of the Gilded Age, a second-

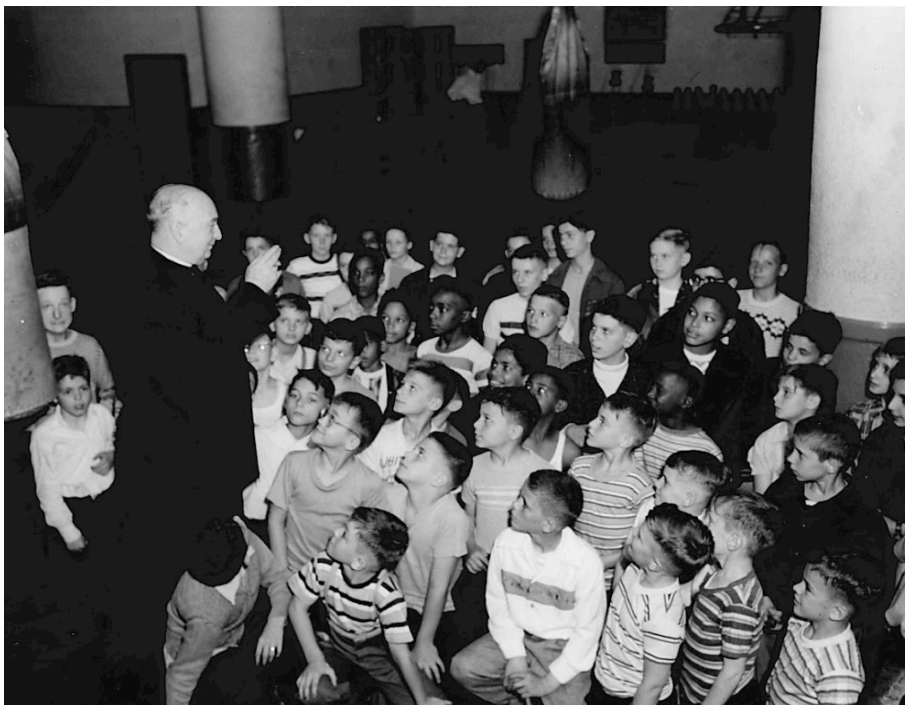


Figure 12: Bernard Sheil speaking to a group of interracial youth participating in a boxing program in downtown Chicago, circa 1940s, in Timothy B. Neary, "Legacies and Lessons from the People's Bishop," *American Catholic Studies* 130, no.3 (2019): 113.

generation Irish American, and a liberal crusader. Preaching a more cosmopolitan, pluralistic version of American Catholicism, Sheil brought New Deal egalitarianism to the hierarchy and was unafraid to break with his more conservative

<sup>38</sup> Kat Eschner, "The YMCA First Opened Gyms to Train Stronger Christians," *Smithsonian Magazine*, December 29, 2017, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/ymca-first-opened-gyms-train-stronger-christians-180967665/>.

<sup>39</sup> Timothy B. Neary, "Legacies and Lessons from the People's Bishop," *American Catholic Studies* 130, no.3 (2019): 118, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27098024>.

counterparts on issues like fascism, Jim Crow, and anti-Semitism. His interest in sports as a mechanism for engaging youth reached back to his own athletic career, which had nearly landed him a spot with the Chicago White Stockings before he joined the priesthood. As a result, he was attuned to the latest crazes in American sport and saw boxing as one of the key activities that could bring both youth participants and adult spectators closer to the Church. Historian Timothy Neary notes that Sheil's C.Y.O. offered a "safe and healthy alternative to the often dangerous and unforgiving streets of Chicago's working-class neighborhoods." Welcoming "Catholic and non-Catholic, black and white, Jew and Gentile," Sheil was able to exert influence over vast swaths of Chicago.<sup>40</sup>

Crowds at Sheil's youth boxing tournaments sometimes numbered 20,00-40,000 strong, filling venues as impressive as Soldier Field and Wrigley Field. The "civil-religious spectacle" included an impressively large C.Y.O. band and the ceremonial recitation of the C.Y.O. pledge, which centered on "love of God and Country."<sup>41</sup> Irish Catholics were particularly prominent in both participation and spectatorship. Given the exodus of many Protestants from urban to suburban neighborhoods following World War I, Irish Catholics who remained in the cities wielded significant political and social influence within the urban ecosystem. As a result, Neary argues that Sheil's C.Y.O. experiment became a "prominent manifestation of the urbanity of the American Catholic Church during the mid-twentieth century," influencing sister organizations in other large cities like Cleveland, Louisville, Milwaukee, New York, Providence, Salt Lake City,

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<sup>40</sup> Neary, "Legacies and Lessons," 114.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 119.

and San Francisco.<sup>42</sup> By 1935, the C.Y.O. movement reached St. Louis, Missouri, where “the forgotten dynamo,” Daniel A. Lord, S.J., added his own flare to youth outreach.<sup>43</sup>

Born just two years after Sheil into the same tough Chicago streets, Daniel Lord was destined to become as close to a rockstar as a Jesuit could aspire at the beginning of the twentieth century. Instead of a boxing ring, Lord used the pen and stage to ensnare the hearts and minds of young Catholics. For the entirety of his 31-year career, he consistently wrote 20,000 words per month. The herculean effort resulted in 228 pamphlets, 32 books, 16 booklets, 70 children’s books, and an additional 70 musicals, plays, and pageants.



Figure 13: Daniel A. Lord, S.J., signs autographs for admiring youth, circa 1940s. Stephen Warner, "Daniel A. Lord, S.J.," *American Catholic Studies* 129, no.2 (Summer 2018): 44.

Though academics and fellow Jesuits dismissed Lord as nothing more than a “popularizer” during his lifetime, the title bothered him little.<sup>44</sup> Lord did not write for academics or the hierarchy. Instead, he opted for an accessible, engaging style that met his target audience on their level. His pamphlets and plays featured characters to which students could relate. The

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 120, 114.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen Werner, “Daniel A. Lord, SJ,” *American Catholic Studies* 129, no.2 (Summer 2018): 39, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26585129>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 39-40.

success of his approach was indisputable given that he ultimately sold over 25 million copies of his various works.<sup>45</sup>

If Sheil embodied Hollywood’s image of the “proverbial tough, urban street priest with a heart of gold,” then Lord embodied the Hollywood ethos itself.<sup>46</sup> On tour, he captivated audiences by personally playing the piano for many of his productions. All the while, he bestowed practical advice on everything from sacraments to dating. Notre Dame’s Steve Werner argues that his warmth, humor, and entertaining style allowed him to broach topics in a way that “made religion interesting and challenging” for his audience.<sup>47</sup> As head of *The Queen’s Work*, a Catholic Solidarity magazine, Lord rallied thousands of young readers to attend “Student Leadership Conferences” and Catholic Action summer school programs. In 1932, he penned a song that would become a staple of the youth movement, “Christ the King,” or as it was commonly known, “An Army of Youth:”

An army of youth  
Flying the standards of Truth,  
We’re fighting for Christ, the Lord.  
Heads lifted high,  
Catholic Action our cry,  
And the Cross our only sword.<sup>48</sup>

Given his wide readership and extensive national tours, Lord’s productions were well known to Catholic leaders in Nashville. The same was true of Sheil and his C.Y.O. program. After all, Sheil modeled his beliefs on New Deal philosophies that were particularly potent in the South. Existing literature, however, does not address how their approaches manifested in youth

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>46</sup> Neary, “Legacies and Lessons,” 113.

<sup>47</sup> Werner “Daniel A. Lord, S.J.,” 46-47.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 43, 47.

programs like the C.Y.O. in the inland South. Using Tennessee Edition of the national *Register* newspaper, this chapter examines how the Diocese of Nashville used its new diocesan newspaper to legitimize the state’s parochial schools and create its own ‘Army of Youth.’

## The Flame Renewed

Beginning its run in September 1937, Tennessee’s *Register* was an offshoot of Msgr. Matthew Smith’s national Register System of Catholic newspapers. The Diocese of Nashville

was one of 35 editions of the paper that would eventually reach an audience of over 800,000 by the 1960s. Promising readers a publication filled with “snap, vigor and courage,” the Register System



Figure 14: Msgr. Matthew Smith, *Denver Catholic*, Dec. 5, 2017.

of papers actively challenged threats to the Catholic Church, including the Ku Klux Klan, communism, fascism, and, increasingly, secular state schooling.<sup>49</sup>

Tennessee’s edition of *The Register* inherited a tradition of advancing the cause of Catholicism in the inland South began by *The Herald*, *The Columbian*, and *The Cresset*. Rev. George J. Flanigen, former editor of *The Cresset*, returned to guide the fledgling paper. Despite

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<sup>49</sup> Aaron Lambert, “90 years of Catholic news with snap, vigor and courage,” *Denver Catholic*, December 5, 2017, <https://denvercatholic.org/90-years-catholic-news-snap-vigor-courage/>.

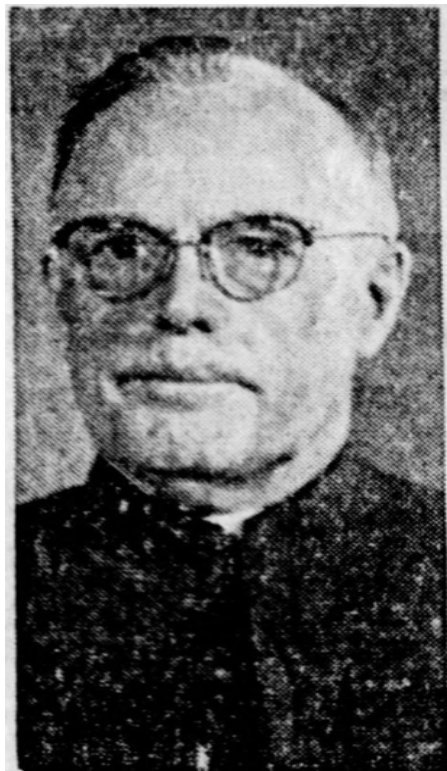


Figure 15: Rev. George Flanigen, *The Tennessean*, October 22, 1974, 8.

these continuities, *The Register* approached issues related to education and youth culture in fundamentally different ways than its predecessor. *The Cresset*, which had claimed to be a “Flame Upon the Hearthstones” for Catholic families in Tennessee in the 1920s, focused mainly on traditional approaches to adult Catholic education. Its pages were filled with high browed lessons on foundational tenets of the faith. When Catholic schools were mentioned, they were treated as auxiliary pieces of a larger assimilative machine driven primarily by adult interests. Msgr. Smith promised, however, that the new *Register* would display a vigor and scope that far surpassed its predecessors.

Though it lacked much of the Irish American humor that had characterized the early days of *The Cresset*, *The Register* approached a broader array of stories of national and international importance. Most importantly, the paper embodied the growing urgency with which the Church approached youth culture. Inspired by the work of men like Bishop Sheil and Bishop Lord, local leaders like Bishop William L. Adrian and Rev. Joseph E. Leppert launched a movement to call Catholic youth to the defense of both creed and country while building on the success of Southernization in the 1920s. In doing so, they helped to legitimize Catholic parochial schools as engines of patriotic assimilation in much the same way that volunteerism in World War I had helped legitimize Tennessee’s Catholic community as a patriotic social entity.

## Rallying Cry

*The Register* opened 1938 ominously. In a cartoon featured prominently on page one, a aging 1937 runs before a cheering crowd of notable onlookers, including Franklin Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin, Benito Mussolini, and Adolf Hitler, to pass his scythe to a newborn 1938.<sup>50</sup> The cartoon was an unusual move for the paper. Political cartoons were rarely, if ever, used in earlier iterations of the Catholic press in Tennessee. In the



Figure 16: "Happy New Year," *The Register*, January 2, 1938.

years that followed, *The Register* would use comicstrip-style cartoons to illustrate key aspects of Catholic history and doctrine, but this was one of a handful of appearances of an overtly political sketch for the entirety of 1938. It was prophetic in multiple ways. First, it depicted heads of state who would soon lead their nations into yet another great war and, in doing so, challenge both the underpinnings of Western democracies and the Catholic Church. Second, the passing of the scythe from the old to the youthful embodied real campaigns by both secular and sectarian forces throughout the 1930s to win the hearts and minds of youth and, consequently shape a new world order.

<sup>50</sup> "Happy New Year," *The Register*, January 2, 1938.

The gathering clouds of global war, however, also provided an opportunity for American Catholics to further legitimize their institutions as bastions of patriotic citizenship worthy of respect alongside their Protestant and secular counterparts. While Pope Pius XI's call to Catholic Action in the 1920s had focused on the adult laity, the combination of lingering social anxieties and emerging economic anxieties forced the hierarchy to fundamentally shift focus to youth. If voluntary leisure time in the 1920s had fed worries over youth indulgence in new styles of dress, dance, and dating, then "enforced leisure" of unemployment during the depression fed new worries about ideological indulgences of far broader consequence.<sup>51</sup> As Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin increasingly sought to limit the influence of religious teaching in their countries, American Catholics worried their radical ideologies might find fertile ground in the masses of unemployed American youth who lacked appropriate moral instruction. Tom Bergler of Huntington University notes that "beneath these concerns lay fears that America might never recover its economic vitality and that democracy might be destroyed by communism or fascism."<sup>52</sup> As 1938 dawned, therefore, it was clear to many leaders within the church that the time had come to thrust the baton of Catholic Action into the hands of a new generation. The question was how.

Bishop William L. Adrian believed the answer lay in women, the press, and schools. Having taken over administration of the Diocese of Nashville only two years prior in April 1936,

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas E. Bergler, "Youth, Christianity, and the Crisis of Civilization, 1930-1945," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 24, no.2 (Summer 2014): 260-261. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rac.2014.24.2.259>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.



Figure 17: Bishop William L. Adrian, Diocese of Nashville,  
<https://stmaryscamden.org/home/history/>.

Adrian was known as “a man who gets things done,” and, though a native of Iowa, his leadership would fundamentally shape the nature of Tennessee Catholicity in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>53</sup> An early issue of *The Register* listed Bishop Adrian’s early achievements as the organization of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women (DCCW), the Tennessee edition of *The Register*, and four new parochial schools.<sup>54</sup> As *The Register* made clear in the months that followed, all three accomplishments were closely linked in the Diocese’s ongoing effort to connect with young Catholics.

The paper praised the newly formed DCCW for organizing 35 parish and inter-parochial groups across the state. Mrs. John J. Shea, president of the DCCW, emphasized the organization’s devotion to Catholic Action and reminded readers of the importance of the youth

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<sup>53</sup> “Former Bishops,” Diocese of Nashville, accessed November 11, 2023, <https://dioceseofnashville.com/former-bishops/>.

<sup>54</sup> “1937 Saw Century of Progress in Diocese: Year Marked by Many Changes, Improvements,” *The Register*, January 2, 1938, last.

movement it had launched the year prior.<sup>55</sup> “The youth program,” she said, “is our big project for the coming year.”<sup>56</sup>

The promotion of Tennessee’s parochial schools as “thoroughly modern” also became a regular feature in the paper.<sup>57</sup> A 1938 article extolled improvements to Nashville’s St. Patrick’s parish school, including hardwood floors, repaired windows, newly painted classrooms, and new blackboards.<sup>58</sup> The tone of such articles implied a level of self-consciousness over the reputation of parochial plants vis-a-vie public school, especially in light of the hundreds of new modern schools funded by New Deal agencies, with a dozen or more of those in Nashville. Given the early focus on building parochial schools in the major urban hubs of the diocese, many of the buildings were quite old, and their outdated facilities may have contributed to the categorization of Catholic schools as institutionally inferior and, therefore, unworthy of recognition as legitimate in Humphrey Timothy’s 1930 census. As a result, the term ‘modern’ was used again and again to describe upgrades.

Concern for portraying quality and modernity extended to Catholic colleges as well. The issue was especially important the colleges responsible for training parochial school teachers. In July, *The Register* detailed the Tennessee State Board of Education’s certification of St. Agnes College in Memphis. Though it was denied certification on its first attempt because of low full-

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<sup>55</sup> “One Year Old DCCW Organizes 35 Groups,” *The Register*, January 2, 1938, last.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> “Knoxville to Have New High School,” *The Register*, April 17, 1938, 5, last; “C.Y.O. Unit Pledges \$100 to School Fund in Knoxville,” *The Register*, May 1, 1938, 4; “Memphis Parish Plans New School Plant,” *The Register*, May 1, 1938, last; “Memphis School to Cost \$80,000,” *The Register*, May 22, 1938, last; “Loretto School Gets Library,” *The Register*, June 19, 1938, last; “Juvenile Library Being Planned,” *The Register*, August 21, 1938, 4; “Nashville Parish Plans New Church, School,” *The Register*, August 28, 1938, last; “\$7,200 Pledged for Knoxville Catholic High,” *The Register*, September 18, 1938, 5.

<sup>58</sup> “Improvements in Nashville Parish Indicate Growth,” *The Register*, January 2, 1938, last.

time enrollment, a low percentage of faculty holding masters degrees, and a library that did not have the requisite 12,000 volumes, the college moved quickly to remedy those issues and gain certification on its second attempt. *The Register* noted with pride that during the failed first inspection, state officials reported that the college buildings and grounds “more than [met] the standard of the state board.”<sup>59</sup>

*The Register* also displayed evidence of the pressure felt by the Catholic hierarchy to keep up with rising expectations of teacher qualifications. While Catholic schools traditionally leaned on the clergy and various religious orders to produce teachers, increasing standards for teacher qualifications meant Catholic parochial schools felt a need to defend the legitimacy of their instructors.<sup>60</sup> In October, *The Register* touted a first-of-its-kind teachers’ institute to be held in Nashville the following month at Father Ryan High School.<sup>61</sup> Two hundred teachers from across the Diocese attended the event, discussing topics ranging from state aid to vocational guidance to the use of tests. A keynote speaker was Daniel Lord.<sup>62</sup>

Described as “captivating,” Lord delivered an hour long speech that “startled” his audience with statements like “abolish all religion classes.” Of course, Lord was not actually advocating for an end to Catholic education. Insisting that teachers “must first of all obtain the interest and good will of their pupils,” he implored the Catholic educators to focus their efforts on what young people found most interesting: jobs, marriage, self-expression, extra-curricular

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<sup>59</sup> “St. Agnes’ College Approved By State,” *The Register*, July 24, 1938, 5, last.

<sup>60</sup> Neil G. McCluskey, “A Changing Pattern,” in *Federal Aid and Catholic Schools*, edited by Daniel Callahan (Baltimore: Helicon, 1964), 33; O’Neil C. D’Amour, “The Catholic Case,” in *Federal Aid and Catholic Schools*, edited by Daniel Callahan (Baltimore: Helicon, 1964), 66.

<sup>61</sup> “Teachers’ Institute Will Meet Nov. 11,” *The Register*, October 9, 1938, last.

<sup>62</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Diocesan Teachers’ Institute Success,” *The Register*, November 20, 1938, 3, last.

activities. From there, he insisted, “we must teach them to think, act, and live their religion.”<sup>63</sup> Lord’s impact on the youth movement in Tennessee, however, was already evident well before his visit to the teachers’ institute.

A headline the previous January announced plans for the formation of a statewide system of C.Y.O.s. Guided by National Council of Catholic Women field secretary Anna Rose Kimpel and diocesan director of youth Rev. Joseph E. Leppert, C.Y.O. units were inaugurated across Tennessee’s four key cities during a twelve day tour. Beginning in Nashville on January 14,

Kimpel spent five days speaking at the Cathedral and Father Ryan High School before moving on to one-day stints in Knoxville and Chattanooga. The tour ended with five additional days of meetings in Memphis.<sup>64</sup> From that moment, the establishment of both in-school and out-of-school C.Y.O. units as well as the selection of their local officers was a regular feature of *The*



Figure 18: Middle Tennessee Deanery of the National Council of Catholic Women, *Nashville Banner*, January 17, 1938. Anna Rose Kimpel is seated on the left.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> “Youth Organization Program is Announced,” *The Register*, January 14, 1938, last.

*Register*.<sup>65</sup> The program also earned the attention of the non-Catholic press. The *Nashville Banner* noted Anna Rose Kimpel's appearance approvingly and highlighted the the success of the C.Y.O.'s boys basketball league. Appearing side-by-side with articles detailing the work of the United Daughters of the Confederacy with Protestant youth, these articles helped elevate the efforts of Catholic women to equal bearing with their Southern Protestant counterparts.<sup>66</sup>

Though elements of Bishop Sheil's athletic focus were present, the majority of C.Y.O. articles focused on the musicals, concerts, and plays indicative of Daniel Lord's brand of youth

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<sup>65</sup> "Women Get Youth Program Off to Good Start," *The Register*, January 21, 1938, 4, last; "Youth Movement to be Objective of DCCW," *The Register*, January 21, 1938, last; "Diocesan Organization of Youth Complete," *The Register*, January 30, 1938, 4; "C.Y.O. Officers Are Chosen in Nashville," *The Register*, January 30, 1938, 4, last; "Plans Will Be Drafted Soon For Forming Knoxville C.Y.O.," *The Register*, January 30, 1938, last; "Contest to Choose Patroness for Girls' C.Y.O. Announced," *The Register*, February 6, 1938, last; "Memphis Youths Meet to Form C.Y.O. Units," *The Register*, February 6, 1938, last; "Splendid Leader Directs C.Y.O. in Chattanooga," *The Register*, February 27, 1938, 4; "Cathedral C.Y.O. Group Convenes," *The Register*, February 27, 1938, 4; "Officers to Be Named By C.Y.O. of Nashville," *The Register*, March 20, 1938, last; "Officers Named by C.Y.O. Group," *The Register*, April 17, 1938, 5; "Officers Elected by C.Y.O. Group," *The Register*, April 17, 1938, 5; "C.Y.O. Patroness is Little Flower," *The Register*, April 17, 1938, last; "Leaders Elected by Parish C.Y.O.," *The Register*, April 24, 1938, 5; "C.Y.O. Units in Memphis Meet," *The Register*, April 24, 1938, 5; "Meeting Held by Holy Name C.Y.O.," *The Register*, April 24, 1938, 5; "C.Y.O. Observes Communion Day," *The Register*, April 24, 1938, 5; "Officers Named by Knoxville C.Y.O.," *The Register*, April 24, 1938, 5; "Meeting Held by Members of Holy Name Parish C.Y.O.," *The Register*, May 8, 1938, 5; "Session Held by Knoxville C.Y.O.," *The Register*, May 8, 1938, 5; "Clarksville C.Y.O. Receives Eucharist," *The Register*, May 8, 1938, 5; "Knoxville Parish C.Y.O. Elects 1938 Officers," *The Register*, May 8, 1938, 5; "Out of School C.Y.O. Has Meet," *The Register*, May 22, 1938, 5; "C.Y.O. Unit Formed in Copperhill Parish," *The Register*, June 26, 1938, last; "Senior Unit of Nashville C.Y.O. Holds Meeting," *The Register*, July 17, 1938, 5, last; "Fr. M.E. Dolan of Memphis Is New Diocesan C.Y.O. Director," *The Register*, July 24, 1938, last; "C.Y.O. Formed in Loretto Parish," *The Register*, July 31, 1938, last; "Lawrenceburg C.Y.O. to Meet Nashville Again," *The Register*, August 21, 1938, 5; "C.Y.O. Unit To Hold Meeting September 22," *The Register*, September 27, 1938, last; "Memphis C.Y.O. Group Sponsors Fete for Funds," *The Register*, October 9, 1938, last; "C.Y.O. President in Memphis Has Ambitious Plans," *The Register*, October 16, 1938, 7; "Joint Communion Is Sponsored by Nashville C.Y.O.," *The Register*, October 23, 1938, 5; "C.Y.O. Group in Memphis Parish Holds Meeting," *The Register*, October 23, 1938, 7; "C.Y.O. Will Have Special Column," *The Register*, November 20, 1938, 5.

<sup>66</sup> "Catholic Women To Meet Friday for Luncheon," *Nashville Banner*, January 10, 1938, 9; "Miss Kimpel Will Address Catholic Women," *Nashville Banner*, November 29, 1938, 3.

engagement.<sup>67</sup> Across twenty-eight articles related to C.Y.O. activities, nineteen focused on showmanship. In fact, Sheil's athletic program is directly mentioned only once.<sup>68</sup> Unlike either Chicago or St. Louis, however, Tennessee's C.Y.O.s had a unique obsession with social events.

Articles concerning C.Y.O.-sponsored dances, picnics, breakfasts, banquets, nature outings, and wiener roasts were regular features of the local news section of the paper. Appearing twenty-seven times over the course of the year, the articles chronicled the smallest details of the often elaborate forays, from the appointment of party officers to the selection of decorations, entertainment, and food. Father Ryan High School, which was a crown jewel for the Diocese dating back to the 1920s, was a frequent venue. Planners draped its auditorium and gymnasium in the C.Y.O.'s blue and white color scheme and invited prominent bands to perform. The events mirrored all the pomp and liveliness of non-Catholic youth events absent only one element: swing music. Swing was prohibited at C.Y.O. dances due to its corrupting influence.

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<sup>67</sup> "Lawrenceburg C.Y.O. Attends School Play," *The Register*, February 20, 1938, last; "Memphis Group to Stage Show for Boys' School," *The Register*, February 27, 1938, 4; "Ping Pong Tourney is Held in Parish," *The Register*, March 17, 1938, 5; "Blackfriars to Stage Rebellion of Youth," *The Register*, April 24, 1938, last; "Rebellion of Youth Presented by Class," *The Register*, May 8, 1938, 5; "Young People in Chattanooga Give 3 One-Act Plays," *The Register*, May 15, 1938, last; "C.Y.O. Minstrel Attracts Crowd," *The Register*, May 15, 1938, last; "School Music Department Gives Interesting Program," *The Register*, June 5, 1938, 4; "Operetta Presented At School Closing," *The Register*, June 5, 1938, 5; "C.Y.O. Softball League Announces Schedule," *The Register*, June 12, 1938, last; "Two Teams Share C.Y.O. Loop Lead," *The Register*, June 26, 1938, 5; "St. Patrick's Leads in Nashville Loop," *The Register*, July 10, 1938, 5; "C.Y.O. Softball League Organized in Memphis," *The Register*, July 24, 1938, last; "Results of C.Y.O. Loop Games Given," *The Register*, August 14, 1938, 5; "Memphis Youth is Crowned Net Champ," *The Register*, August 21, 1938, 4; "School Gets New Athletic Head," *The Register*, September 4, 1938, 4; "29 Report for Practice of Chattanooga Football Team," *The Register*, September 4, 1938, last; "New Memphis School to Organize Orchestra," *The Register*, September 11, 1938, last; "Memphis C.Y.O. Players' Guild Repeats Drama," *The Register*, October 23, 1938, 7; "Catholic High Is Winner of Grid Loop in Memphis," *The Register*, November 6, 1938, last; "Academy Club to Present Comedy," *The Register*, November 6, 1938, last; "C.Y.O. Choristers Will Appear in Nashville," *The Register*, November 13, 1938, last; "3-Act Comedy Presented by Senior C.Y.O. in Memphis," *The Register*, November 20, 1938, 5; "C.Y.O. Choristers of Chattanooga To Present Concert in Nashville, November 20, 1938, last; "C.Y.O. to Hold Minstrel Show," *The Register*, November 20, 1938, last; "C.Y.O. Singers Give Program in Nashville," *The Register*, December 4, 1938, 3; "Junior C.Y.O.'ers Are Entertained In Clarksville," *The Register*, December 4, 1938, 7; "C.Y.O. Choisters' Nashville Program Is Well Received," *The Register*, December 4, 1938, last; "Drama Club at Knoxville High Gives 3 Skits," *The Register*, December 11, 1938, last.

<sup>68</sup> "C.Y.O. Boxers Defeat Irish Before 30,000," *The Register*, July 31, 1938, 6.

In every other way, however, these galas were an impressive show of unity, sophistication, and progressiveness for the Catholic youth community. While outsiders were welcome to purchase tickets to select events, others remained exclusively Catholic. In both cases, the number of attending couples sometimes reached into the hundreds.<sup>69</sup>

Coverage of Catholic youth events was not limited to *The Register*. *The Nashville Banner* also covered C.Y.O. parties at various points during 1938. Appearing side-by-side with articles about events sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution, Masons, and the Y.M.C.A., C.Y.O parties served to elevate Catholic youth into the public consciousness and position them in the same echelons as their Protestant schoolmates. A similar effect occurred for Catholic educational institutions like Father Ryan High, which also received significant positive press thanks to its role in hosting such events.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> “C.Y.O. Group At Cathedral To Hold Ball,” *The Register*, February 20, 1938, last; “Cathedral C.Y.O. Plans Spring Social May 24,” *The Register*, March 27, 1938, last; “C.Y.O. Unit Holds Weiner Roast,” *The Register*, May 1, 1938, 4; “Nashville Girls Conduct Picnic,” *The Register*, May 1, 1938, 4; “Parish C.Y.O. Meets To Plan Tacky Party,” *The Register*, May 8, 1938, 5; “Final Plans Are Made for Spring Social,” *The Register*, May 22, 1938, last; “Picnic Is Planned For Grade School,” *The Register*, June 5, 1938, 4; “Social Is Given by C.Y.O. Groups,” *The Register*, June 12, 1938, last; “C.Y.O. Units Hold Initial Banquet,” *The Register*, June 19, 1938, 4; “Catholic Youth Group Plans 3-Day Outing,” *The Register*, June 19, 1938, last; “Lawn Party is Feature of Holy Name C.Y.O. Meeting,” *The Register*, June 26, 1938, 5; “Cathedral C.Y.O. Plans 3-Day Outing At Park,” *The Register*, June 26, 1938, last; “C.Y.O. Units Have Joint Breakfast,” *The Register*, July 3, 1938, last; “Final Arrangements Will Be Made for 3-Day C.Y.O. Outing,” *The Register*, July 3, 1938, last; “Social Sponsored By Memphis C.Y.O.,” *The Register*, July 10, 1938, 5; “Cathedral C.Y.O. Members Enjoy Outing At Dam,” *The Register*, July 17, 1938, last; “C.Y.O. Orchestra Enjoys Picnic,” *The Register*, July 24, 1938, 5; “Hay Ride Is Held By Unit of C.Y.O.,” *The Register*, July 24, 1938, last; “Parish C.Y.O. Unit Has Picnic at Dunbar Cave,” *The Register*, July 24, 1938, last; “Joint Party Is Held by C.Y.O.s,” *The Register*, August 14, 1938, last; “Boat Ride Will Be Sponsored By Nashville C.Y.O.,” *The Register*, September 18, 1938, last; “Party Is Held By Memphis C.Y.O. Unit,” *The Register*, September 18, 1938, last; “Masquerade Planned by Nashville C.Y.O.,” *The Register*, October 9, 1938, 3; “Nashville C.Y.O. Will Give Party on Oct. 24,” *The Register*, October 23, 1938, 7; “Final Plans Made for Cathedral C.Y.O. Social,” *The Register*, October 30, 1938, last; “City-Wide Ball of C.Y.O. Group Is Successful,” *The Register*, November 27, 1938, 7; “K. of C., C.Y.O. to Give Yule Affair,” *The Register*, December 25, 1938, 3.

<sup>70</sup> “Announcements,” *Nashville Banner*, February 19, 1938, 10; “Mardi Gras Ball To Be Given by Catholic Group,” *Nashville Banner*, February 23, 1938, 4; “Catholic Group to Entertain at Dance Tuesday,” *Nashville Banner*, May 23, 1938, 10.

To become fully accepted by the state's Protestant majority, however, Catholic youth also needed to exude patriotism. Anti-Catholic literature had long portrayed Catholics and their institutions as foreign invaders bent on the overthrow of American values.<sup>71</sup> Earlier Catholic newspapers fought such accusations by assuming the mantle of anti-communism. *The Register* continued that tradition by emphasizing communism as a common threat to both Catholic and non-Catholic youth. Articles frequently intertwined U.S. and Church priorities threatened by communism's spread.<sup>72</sup>

The Church's support for labor rights, however, posed a problem as it provided low hanging fruit for anti-Catholic nativists to lump Catholics in with the 'leftists' they feared were corrupting American youth.<sup>73</sup> Catholics responded by emphasizing the role of conservative, moralistic Catholic education in dissuading radicalization.<sup>74</sup> "A nation-wide Catholic youth

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<sup>71</sup> Kenneth C. Barnes, *Anti-Catholicism in Arkansas: How Politicians, the Press, the Klan, and Religious Leaders Imagined an Enemy, 1910-1960* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2016); Donald L. Kinzer, *An Episode in Anti-Catholicism: The American Protective Association* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964); Justin Nordstrom, *Danger on the Doorstep: Anti-Catholicism and American Print Culture in the Progressive Era* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); Philip N. Racine, "The Ku Klux Klan, Anti-Catholicism, and Atlanta's Board of Education, 1916-1927," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1973), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40579872>.

<sup>72</sup> "Good in Capitalism is Approved, Evil Scored," *The Register*, January 21, 1938, 1; "Russians Sharpen Knife Against U.S. System," *The Register*, February 27, 1938, 1; "Soviets Rob Churches of 3 ½ Billions," *The Register*, March 6, 1938, 1; "Red Hecklers Needed, Says Arnold Lunn," *The Register*, April 24, 1938, 1; "Bloody Record of Reds Is Cited By K. of C. Speaker," *The Register*, May 1, 1938, last; "Bishop Schlarman Exposes Propaganda Trick of Reds," *The Register*, June 5, 1938, 1; "U.S. Organizations Are Leaning Toward Communism, Charge," *The Register*, August 28, 1938, 1; "Professor Describes Vicious Program of Communist Forces," *The Register*, September 25, 1938, 1; "Federal Writer Stirs Revolt As Communist," *The Register*, September 25, 1938, 1; "Communists Strong in WPA, Catholic Charges," *The Register*, October 2, 1938, 4; "Pontif Lauds K. of C. Drive on Communism," *The Register*, October 9, 1938, 1.

<sup>73</sup> "State Morally Obligated To Support Unemployed," *The Register*, January 21, 1938, 1; "Less Than 12 Per Cent of Labor In U.S. Organized, Says Prelate," *The Register*, July 3, 1938, 1; "Catholics Must Earn Lead In Social Justice," *The Register*, July 10, 1938, 1; "Catholic Radicals Dynamic Crusaders," *The Register*, August 7, 1938, 1.

<sup>74</sup> "Catholic Youth Front Needed to Fight Reds," *The Register*, March 6, 1938, 1; "Students Imported to Spread Social Thought," *The Register*, April 10, 1938, 1; "Charge Pinks Are Active at Summer Camp of YMCA," *The Register*, April 24, 1938, 1; "Bishop's Exposure of YWCA Pinks Lauded," *The Register*, May 15, 1938, 1; "Bishop Warns Against World Youth Congress," *The Register*, July 3, 1938, 1.

front, filled with the zeal of the Crusaders, is necessary to combat the feverish activities of Reds among young people,” extolled Rev. Vincent Mooney, director of the Nation Catholic Welfare Council’s Youth Bureau, on a “Call to Youth” radio program.<sup>75</sup> Catholics positioned their faith as a logical bulwark against common ideological enemies by stressing how devotion to the Church engendered concomitant devotion to American ideals of loyalty, democracy, and civic obedience.

Prominent American diplomat William Franklin Sands proclaimed in a June issue of *The Register* that “our American fundamental political principles (perhaps more truly than with any other people) are consonant with Catholicism.” Sands insisted that “true democracy is not possible except on the basis of Christian principles, and that the basic concepts of Americanism are not only Christian, but flowed into our founding through men who brought them straight down from united Christendom, which was Catholic.”<sup>76</sup> Who better to counter the nefarious forces already at work in an ever more secularized youth culture than the Mother Church and her democratic-minded schoolhouses?<sup>77</sup>

In November, *The Register* declared that Catholic schools were the “best training in citizenship” found in America.<sup>78</sup> In the same article, the paper recounted how Bishop Gerald P. O’Hara of the Savannah-Atlanta Diocese had helped lead the charge in bringing Catholic education to the fore of national ideological defense. Launching a series of teachers’ institutes

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<sup>75</sup> “Americanism Based on Catholic Principles,” *The Register*, May 22, 1938, 1.

<sup>76</sup> “W.F. Sands Is Dead; Veteran Diplomat,” *New York Times*, June 19, 1946, 18; “Americanism,” *The Register*.

<sup>77</sup> “Youth Congress Is Anxious Over Exposure of Red Tinge,” *The Register*, August 21, 1938, 1; “Doherty Urges Youth Plan to Fight Un-Americanism,” *The Register*, September 4, 1936, 1; “Communism Is Rife In Schools, Teachers Say,” *The Register*, September 4, 1938, 1; “Young Girls Used as Bait By Communists, Is Charge,” *The Register*, November 26, 1938, 6; “Pennsylvania Youth Join in War on ‘Isms,’” *The Register*, November 13, 1938, 1.

<sup>78</sup> “Church School Best Training in Citizenship,” *The Register*, November 6, 1938, 6.

across the South, O'Hara argued that Catholic schools were not emblems of separation from the "general body and spirit of American citizenship" but rather an embodiment of the rights at the heart of that citizenship.<sup>79</sup> Beyond Atlanta, O'Hara conducted institutes in Dallas, Little Rock and Nashville.<sup>80</sup>

A major impediment to *The Register's* effort to paint Catholic education as fundamentally patriotic, however, was the Vatican's complicated relationship with fascism. While oppressive policies against Catholics in Germany and Austria meant Hitler's government was easily demonized in Catholic papers, other dictators were openly praised.<sup>81</sup> In Italy and Spain, fascist governments not only safeguarded Catholic institutions but actively integrated them with the state. This favoritism, of course, drew applause from the Catholic hierarchy. Protections for Catholic schooling offered by Benito Mussolini and Francisco Franco were especially praised.<sup>82</sup>

While full-throated support of Mussolini and Franco did not immediately conflict with the Church's international crusade against communism, it did risk condemnation by Americans who were less sympathetic. Luckily for American Catholics, Mussolini and Franco became less

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> "Pontif Makes Strong Protest on Nazi Rule," *The Register*, January 2, 1938, 1; "Peace in Jeopardy So Long As Hitler Rules," *The Register*, February 27, 1938, 1; "Austria's Nazification Is Hard On Religion," *The Register*, April 3, 1938, 3; "Nazi Promises to Church Are Not Very Assuring," *The Register*, April 17, 1938, 1; "Nazis Waging Propaganda War On Church," *The Register*, June 16, 1938, 1; "Nazis Hold 300 Priests In One Camp," *The Register*, July 10, 1938, 1; "Persecution of Jews Is Widely Condemned," *The Register*, July 17, 1938, 1; "Brutal Jewish Pogroms Hint War on Catholics," *The Register*, November 20, 1938, 1; "U.S. Catholics Denounce Brutal Pogrom in Germany," *The Register*, November 27, 1938, 1; "Religious Education Is Wiped Out In Bavaria," *The Register*, November 27, 1938, 4.

<sup>82</sup> "Franco's Government Is To Be Like Portugal's," *The Register*, April 17, 1938, 1; "Attempt Made to Destroy Church in Spain Failure," *The Register*, September 25, 1938, 1; "19,000 Spanish Are Killed In Red Air Raids," *The Register*, November 6, 1938, 1.

acceptable to the Vatican over time, resulting in an opening for the Catholic press to stage a star-spangled campaign of the sorts not seen since the days of World War I.<sup>83</sup>

Alongside time-worn claims that American icons like George Washington were Catholic, *The Register* launched into increasingly emphatic assertions of Catholic patriotism late in 1938.<sup>84</sup> In reaffirming their foundational role in defending American democracy, Catholics sought to leverage their loyalty against the ‘double burden’ of private school funding and mandatory state taxes. While Catholic families patriotically paid those taxes, they could not in good conscience send their children to those schools. Instead, they paid a kind of second tax in tithes and tuition in order to support the vast system of Catholic parochial schools. Interestingly, the double burden was presented primarily as an issue in other parts of the country. Resistance to the use of public funds for Catholic books, buses, etc., was explicitly discussed in regards to states like New York and Ohio.<sup>85</sup> In Tennessee, however, there was greater openness to the use of public funds to support at least some functions of Catholic schools. A June article noted that the school board of Humphrey County agreed to furnish a public school bus to transport children attending the Catholic school in McEwen after “numerous” citizens, Catholic and non-Catholic, presented a

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<sup>83</sup> “Serious Rift Over Racism Looms Between Pope and Mussolini,” *The Register*, August 7, 1938, 1.

<sup>84</sup> “Did Washington Die Catholic?,” *The Register*, February 20, 1938, 1; “Re-Dedication to Principles of Freedom Urged,” *The Register*, July 17, 1938, 1; “Church True Defender of True Liberty,” *The Register*, August 14, 1938, 1; “Democracy’s Main Pillar That of Religious Liberty,” *The Register*, September 11, 1938, 2; “America Can Survive Only Through Religious Ideals,” *The Register*, November 6, 1938, 1; “Democracies Favorable to Church, Says Cardinal,” *The Register*, November 13, 1938, 4; “Bishops Ask Christian Democracy Crusade,” *The Register*, November 27, 1938, 1; “Study of Christian Democracy,” *The Register*, November 27, 1938, 6; “Americans Join Forces to Protect Democracy, Religion,” *The Register*, December 4, 1938, 1; “One Prayer From Many Creeds,” *The Register*, December 4, 1938, 3.

<sup>85</sup> “Priest Commends Proposed School Aid,” *The Register*, March 6, 1938, 1; “Attack on School Aid Is Refuted,” *The Register*, March 27, 1938, 1; “Schools Save Huge Sum In Taxes Yearly,” *The Register*, April 17, 1938, 4; “Law Change for School Aid Asked,” *The Register*, April 15, 1938, 1; “Fair Play Holds Only Hope In School Taxes,” September 4, 1938, 1; “Refusal of Bus Service Closes Parish School,” *The Register*, September 11, 1938, 1; “State Bus Service For Parish Pupils Favored,” *The Register*, September 25, 1938, 1; “State Should Aid Every School, Says Ohio Bishop,” *The Register*, November 13, 1938, 2.

petition in favor of the arrangement.<sup>86</sup> It undoubtedly helped that “a number” of non-Catholic children were also scheduled attend the sister-led school.<sup>87</sup>

Another explanation for relative Protestant good-will surrounding the issue of school funding in Tennessee was the effectiveness with which Tennessee Catholics raised money to



Figure 19: "Why the Double Burden?" *The Register*, September 25, 1938.

fund their parochial system. *The Register* repeatedly noted the success of parishes in quickly meeting or exceeding fundraising goals for the construction of new schools or the updating of existing ones in Nashville, Knoxville, and Memphis.<sup>88</sup> Of particular interest was the need to raise \$15,000 for the upkeep of Father Ryan High. To collect the funds as quickly as possible, the Diocese adopted a contest-style fundraiser in which Nashville’s parishes jockeyed to appear atop rankings featured in *The Register*.<sup>89</sup> The

<sup>86</sup>“McEwen Catholic School To Get Bus Service,” *The Register*, June 19, 1938, last. *The Register* did not paginate the final page of each issue, so citations for articles on those pages are designated as ‘last’ in lieu of a specific page number.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> “Knoxville to Have New High School,” *The Register*, April 17, 1938, 5, last; “C.Y.O. Unit Pledges \$100 to School Fund in Knoxville,” *The Register*, May 1, 1938, 4; “Memphis School to Cost \$80,000,” *The Register*, May 22, 1938, last; “Loretto School Gets Library,” *The Register*, June 19, 1938, last; “Nashville Parish Plans New Church, School,” *The Register*, August 28, 1938, last; “\$7,200 Pledged for Knoxville Catholic High,” *The Register*, September 18, 1938, 5.

<sup>89</sup> “Bishop Asks Funds for Nashville School,” *The Register*, August 14, 1938, last; “\$15,000 for Father Ryan High School Goal of Laymen’s Guild’s Drive,” *The Register*, August 21, 1938, last; “St. Joseph’s Leading in Fr. Ryan High Drive,” *The Register*, August 28, 1938, last; “Final Reports Made On Fr. Ryan Drive,” *The Register*, September 11, 1938, last.

success of such fundraisers combined with a greater public willingness to allocate tax dollars to auxiliary services like bussing assuaged tensions over school funding elsewhere.

It would be inaccurate, however, to characterize Tennessee as completely accepting of Catholic schools by the late 1930s. Some resistance was still evident in rural regions beyond the major parishes. In late July, “some of the misguided citizens” of Harriman violently protested Father William K. Graw’s plans to hold a vacation school for Catholic children in the area.<sup>90</sup> Despite having secured permission from the local school board to use public facilities, Graw was sent a letter signed by over a hundred people from “outlying districts” protesting the program just two days before it began.<sup>91</sup> When Graw went forward with his plans despite the letter, a crowd of protestors gathered around the school. *The Register* noted that local police stood ready to protect Father Graw’s right to conduct his approved program. After consulting with Bishop Adrian, however, Graw decided to postpone the school for a year to avoid any “disturbance.”<sup>92</sup> Afterward, Harriman’s “better class of citizens...pledged him their fullest co-operation for his projects in the future” and expressed regret to Bishop Adrian regarding their fellow citizens’ behavior.<sup>93</sup> As the next chapter will show, however, Tennessee Catholics did not plan to remain idle in the face of rural ignorance; instead, they would meet it head on with the innovative trailer missionaries.

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<sup>90</sup> “Vacation School Closed in Harriman, Regret Expressed,” *The Register*, July 31, 1938, last.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

## From Depression to War

From 1939 to 1941, youth and education articles centered around three themes: institutional change, the promotion of new programs and services, and engagement with the federal government. A July 1939 story about the demolition of Nashville's first parochial school, St. Mary's School on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, reflected the theme of change. Built on land originally purchased by Bishop Freehan from the city of Nashville in 1866, the "ancient brick edifice" stood on Capitol Hill for 82 years.<sup>94</sup> When the school opened a year later in September of 1867, it enrolled 400 students "from all sections of the city" and "soon won the recognition and confidence of the people of the city."<sup>95</sup> Over its 50 years of service, St. Mary's helped cultivate important links between the Diocese of Nashville and the national Catholic hierarchy, producing such notable leaders as Rev. Samuel A. Stritch, future Archbishop of Chicago, and Rev. John A. Floersh, Archbishop of Louisville.<sup>96</sup> When the school finally closed its doors in 1923, it was largely the victim of Catholic success. In addition to a general population shift away from downtown, the growing parochial system, including Assumption, St. Columba's, St. Joseph's, and St. Patrick's, and the Cathedral school on West End, attracted students away from St. Mary's until it was no longer financially viable to keep it open. Post demolition, the Diocese mulled renting the space for a parking lot.<sup>97</sup>

As St. Mary's came down, however, *The Register* chronicled efforts across the state to utilize radio to connect with more Catholic youth than brick and mortar schools ever could have

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<sup>94</sup> "Razing of Old St. Mary's Removes Famous Landmark in Nashville," *The Register*, July 2, 1939, last, 3.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

done. In Memphis, the local C.Y.O. began broadcasting programs on Catholic subjects across the city's first full-service station, WMC.<sup>98</sup> In Nashville, Catholic schools were featured on WSIX in a series sponsored by the Nashville Trust called "Do You Know Nashville?" Interestingly, the program was structured as a conversation between two announcers: one asking questions on behalf of the people of Nashville and the other answering those questions as the fictional character 'Colonel Nashville.'<sup>99</sup>

Despite all the growth and change, reinforcing the Diocese's connection with Southern history remained an important theme. A lengthy article from July 1940 highlighted the link between the Diocese of Nashville, parochial schools, and Confederate President Jefferson Davis. The paper recounted how an eight-year-old Davis studied at St. Thomas' College in Kentucky from 1816 to 1818 under Fr. Richard P. Miles, future first Bishop of Nashville. Though Davis's mother was noted for her anti-Catholic views, the impact of briefly studying at a Catholic school was said to have instilled in Davis a "respect and love" for Catholic schools and priests that "carried him through his long life."<sup>100</sup> As evidence of that respect, the paper recounted how an adult Davis once knelt and asked Fr. Matthew A. O'Brien, who was ordained by then Bishop Miles, for his blessing.<sup>101</sup>

Most of *The Register's* education related articles, however, focused on new programs and services offered throughout the state to meet growing demands. At the heart of those offerings was a rapidly expanding student body that threatened to outstrip the ability of existing

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<sup>98</sup> "Memphis CYO To Begin Broadcasts," *The Register*, March 26, 1939, last.

<sup>99</sup> "Schools to be Topic of Nashville Radio Program," *The Register*, July 2, 1939, last.

<sup>100</sup> "Jefferson Davis Was Student Under First Bishop of Nashville Diocese," *The Register*, July 14, 1940.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

institutions to serve them. Two articles from September 1939 noted how Father Ryan in Nashville received its largest enrollment ever while schools in Chattanooga were already approaching maximum capacity.<sup>102</sup> The obvious implication was the immediate need for new and larger facilities. The lingering depression and coming war, however, continued to stall the massive building projects that would characterize the Diocese in the decades to come.



Figure 20: "Students of Alto's Summer School," *The Register*, July 23, 1939, last.

In the meantime, lower-cost services like summer school and seasonal camps helped expand the Diocese's impact without incurring heavy costs. In the summer of 1939, the Paulist Fathers in Winchester launched a summer camp in Alto, a small agricultural town in Franklin County. Operating over a six-week period from June to July, the camp was the first of its kind in the region and served roughly 60 boys and girls with the help of both priests and lay teachers. Importantly, nearly all the registered children were non-Catholics.<sup>103</sup> As the next chapter will show, the Alto camp was not only an expression of innovation in Catholic education in Tennessee but also an important marker for the success of the Diocese's concomitant push to bring Catholicism to more rural areas.

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<sup>102</sup> "Enrollment At Fr. Ryan School Hits New High," *The Register*, September 17, 1939, last; "Parish School in Chattanooga Is Near Its Capacity," *The Register*, September 17, 1939, 6.

<sup>103</sup> "Alto District Will Have 1<sup>st</sup> Summer School," *The Register*, May 14, 1939, last.

Another aspect of Catholic education in 1939, 1940, and 1941 was increasing access to extracurricular activities and auxiliary services. *Register* articles in 1937 and 1938 focused primarily on social and artistic activities aligned with Daniel Lord's version of youth involvement. The articles in 1939-1941 were increasingly sports-minded features of the Bernard Sheil type.<sup>104</sup> In fact, the Chicago CYO became a recurring topic of interest. The prominence of the Chicago approach to CYO activities may



Figure 21: "A League of Nations," *The Register*, November 26, 1939, 6.

have indicated a shift in youth preference for sport or may have been an outgrowth of the increasingly strong connection between the Diocese of Nashville and the Archdiocese of Chicago following the ascension of Nashville's own Samuel A. Stritch to Archbishop of Chicago. Regardless, the success of such programs in producing star athletes was evident in the rise of a new temptation: non-Catholic scholarships. In a May 1940 article, Bishop Adrian, who had been an athlete and coach himself, warned the state's athletes to refuse scholarships from non-Catholic colleges "no matter how tempting their offer."<sup>105</sup>

<sup>104</sup> "Devil Outdone by Chicago CYO Program," *The Register*, July 23, 1939, 1; "Clip 'Im Stinky, Use Your Right," *The Register*, September 8, 1940, 9.

<sup>105</sup> "Don't Attend Secular Schools, Athletes Urged," *The Register*, May 12, 1940, last.



Figure 22: “Proud of Their New School Bus,” *The Register*, January 5, 1941, last.

In terms of auxiliary services, bussing, especially in more rural areas, continued to be an issue. Even though Tennessee was more receptive than other states to contributing public funds, the purchase of a bus continued to be a major event and source of pride in small communities. A January 1941 article featuring a photograph of Winchester students beside their new bus provides evidence of the newsworthy status of such events. The article also reveals the link between Nashville and its outlying communities. The sisters who conducted Winchester’s school (visible to the left) were from Nashville’s St. Cecilia convent.<sup>106</sup>

At an organizational level, a final telling evolution during this period was the centralization of youth activities under the new Catholic Youth Council (CYC). In May of 1940, leaders from Nashville’s Catholic Youth Organization, Newman Club, Catholic Students’ Mission Crusade (CSMC), and other parochial organizations met at Father Ryan High to elect officers to the new general council “in order to broaden the scope of the organization and to include all groups of Catholic youths.”<sup>107</sup> While member organizations retained a level of

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<sup>106</sup> “Proud of Their New School Bus,” *The Register*, January 5, 1941, last.

<sup>107</sup> “Young People To Be United Under CYC,” *The Register*, January 26, 1941, last.

autonomy, they were subject to CYC oversight in order to coordinate and streamline an increasingly complex constellation of camps, dances, outings, and sporting events.

The most important variable affecting Catholic education in the period 1939-1941, however, involved the tightening relationship between the Catholic Church and President Franklin Roosevelt's patriotic ecumenism project. The path toward such a relationship had been laid earlier in the 1930s when the Great Depression and New Deal forced resource-strapped churches to join forces with an increasingly assertive federal government to address unprecedented suffering. As Alison Greene notes, the South stood by the New Deal longer than other regions.<sup>108</sup> That tendency primed the Diocese of Nashville to embrace Roosevelt's language in promotion of their own institutions, including parochial schools.

An August 1939 article about the findings of a special committee in New York exemplified the importance of religious education in an evolving Depression-era definition of Americanism. "The state and nation find themselves in different conditions and with different needs from those which our country has ever heretofore known," the committee insisted, "and our educational system must be adjusted to meet these present needs."<sup>109</sup> For Catholics, the shift was not much of an adjustment at all. Religious instruction in schools had always been an important goal. Any Catholic resistance to religious materials in public schools had derived from Protestant domination of those institutions throughout the nineteenth century. Beginning in the second quarter of the twentieth century, however, Protestants began to abandon their advocacy for religion in schools as it became clearer that taking such a position in a nation that

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<sup>108</sup> Alison Collis Greene, *No Depression in Heaven: The Great Depression, the New Deal, and the Transformation of Religion in the Delta* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 194-195.

<sup>109</sup> "Religion Foremost Need in Public Schools: Special Committee in New York State Reports Findings," *The Register*, August 27, 1939, 1-2.

was increasingly accepting of Catholics might mean inclusion of Catholic teachings beyond the parochial system. The New York article in *The Register* pointed to just such a possibility. “We do not want Church differences mixed up in our schools,” the committee continued, “but we do want our scholars to appreciate and understand the importance of their following and make the most of the faith with which they are identified.”<sup>110</sup>

To borrow from Hutchinson’s three pluralism, American public education had previously operated under a “pluralism of toleration” format. Competing parochial school systems and Catholic attendees in public institutions had been tolerated, but this new construct felt all too much like “pluralism of inclusion” or, worse, “pluralism of participation.”<sup>111</sup> Protestants, therefore, increasingly became the loudest advocates for separation of church and state as their own sectarian empire fractured and federal power seemed increasingly favorable to Catholic inclusion. If Protestants insisted on manning the wall of separation of church and state, however, Catholics were content to manage the gates where mutually beneficial interaction was possible. Education was one of those gates.

The Catholic Church was quick to point to the prominence of dogma-supported patriotism in their parochial systems. The Roosevelt Administration was just as quick to reinforce the value of such education in protecting youth from authoritarian ideologies. “From President Roosevelt on down,” one article read, “almost every national figure who spoke at the [White House Conference on Children in Democracy] looked to religion for the basic principles that will safeguard children from the ravages of fear and frustration and from the false hopes of

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> William R. Hutchinson, *Religious Pluralism in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 5-6.

security held out by un-American totalitarianisms.”<sup>112</sup> Sensing an opening to both advocate for additional funds and knock their nativist rivals down a notch, Catholic leaders framed long-standing Protestant efforts to deny tax funding for parochial schools as an “injustice completely alien to the spirit of American democracy.”<sup>113</sup> They argued that denial of such public funds to religious education had been “forced on the American people by a group of zealots in the last century.” In doing so, those “zealots” had harmed children in both systems and caused the public system to become wholly secular.<sup>114</sup> The implication was clear. Those guarding the wall of separation had left children blind to the true enemy: Godless totalitarianism. Together, Catholics, the federal government, and any other pluralism-minded faiths could reopen their eyes.

When members of those pluralism-minded faiths spoke in unison with Catholics, *The Register* took note. In September 1939, it quoted Dr. Ernest Johnson of the Federal Council of Churches in Christ in America when he charged that “many Americans are using the slogan of religious freedom to promote not religion but secularism.”<sup>115</sup> Speaking at the Williamson Institute of Human Relations, which was sponsored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Johnson proposed twice-weekly religious instruction for students in the public school system. An iteration of what became “release time” proposals, the system set aside a period of the school day multiple times a week for students to receive religious instruction by a teacher in

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<sup>112</sup> “Conference on Children Emphasizes Religion: President Pointedly Shows His Concern At Lack of Faith,” *The Register*, May 7, 1939, 1-2.

<sup>113</sup> “Change Would Aid All Education: Catholics Entitled to Just Share in School Funds,” *The Register*, April 23, 1939, 1.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> “Non-Catholics Agree Church is Right About Education,” *The Register*, September 3, 1939, 1.

their denomination of choice. Tellingly for the ‘tri-faith’ project already at work at the federal level, Johnson suggested the plan “might be adopted throughout the nation by Catholics, Protestants, and Jews.”<sup>116</sup>

For Tennessee Catholics, the argument for funding inclusion went beyond ideological concerns. In October 1939, *The Register* presented a purely financial justification. It reminded readers that the city of Nashville spent an average of \$52.26 per student the previous year. Given that there were 13 parochial schools serving 1,952 students in Nashville by 1939, Catholic institutions were saving the city \$102,011.52 per year. The paper also pointed out that Nashville’s per pupil expenditure was low compared to either Knoxville (\$67.89) or the national average for cities over 100,000 population (\$120.87). Additionally, even though expenditures in Chattanooga and Memphis were lower (\$50.41 and \$50.50, respectively), the average spent per student in Tennessee cities averaged at least \$50. Since the Diocese of Nashville’s 48 schools and 8,000 pupils were still primarily concentrated in cities in 1939, the paper claimed a total savings for Tennessee of over \$400,000, all while Catholics paid their fair share of taxes as well.<sup>117</sup>

As the clouds of despotism gathered in Europe, however, such financial arguments once again became secondary to patriotic ones. The dual threats of communism and fascism had the potential to forge a tri-faith alliance well beyond the voluntary détente that emerged following World War I. As early as 1940, preemptive war mobilization efforts hastened the end of both the Great Depression and the social anxieties associated with the unemployed, ideologically vulnerable youth culture it had birthed. Issues regarding education did not disappear, but they

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> “Catholic Schools Save Nashville Taxpayers Over \$100,000 Yearly,” *The Register*, October 15, 1939, last, 3.

did pale in comparison with a battle to protect religious freedom broadly. As the armies of irreligiousness threatened to tear down Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish institutions globally, leaders from all three faiths answered their government's call for support when it finally came. Though each approached the resulting ecumenical experiment from their own perspective, representatives from a diverse cohort of religious communities tentatively joined hands in the closest approximation of pluralism of participation yet attempted. For Tennessee Catholics, the opportunity was especially well timed. The Diocese of Nashville had spent the previous decade cultivating an educational, extracurricular, and sporting ecosystem that swelled the ranks of young Catholics ready to serve both God and country. In the decade that followed, that "Army of Youth" marched forth into both battlefields and backwoods to claim new victories for Catholicity.

### **"Attended School"**

In April 1940, federal census takers once again visited 3508 Murphey Road. Shadows of the Great Depression lingered. Up and down the block, home values were nearly 38% lower than they had been a decade before. The Timothys, however, still lived in the second most valuable home, now worth only \$5,000. Margaret was the new head of household for her two thirteen-year-old daughters, Mary and Julia. Ten years after Humphrey's death, Margaret still worked as a domestic servant to make end meet, though no official income was listed in census documents. Gone from the census were archaic designations of literacy. In the column where literacy once appeared, there was now a space to indicate the highest year of schooling attended. For Margaret, that was the fourth year of high school. In the column labeled "Attended School or

College,” however, the answer was the same as it had been for her husband in 1930: “no.”<sup>118</sup> Stagnant prejudices of the Catholic schooling obtained by Margaret and Humphrey’s generation appeared unchanged.

Mary and Julia were sixth graders at Christ the King School by 1940. Established by Bishop Adrian in the spring of 1937, Christ the King parish revolved around a two-story brick home at 3001

Belmont Boulevard.

The building served as the chapel, school, parish house, recreation hall, and community center.

Reverend Joseph E. Leppert, who later became the chief

organizer of



Figure 23: Christ the King School, [https://www.cksraiders.org/about\\_2020/school\\_history](https://www.cksraiders.org/about_2020/school_history)

Tennessee’s C.Y.O.s, was the parish’s first pastor. While the chapel moved into a white framed structure on the property, the school remained in the original brick home.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population Schedule,” <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/38188652:2442>.

<sup>119</sup> “School History,” Christ the King School, [https://www.cksraiders.org/about\\_2020/school\\_history](https://www.cksraiders.org/about_2020/school_history); Katie Peterson, “Christ the King Church celebrates being 85 years strong with generations of families,” *Tennessee Register*, September 15, 2022, <https://tennesseeregister.com/christ-the-king-church-celebrates-being-85-years-strong-with-generations-of-families-photo-gallery/>.

Christ the King was an emblem of the continued growth of Nashville's Catholic community. It was the place where Mary and Julia learned the tenets of both democratic citizenship and Catholic faith. It was the place where they participated in community performances and lively socials. It was the place where they upheld the rising academic standards expected of their secular counterparts.

When it came time for the 1940 census taker to register if Mary and Julia had attended school, years of advocacy hung in the balance. The development of C.Y.O.s, the raising of tens of thousands of dollars to modernize Catholic school buildings, and the tireless assertion of patriotic loyalty in the Catholic press had sought to change the fate of a new generation of Tennessee Catholics. A decade of work was measured in a few pen strokes. Under "Attended School," the census recorded a simple yet profound "yes."<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Sixteenth Census."

## Chapter 5

### **Out of the Wilderness, Into the Backwoods: Tri-Faith Ecumenism, Trailer Missionaries, and the Great Buildout At Mid-Century**

#### **Back to the Front Lines**

On November 23, 1944, a 25-year-old James Simmons Timothy was once again on the front lines in France. Like his namesake uncle 26 years earlier, James found himself in mortal danger from a German attack. Like his namesake, James would receive the Distinguished Service Cross for the bravery he was about to display. Unlike his namesake, he would survive to accept it.

Captain James Timothy, commander of Company D, First Battalion, 313<sup>th</sup> Infantry, was detached from American forces in November 1944 to assist the “Wildcat” Second French Armored Division in taking the Kehl Bridge in Strasbourg, France. Timothy’s heavy weapons unit was tasked with taking what was first thought to be a barracks but, instead, turned out to be the German headquarters. In the intense battle that ensued, the Germans inflicted heavy casualties on the Americans but were unable to force their retreat. By nightfall, a French-speaking German officer snuck through the battle lines to request a parlay. Timothy, who had focused on French after struggling with mathematics while at West Point, volunteered to go behind enemy lines to discuss terms of surrender. His own commander doubted if he would return alive.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Captain Timothy Talks Nazi Commander Into Surrendering Garrison, Wins DSC,” *Nashville Tennessean*, September 23, 1945, 11.

Timothy and the German officer moved through the dusk light, dodging a continuing hail of bullets, until they finally reached the German headquarters. Once there, James informed the senior Nazis that they would be surrounded by two Allied armored divisions by morning if they did not lay down their arms. The younger Nazis were incredulous and treated James with a contempt that he returned in kind. He was, of course, lying. No armored divisions were coming. James, however, assured the senior officers that they could surrender to the Americans rather than the French, saving face for the questions that would undoubtedly come from their superior later. This was also a lie. The Americans fighting in Strasbourg were under French command. When Timothy returned to the French lines, however, he was followed by an entire garrison of 16 Nazi officers and 372 enlisted men. Soon thereafter, he was deployed with the 79<sup>th</sup> Division, which was the first American unit to reach the Rhine.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 24: Brigadier General Pat Timothy, *Nashville Tennessean*, June 27, 1945, 16.

Back in the United States, James's father, Colonel Pat Timothy, had worked long hours as one of the principal planners of that Rhine assault. As the chief engineer of the Twelfth Army under General Omar Bradley, Col. Timothy oversaw roughly 160,000 fellow engineers. His attachment to Bradley likely dated from their days at West Point, where he was a freshman the year Bradley and the legendary class of 1915, including Dwight Eisenhower, graduated from the academy. Both Bradley and Timothy then served as instructors in the school's Mathematics department during the 1920s. His role in coordinating the logistics of the Rhine crossing was so critical

<sup>2</sup> Ibid; "Capt. James Timothy Given Service Medal," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, September 23, 1945, 11.

that it later garnered him a Distinguished Service Medal, a Legion of Merit recognition, and, eventually, a promotion to Brigadier General by President Franklin Roosevelt.<sup>3</sup> For Pat, however, the most important aspect of his job was ensuring that the path for his son was well laid.

Carl Wittke once wrote that the hyphen separating Irishmen from their fellow Americans had dissolved in the heat of World War I. The James Simmons Timothy that died at Chateau Thierry in 1918 was a symbol of that dissolution. He laid a path for Pat, his nephew, and fellow Irish Catholics to stake increasing claims to both 100 percent Americanism and Southern indigeneity. Over the ensuing years, Pat, James, Humphrey, and others picked up the assimilative baton to carry American Catholics forward in the race toward pluralism of inclusion. Simultaneously, deliberate action by the Diocese of Nashville, its bishops, its newspapers, and its individual congregants won Catholicity increasing levels of institutional legitimacy.

Other changes were also in process. Beginning with the founding of the National Conference of Jews and Christians (Protestant and Catholic) in 1928, a broad push for ecumenical action opened opportunities for cooperation and understanding between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. Though imperfect, the tentative pluralism explored by groups like the NCJC caught the attention of the White House as a potent coalition-building tool. As a result, President Franklin Roosevelt launched what would become a multi-administration, multi-decade ecumenical campaign that would forever transform the fate of American Catholicity.

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<sup>3</sup> “Gen Pat Timothy of Nashville Gets New Post,” *Nashville Tennessean*, June 27, 1945, 16; “Retired General, Patrick Timothy, Services Slated,” *The Tennessean*, October 31, 1981, 23; “Col. P.H. timothy Nominated for Brigadier General,” *Nashville Banner*, April 4, 1945, 5; “Notable Graduates,” United States Military Academy, accessed March 3, 2026, <https://www.westpoint.edu/about/history-of-west-point/notable-graduates>; “Timeline of General Bradley’s Life,” General Omar Bradley Memorial, Library, and Museum, accessed March 3, 2026, <https://www.omarbradley.org/omar-bradley/>; “Patrick Henry Timothy,” Hall of valor by Military Times, accessed March 3, 2026, <https://valor.militarytimes.com/recipient/recipient-113376/>.

In many ways, Pat and his son were ideal symbols for the generalized, patriotic faith that Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower sought. The recognition and high rank that both achieved was not the result of their Irish Catholic heritage. Neither was it achieved in spite of that heritage. In the emerging 'tri-faith' construct, their heritage marked them as belonging to one of the three legitimate faiths of democracy and, therefore, automatically positioned them within the new mainstream. Though Catholics had long wandered the American political wilderness, the ambiguous tenants of tri-faith Americanism pointed the way out. It was a path that would one day lead all the way to the long sought promised land: 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

### **First Contact**

White House overtures for a tri-faith ecumenism arrived in the heart of Catholicity just in time for Christmas. In December 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt publicly released letters that he dispatched to the preeminent leaders of each of America's three major faiths, at least as he understood them. One arrived at the desk of Rabbi Cyrus Adler, president of the Jewish Theological Seminary. Another was directed to George A. Buttrick, president of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America (FCC). The final letter was addressed to Pope Pius XII, head of the Catholic Church in Rome. The general tone of all three letters was one of goodwill and a hope that ecumenism could advance the cause of peace.<sup>4</sup> "The people of this nation," Roosevelt wrote to Pius XII, "understand that which harms one segment of humanity

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew R. Polk, *Faith In Freedom: Propaganda, Presidential Politics, and the Making of An American Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 14.

harms all the rest.”<sup>5</sup> The implicit suggestion that Roosevelt envisioned a society free from the anti-Catholic bigotry that had characterized earlier periods is unmistakable, but he did not dare to directly implicate Protestants as the primary source of that bigotry in a public letter. Instead, he focused on the looming struggle between “seekers of light” and the “forces of evil.”<sup>6</sup> “I trust,” he concluded the letter, “that all of the churches of the world which believe in a common God will throw the great weight of their influence into this great cause.”<sup>7</sup>

Over the next two decades, tri-faith concepts evolved in ways that transformed belief in that ‘common God’ into an ambiguous civic faith closely linked to concepts of American heritage and unquestioning patriotism. Though 99 percent of Americans professed to believe in an almighty God by 1954, the efforts of Roosevelt and his successors ensured that He was fettered by neither liturgy nor dogma. Ironically, the irreligiousness of America’s civic religion was the development necessary to open the door to pluralism of participation for American Catholics. In December 1938, however, those developments were still years away. For the moment, Roosevelt needed to start by establishing basic relationships. He ended his letter to Pius XII with a remarkably personal touch, calling Pius “a good friend and an old friend.”<sup>8</sup>

The letter to the Vatican was exceptional in that it alluded to FDR’s intention to send a U.S. representative to the Holy See.<sup>9</sup> For Roosevelt, the decision to engage with the Vatican was strategic. Not only did Pius XII sit atop a global religious hierarchy, giving him insight into

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<sup>5</sup> Office of the Historian, “President Roosevelt to Pope Pius XII,” United States Department of State, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1939v02/d843>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Office of the Historian, “President Roosevelt to Pope Pius XII.”

<sup>9</sup> George Q. Flynn, “Franklin Roosevelt and the Vatican: The Myron Taylor Appointment,” *Catholic Historical Review* 58, no.2 (July 1972), 171

embattled regions of Europe that Roosevelt desired, but Roosevelt's New Deal coalition at home was built largely on the voting block started by Alfred E. Smith in 1928 and, therefore, depended on the support of several million Catholics.<sup>10</sup> Protestants were also part of that coalition, however, which in part explains why Roosevelt chose Myron C. Taylor, an Episcopalian "of the same unfervent variety" as Roosevelt.<sup>11</sup> Both men displayed an overt preference for the privileged place of Protestantism in American society, but both also appeared sincere in their belief that a unified religious front was possible.<sup>12</sup> Taylor's personal wealth as a former chairman of U.S. Steel also meant that he could finance his own travels and leverage pre-existing connections with Pius that facilitated greater access to the pontiff than any other foreigner in the Vatican.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, Roosevelt labeled Taylor as a 'personal representative,' bypassing the need for Congressional involvement and muddying the waters as to the nature of Taylor's relationship to the federal government in an effort to stave off Protestant criticism.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the overtly Christian references in Roosevelt's letter, his ecumenical plans, including Taylor's appointment to the Vatican, were not immediately controversial for Adler and the American Jewish community. In his reply to Roosevelt, Adler praised the president's "vivid

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<sup>10</sup> John S. Conway, "Myron C. Taylor's Mission to the Vatican, 1940-1950," *Church History* 44, no. 1 (March 1975), 85-99, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3165101>; Flynn, "Franklin Roosevelt and the Vatican," 171-183; Polk, "Unnecessary and Artificial Divisions," 667-671; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 925.

<sup>11</sup> Conway, "Myron C. Taylor's Mission to the Vatican, 1940-1950," 87.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew R. Polk, "Unnecessary and Artificial Division: Franklin Roosevelt's Question for Religious and National Unity Leading Up to the Second World War," *Church History* 82, no.3 (September 2013): 667-668; Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10.

<sup>13</sup> Flynn, "Franklin Roosevelt and the Vatican," 183; Conway, "Myron C. Taylor's Mission to the Vatican, 1940-1950," 88.

<sup>14</sup> Flynn, "Franklin Roosevelt and the Vatican," 184-186.

and forceful leadership” in nobly bringing “the forces of religion” together.<sup>15</sup> Wishing both Pius and Buttrick well, Adler also expressed confidence that “men of good faith” would unite in unanimous support for Roosevelt.<sup>16</sup> Other Jewish leaders echoed Adler’s sentiments. Dr. Stephen S. Wise, president of the liberal-leaning American Jewish Congress, expressed both his longstanding wish that Roosevelt would take such action and his support of Adler as a fitting representative of “collective American Jewry.”<sup>17</sup> William Weiss, president of the Union of Orthodox Congregations, also praised Roosevelt’s overtures.<sup>18</sup> Taylor’s time as Roosevelt’s representative at the 1938 Evian Conference on Jewish refugees and, later, as Vice-Chairman of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (ICR) certainly helped incur such support. Though neither the Evian Conference nor the ICR solved the issue of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi territories, they were both taken as goodwill gestures worthy of reciprocation in this instance.<sup>19</sup>

Catholics, of course, also responded positively. Pius replied to Roosevelt in equally warm tones and was especially laudatory of Roosevelt’s Biblical references. He also expressed “special satisfaction” in receiving Taylor, whom he called “the faithful interpreter of

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<sup>15</sup> “Presidents Vivid Leadership Lauded,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, December 28, 1939, 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> “Jewish Leaders Praise Move,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, December 28, 1939, 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> “Background: The Refugee Crisis,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, revised September 22, 2025, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-evian-conference>; Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Address at the Meeting of the Officers of the Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees,” The American Presidency Project, accessed March 7, 2026, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-meeting-the-officers-the-intergovernmental-committee-political-refugees>.

[Roosevelt's] mind."<sup>20</sup> In the United States, both the Catholic press and individual Catholics expressed their satisfaction with Roosevelt's gesture.<sup>21</sup> *The Register* responded to Roosevelt with an approving two-page, multi-article spread that included a full reprinting of his letter and selections from both Pius and Archbishop Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, Apostolic Delegate to the United States. A parenthetical within the main article, however, was telling of how Catholics perceived Roosevelt's actions. "Belief was expressed in Vatican quarters that the move was further evidence of the increasing cordial relations between the United States and the Holy See."<sup>22</sup> Citing earlier pro-Catholic gestures by the Roosevelt Administration, including the full diplomatic honors offered to Cardinal Mundelein on his visit to the U.S. and the appointment of Ambassador Joseph Kennedy as a special U.S. representative at the coronation of Pius XII, the *Register* pointed to "persistent" rumors that diplomatic relations between the Vatican and United States would soon resume.<sup>23</sup> Rumors like those, however, were precisely why Protestant reactions were far more divided and contentious than their fellow tri-faith candidates.

When Buttrick published his public response to Roosevelt, his tone was affable. Like Adler, he accepted Roosevelt's invitation to periodically consult with the administration and offered both his and the FCC's support. Behind the scenes, however, he and other Protestants were deeply concerned about Taylor. In private, Buttrick sought clarification from the White House on the specific role this 'special representative' would play. His primary concern was

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<sup>20</sup> "Letter of His Holiness Pius XII to the President of the United States of America, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, on the Occasion of the Nomination of an Extraordinary Ambassador to the Holy See," The Holy See, accessed March 7, 2026, [https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/letters/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_lett\\_19400107\\_memorable-message.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/letters/documents/hf_p-xii_lett_19400107_memorable-message.html).

<sup>21</sup> Polk, *Faith in Freedom*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> "Roosevelt Names Vatican Representative," *The Register*, December 31, 1939, 1-2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

that the United States would formally reestablish a diplomatic relationship with the Holy See, something that had not existed since Italy's absorption of the Papal States triggered the closure of the US-Vatican mission. Though the White House and State department reassured Buttrick that Taylor's mission was strictly informal, he and his fellow Protestants were largely unconvinced. For them, the appointment was a clear violation of the separation of church and state. Worse, it was potentially a signal that Catholics and Jews were being offered a seat within the halls of power. As Andrew Polk notes, "America's fragmented Protestants had little interest in sharing political or cultural power with each other, much less with American Catholics or Jews."<sup>24</sup>

Baptists were especially incensed, and none more so than the Southern Baptist Conference (SBC). The severity of their displeasure was evident in their willingness to temporarily work in tandem with their Northern and National Convention counterparts to oppose Taylor. Beyond U.S.-Vatican connections, however, the SBC was also as concerned about the leading role taken by coalitions of mainline Protestant churches like the FCC and National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ). From its perspective, the move felt like yet another example of exclusion from a government that was actively courting the SBC's rivals in ways that were both un-Christian and un-American.<sup>25</sup> Though there were rival organizations to the FCC, such as the American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC) and National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), the strong anti-ecumenical tradition of the SBC prevented it from going any

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<sup>24</sup> Polk, *Faith In Freedom*, 21, 16; "U.S. Vatican Relations Long in Existence," *The Register*, December 31, 1939, 1-2.

<sup>25</sup> Conway, "Myron C. Taylor's Mission to the Vatican, 1940-1950," 85-99; Flynn, "Franklin Roosevelt and the Vatican," 171-183; Polk, "Unnecessary and Artificial Divisions," 667-671; Polk, *Faith In Freedom*, 22.

further than treating such organizations as cooperative allies.<sup>26</sup> After all, Southern Baptists saw themselves as a ‘fourth’ American religion that was separate from Jewish, Catholic, or Protestant traditions.<sup>27</sup> Avid SBC opposition to Roosevelt’s ecumenical project may have also derived from the SBC’s need for a distraction from their own centralization controversies. By contrasting themselves against a church-state alliance that dwarfed SBC’s organizational structures, they could continue to appear fiercely independent even as their own hierarchical structure expanded. As one Baptist preacher noted, “the conglomeration of politics and heresy represented by the government, the Vatican, the Federal Council of Churches, and Judaism, respectively is an effort to achieve by earthly means and from the top down what can only be done by spiritual means and from the bottom up.”<sup>28</sup> The Southern Baptist saga of growth and redefinition in the tri-faith era is covered in detail in Chapter 6.

If Protestant leaders had paid closer attention to Roosevelt’s actions, however, they might have recognized his overt preference for continued Protestant supremacy. In a 1942 conversation with his Catholic and Jewish advisors, Roosevelt insisted that the United States remained a Protestant country in which Catholics and Jews were suffered to live. Tellingly, he also warned them that they bore a responsibility to persuade their religious communities to “go along with anything I want.”<sup>29</sup> In Roosevelt’s mind, his Episcopalian-derived pragmatism was representative of Protestantism writ large. As such, he cared little for selecting winners and

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<sup>26</sup> Polk, *Faith in Freedom*, 41-42; Albert Mohler, “The Southern Baptist Convention and the Issue of Interdenominational Relationships,” The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed April 29, 2025, <https://albertmohler.com/2009/07/16/the-southern-baptist-convention-and-the-issue-of-interdenominational-relationships/>.

<sup>27</sup> Polk, *Faith in Freedom*, 22; M.E. Dodd, “The Baptist Message, Mission and Method,” *Baptist and Reflector*, March 9, 1950, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Polk, “Unnecessary and Artificial Divisions,” 671.

<sup>29</sup> Polk, *Faith In Freedom*, 15.

losers in multi-denominational power struggles. Some denominations returned the sentiment. Polk points out that “many fundamentalists were worried that Roosevelt was the Antichrist, and Roosevelt barely knew fundamentalists existed.”<sup>30</sup> For Roosevelt, ecumenism was a useful political tool rather than an ideological crusade.

U.S. entry into World War II altered the dynamic. Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish leaders no longer had time to hash out the fine details of how Roosevelt’s ecumenical plan would work. Desirous of influence but weary of each other’s intentions, the three faiths of democracy found themselves locked in a complicated dance driven by political machinations that frequently displayed little regard for their theological differences.<sup>31</sup> Developing a broadly inclusive definition of Americanism became nothing short of a war necessity. Groups like the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) moved to the fore and framed the war as “a battle to defend the righteousness of the three faiths of democracy.”<sup>32</sup>

### **War Comes Again**

According to Kevin Schultz, World War I was the moment that some Protestants denominations first entertained interfaith cooperation. The cause was twofold. First, Catholics and Jewish soldiers displayed remarkable patriotism on the battlefield. James Simmons Timothy and his memorialization ceremony provide a vivid example. Second, the cooperative if sometimes tense interactions fostered by the tri-faith chaplaincy provided a concrete source of goodwill. By 1927, that goodwill translated into the first proto-tri-faith organization, the

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<sup>30</sup> Polk, *Faith In Freedom*, 35.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 4-5, 23, 40.

<sup>32</sup> Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*, 50.

National Conference of Jews and Christians (Protestant and Catholic). Renamed the NCC in 1938, the body enjoyed broad participation from groups like the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, the National Catholic Welfare Council, and the Federal Council of Churches in Christ of America. Much of its success derived from a religiously ambiguous reimagining of Americanism that was exemplified by the slogan “the brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God.” The construct allowed the three faiths, all of whom were still leery of the others, to stand shoulder to shoulder in public relations campaigns like the “Tolerance Trio” tour of Reverend Everett Clinchy, Rabbi Morris S. Lazaron, and Father John Elliot Ross in 1933. After 38 cities, 129 meetings, 21 radio broadcasts, and a *Time* magazine feature, hearing that a Protestant, a Catholic, and a Jew walked into a room transformed from the makings of a joke to the makings of a movement.<sup>33</sup>

The Tolerance Trios became a staple throughout the 1930s. After the first tolerance tour, hundreds of additional trios were created and sent to every corner of the nation, including the South. One Rabbi noted that the trios created opportunities to visit small towns that had never seen a priest or rabbi before. In 1939 alone, the contiguous states could count over ten thousand meetings involving some form of a tolerance trio. The fruit reaped by the trios was more than just lip service to goodwill. A 1940 edition of the *Saturday Evening Post* noted that money raised to aid Jewish refugees in Knoxville was matched dollar for dollar by the local Protestant and Catholic communities.<sup>34</sup> It was precisely this sort of interfaith potency that Roosevelt hoped to harness at the national level. In his mind, civic virtue obligated religious institutions to set aside their “unnecessary and artificial divisions” in aid to their government. His effort in the two

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 30-32, 35-36.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 39-41.

years following his Christmas letters, however, was largely in vain. Warm public words helped bolster Roosevelt's legitimacy, but he did not receive the full-throated, unified support he desired. The three faiths may have been willing to share stages and charitable funds, but power was a different story entirely. A frustrated Roosevelt began looking for paths to ecumenism that did not lead through the religious leaders.<sup>35</sup>

Then came December 7, 1941. In the wake of the Japanese assault, most religious groups threw their support behind the war effort. Some of the conservative Protestant groups who had resisted Roosevelt's pre-war wooing became the loudest voices in favor of the war effort. Even pacifists mostly came around to Roosevelt's cause. Though divisions between the three faiths remained to some degree, the category of 'outsider' dramatically narrowed. For a moment, only staunchly anti-war denominations like the Mennonites and Society of Friends were outside the mainstream. The rest found refuge under the umbrella of the 'Judeo-Christian tradition' so masterfully promoted by the NCCJ in the decades leading up to the conflict. At the same time, Roosevelt moved forward with plans to shift focus to promoting his ecumenist plan through government organs like the Office of War Information (OWI) and War Advertising Council (WAC). The result was a fusion of national and religious identity that permanently altered the meaning of 100 percent Americanism in ways that none of the involved parties anticipated. Religious leaders may have hoped to benefit from Roosevelt's schema while maintaining a safe distance from political entanglement, but the scope of the conflict and the effectiveness of the religio-political propaganda that accompanied it swept the process beyond their control. As Polk states, "American religion had gone to war."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Polk, *Faith In Freedom*, 36.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 41; Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*, 57-58.

## *The Register At War*

As far as *The Register* was concerned, the coming of war was not necessary for Roosevelt to be worthy of support. Articles dating back to the first Tennessee issues in 1937 referenced Roosevelt in glowing terms owing to his public references to Christian scripture, praise of Catholic initiatives, and willingness to appoint Catholics to positions of government authority.<sup>37</sup> The relationship was self-evidently reciprocal. Roosevelt offered praise for the Church as a bulwark of Americanism against the forces of Communism, Fascism, and dictatorship. In return, *The Register* covered him in a positive light and advocated for his programs.<sup>38</sup> Roosevelt's frequent deployment of Biblical language meshed well with the "God in Government" campaign the paper supported, and Catholic rhetoric about the dangers of international Communism, Naziism, and Fascism fit well with Roosevelt's evolving views on Europe.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, articles in late 1939 laid the rhetorical groundwork for later ecumenical efforts, at least between Catholics and Jews.<sup>40</sup> Judge John F.X. Masterson of New York told the American Jewish Federation:

Catholics...themselves members of a frequently persecuted faith, realize that propaganda is poisoning the wells of public thought; they know that Communists are not the friends of truth; they know that the small proportion of Jews in America who turned toward Communism is not representative of the great mass of American

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<sup>37</sup> "President Pays Great Tribute to Church: Her Truths Make America Hope of Peace," *The Register*, November 14, 1937, 1-2; "Give Thanks to Providence, Word of Mr. Roosevelt," *The Register*, November 21, 1937, 6; "FDR Speaks: Religion is Real Need of Americans," *The Register*, January 15, 1939, 1; "Catholic Attorney General," *The Register*, January 15, 1939, 1

<sup>38</sup> "Cut in WPA Would Bring Suffering," *The Register*, January 29, 1939, 1.

<sup>39</sup> "Diocese to Join Crusade for God in Government," *The Register*, February 19, 1939, last, 3; "Msgr. Sheen Crushing Denounces 'Isms': Over 3,000 Throng Nashville Building to Hear Prelate," *The Register*, April 23, 1939; "God In Government Crusade Starts Soon: topic Discussed At Fifth National CCD Convention," *The Register*, November 12, 1939, 1.

<sup>40</sup> "Anti-Semitism Is Grave Sin, Says Fr. Rice," *The Register*, August 20, 1939, 6; "Fight on Anti-Semitism Growing Rapidly," *The Register*, August 20, 1939, 6.

Jews, because the factors which seek to stir Jew against Christian are the same elements which are stirring Christian against Jew.<sup>41</sup>

*The Register's* positive outlook on Roosevelt intensified following the Christmas letters of 1939 and the appointment of Taylor to the Vatican. It also carefully noted instances of outside support or opposition for Taylor.<sup>42</sup> For example, Memphis's *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Seimitar* were both noted for "vigorously" supporting Roosevelt's decisions and labeling his opponents "small" and "unreasonable quibblers."<sup>43</sup> In Nashville, the *Nashville Banner* featured an interview with Bishop Adrian in which he praised the appointment as a step toward peace in Europe. *The Register* insisted that at least half of the city's Protestant churches echoed Adrian's sentiments. Of those who did not support the appointment, *The Register* focused on Baptists. It printed a statement from Dr. J.E. Dillard, director of promotion for the SBC. Dillard expressed admiration for Taylor as a person but took issue with his diplomatic functions. "We're not sending anybody to the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, the Jewish denomination, the Methodist, or any other," he complained, "and I protest sending a representative to any denomination."<sup>44</sup> Despite his blanket opposition to formal relations with "any denomination," Dillard's choices on which denominations to call out by name exposes underlying SBC anxieties over their rivals' increasing favoritism with the federal government while Baptists remained stubbornly on the outside. Hoping to undermine his position, *The*

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<sup>41</sup> "New York Judge Denies That Catholics Are Against Jews," *The Register*, August 27, 1939, 1.

<sup>42</sup> "Roosevelt Names Vatican Representative: Myron C. Taylor Will Work with Pontiff," *The Register*, December 31, 1939, 1-2; "U.S.-Vatican Relations Long in Existence," *The Register*, December 31, 1939, 1-2; "Pius XII Again Shows Love for America: New Letter Praises Work of Hierarchy in the United States," *The Register*, January 28, 1940, 1; "Roosevelt Again Cites Necessity of Religion," *The Register*, January 28, 1940, 1; "Complete Text of Pontiff's Reply to Roosevelt Given," *The Register*, January 28, 1940, 6.

<sup>43</sup> "Taylor Appointment Lauded by Newspapers in Memphis," *The Register*, January 7, 1940, last, 5.

<sup>44</sup> "Bishop Voices Approval of Selection of Myron Taylor," *The Register*, January 14, 1940, last.

*Register* countered Dillard by publishing multiple articles on instances of Baptist support for Taylor in the months that followed.<sup>45</sup> No other denomination received such targeted attention, indicating the growing institutional rivalry between Catholics and Baptists.

*The Register's* support, however, was not absolute. For instance, it held internal polls of readers that indicated Catholic skepticism of Roosevelt attempting a third term despite continuing support for his New Deal reforms.<sup>46</sup> The paper carefully maintained an apolitical stance from an editorial perspective, but the inclusion of reader data opposing a third-term allowed it to sidestep the issue by clearly vocalizing the Catholic position without claiming such a position as its own. When it became clear in July 1940 that Roosevelt would become a third-term candidate, however, *The Register* subtly shifted back into Roosevelt's camp, announcing his nomination with a collage of photos that



Figure 25: Third Term Run, "President Franklin D. Roosevelt - Third Term Nominee," *The Register*, July 28, 1940, 3.

<sup>45</sup> "Baptist Minister Hopes U.S. Will Have Permanent Representative at Vatican," *The Register*, March 24, 1940, 1; "Another Baptist Raps Opponents of Vatican Envoy," *The Register*, April 28, 1940, 1; "Taylor's Appointment Defended by Baptist," *The Register*, May 5, 1940, 7.

<sup>46</sup> "Readers for New Deal, But Against 3<sup>rd</sup> Term," *The Register*, March 24, 1940, 1.

strategically included images of the president with prominent Catholics during his first two terms.

In the months that followed Roosevelt's nomination, his quid-pro-quo relationship with the Catholic Church was once again on full display. Photos of Roosevelt and Catholic leaders featured exchanges of titles and awards recognizing each other's accomplishments. For example, one featured Frank C. Walker accepting the role of postmaster general. Walker, an active Irish Catholic layman in New York, joined Catholic Attorney General Frank Murphy to become the eighth Catholic to serve in a presidential cabinet. Three of those eight belonged to Roosevelt. Several months later, the American Congress for Peace and Social Security, sponsored by Catholic La Salle College, awarded Roosevelt a peace medal "in recognition [of] his effort on behalf of peace and social security."<sup>47</sup>

As noted by both Polk and Schultz, Roosevelt wanted more than just kind words and public back-scratching. He desired material support for his efforts. In Tennessee, he got his wish, especially regarding military preparedness. *The Catholic Herald*, *The Columbian*, and *The Cresset* had all leaned on the diocese's patriotic support for and participation with the military as central pillars of Catholic Americanism. *The Register* continued that long tradition in a series of articles from November 1940 to December 1941. One area of focus was the role of Catholic chaplains both abroad and at home. The arrival of 5,000 Catholic soldiers at Camp Forrest alone created both challenges and opportunities. Even though the army planned to build 604 base churches, many soldiers still chose to attend mass at local parishes. As a result, the worship space at Murfreesboro's St. Rose was suddenly inadequate to hold the overflowing crowds attending each Sunday, necessitating an additional mass. The tidal wave of soldiers also required

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<sup>47</sup> "Peace Medal for President," *The Register*, January 19, 41, last.

entertainment during their periods of leave from base. Over seventy thousand soldiers blanketed the state by June 1941, and the Diocese of Nashville accommodated them with frequent balls and dinners that provided both wholesome entertainment and moral reinforcement.<sup>48</sup>

Overall Catholic enlistment was also a source of pride. As in previous wars, Catholics boasted that their sons volunteered in higher proportions than other Christian denominations. A September 1941 article bragged that Catholics represented 31 percent of the army but only 1/6 of the population.<sup>49</sup> Unlike the “cautious patriotism” of their Protestant counterparts, Tennessee Catholics offered both full-throated rhetorical and material support due in large part to the Church’s unique blend of localism and internationalism.<sup>50</sup> The global conflagrations were not



Figure 26: Presidential Quid-Pro-Quo, "A Distinguished Catholic," *The Register*, September 29, 1940, last; "Peace Medal for President," *The Register*, January 19, 1941, last.

distant issues for someone else to solve but rather collective struggles in which every corner of Catholicity could meaningfully contribute. In the eyes of Tennessee-born leaders like Chicago Archbishop Samuel Stritch, the looming conflict might

<sup>48</sup> "Record Number of Priests in U.S. Army," *The Register*, November 10, 1940, 1; "Ground is Broken for 12 Chapels at Camp Forrest," *The Register*, July 20, 1941, last; "State's Catholic Population Swelled by Army's Influx," *The Register*, June 8, 1941, 3; "150 Soldiers Attend Ball in Nashville," *The Register*, July 20, 1941, 5; "Ground is Broken for 12 Chapels at Camp Forest," *The Register*, July 20, 1941, last

<sup>49</sup> "31 Per Cent of Nation's Army is Catholic," *The Register*, September 7, 1941, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Polk, *Faith in Freedom*, 44.

decide the fate of Western civilization, and Tennessee would play a vital part in its defense. “I fondly cherish the hope,” Stritch told a crowd of 2,000 in Nashville, “that in this Athens of the South there will always be a strong defense of our culture and that you will have a mighty part in it.”<sup>51</sup>

When war finally came in December 1941, *The Register* made it clear that Catholics were ready to throw themselves into the struggle. “Old Glory! Behind You We Stand As One!” the paper proclaimed in the first issue after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Beyond simple national



Figure 27: "Old Glory! Behind You We Stand As One!," *The Register*, December 14, 1941, 1.

defense, the war was framed in near prophetic language. One article noted that the last war declaration had occurred on Good Friday, and this one was on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, which was the patronal feast of the nation. Another article reminded Catholics that their efforts were critical for security far beyond the forty-eight contiguous states. American

Catholic outposts in Hawaii, the Philippines, and Guam were also in danger, as were missions in China, Korea, Burma, and elsewhere. Hawaii alone contained 76 priests, 81 brothers, and 255 sisters.<sup>52</sup> Archbishop Stritch stressed that “in sacrifice we shall be ready to answer our country’s

<sup>51</sup> “Defense of Christian Culture is Urged,” *The Register*, March 2, 1941, last.

<sup>52</sup> “Every Catholic Should Stand By Old Glory,” *The Register*, December 14, 1941, 1, 6; “Many Americans Serving Church in New War Area,” *The Register*, December 14, 1941, 1.

every demand.”<sup>53</sup> In line with the tradition of Catholic martyrdom, an article on December 28, 1941, noted that the first chaplain in the armed forces to die in the war, Fr. Aloysius H. Schmitt, was a Catholic.<sup>54</sup>

By the mid-point of the war, evidence of Catholic enthusiasm remained a prominent part of *The Register* despite a distinct reduction in the attention given to Roosevelt. Perhaps a growing realization that Rooseveltian ecumenism only went so far ultimately cooled the paper’s perception of his usefulness. The once ubiquitous photos of Roosevelt all but disappeared. The paper didn’t even acknowledge his death in April 1945. Regardless, the door opened by Roosevelt’s tri-faith overtures remained valuable, and patriotic war participation was a proven method for taking advantage of such opportunities. Other denominations were beginning to embrace Nazism’s threat to religion as a common trope by 1943, but they had significant ground to make up to catch early-adopter Tennessee Catholics.

A favorite point of pride was local Catholic participation in the War Food Administration’s ‘victory garden’ campaign.’ Blending patriotism and the American agricultural tradition, the program was an ideal synthesis of high international ideals and a core state economic activity.<sup>55</sup> From Lawrence County to the lawn of St. Joseph’s church in Nashville, planting victory gardens became a symbol of participation for those unable to fight. *The Register* noted that gardens were present at St. Ann’s church and in the side yard of Father Ryan High School. The secular press also took notice. The *Tennessee Market Bulletin* featured a

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<sup>53</sup> “All Resources of Church Pledged to Government,” *The Register*, December 21, 1941, 1, 3.

<sup>54</sup> “Catholic Naval Chaplain Is Among First to Lose Life in Defense of Old Glory,” *The Register*, December 28, 1941, 1.

<sup>55</sup> Cecilia Gowdy-Wygant, *Cultivating Victory: The Women’s Land Army and the Victory Garden Movement* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 133.

photo of Catholic Ben O'Connor and his family proudly showing the stores of food the family had grown in 1942. O'Connor said he was "determined not to be forced to fall back on the ration books any more than necessary."<sup>56</sup>



Figure 28: Left: Rev. Thomas P. Duffy in St. Joseph Victory Garden (Nashville), *The Register*, April 11, 1943, 1; Right: Ben O'Connor and Family (Lawrence County), *The Register*, April 4, 1943, 1.

Beyond the gardens, Tennessee Catholics also contributed significant financial resources to the war effort. Catholic institutions like Father Ryan High School held war bond drives, and the diocese was a regular sponsor of meals and social gatherings for soldiers through the USO.<sup>57</sup> Regardless of how they were involved in the war effort, Tennessee Catholics embodied the type of participatory patriotism that Roosevelt desired. By placing tri-faith religiosity at the heart of

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<sup>56</sup> "Reaping Fruits of Victory Farming," *The Register*, April 4, 1943, 1; "In Victory Manner," *The Register*, April 4, 1943, 1.

<sup>57</sup> "Two Hundred Catholic Trainees," *The Register*, August 8, 1943, 1; "Twenty Thousand Service Men Have Visited," *The Register*, July 12, 1943, 1.

100 percent Americanism, Roosevelt opened additional doors for Catholicism to enter the country's political and social mainstream, and Catholics responded enthusiastically, some with the James Simmons Timothy's rallying cry of 'For God and Country.'

As a result, American Catholics emerged from World War II standing shoulder to shoulder with mainline Protestants and Jews in a new patriotic trinity of American culture. In many ways, Rooseveltian ecumenism evolved in ways that exceeded the original intentions of either its designers or its participants. One result was increased Protestant anxiety. Msgr. Albert



Figure 29: For God and Country, *The Register*, July 4, 1943, 1.

Seiner warned the local Knights of Columbus of increasing pushback by groups like the FCC. He gave several reasons, all of which were telling of growing Catholic influence in society and government. First, the FCC claimed that the State Department was denying passports for Protestant missionaries headed to South America while giving preference to Catholics. The State Department denied the allegations. Second, the FCC repeated the old trope that the Catholic Church

was working toward world dominion, especially using diplomatic relations with the United States. Msgr. Seiner noted that no evidence was given. Third, the FCC resented the overrepresentation of Catholics in newsreels and motion pictures. In answer to such accusations,

Seiner told the KoC members to be “loyal citizens, exemplary citizens, Catholics, and men of good will toward all.” He ended with the admonition: “Bless them that curse you.”<sup>58</sup> In the wake of World War II, when the KoC was seeing its most successful year in a quarter century, Tennessee Catholics were secure enough to say of their opponents in the most southern way possible: ‘bless their hearts.’<sup>59</sup>

They were confident in other arenas as well. One was international relations. Speaking on the recently signed United Nations Charter, Archbishop Stritch advocated for US interventionism abroad:

We assumed a great responsibility when we went into the war. We have broken with our past tradition of isolationism and we have done so rightly. We are the most powerful nation in the world, but by that very fact we have much to give the world and an obligation to do so.<sup>60</sup>

This stance was a dramatic departure from the warnings against international involvement in prior decades, and, therefore, spoke of a new confidence among Catholics that they had access to the levers of political power. That power was not only expressed at the national level but also at the state and local level. In an article listing the Catholic leaders in many of Nashville’s civic organizations, including the Lions Club, Rotary Club, Civitan Club, Optimist Club, Elks Club, Nashville Bar Association, and Chamber of Commerce, *The Register* noted that “since Catholics are in the minority in the South it is evident that these men have proved their capability and their interest in the betterment of civilization.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> “Signs Point to Bigotry Wave in Making, Declares Monsignor,” *The Register*, March 11, 1945, 1-2.

<sup>59</sup> “Most Successful Year in Past 24 Had by K. of C.,” *The Register*, August 5, 1945, 1.

<sup>60</sup> “Drop Isolationsim, Archbishop Stritch Urges,” *The Register*, July 22, 1945, 1.

<sup>61</sup> “Catholic Businessmen Are Leaders in Many Civic Clubs,” *The Register*, August 5, 1945, 1.

## Into the Backwoods: The Trailer Missionaries

In the same period that tri-faith ecumenism gave Tennessee Catholics increasing confidence, the Paulist Fathers of Winchester launched a rural outreach program that harnessed new technologies and became a model for dioceses across the country. Drawing on the Catholic rural life movement that emerged in the 1920s, the Paulists brought the Catholic faith into small towns across the state in an accessible and disarming format that laid the groundwork for expanding the diocese's physical footprint.<sup>62</sup> As American Catholics emerged from the political wilderness, the Paulists hitched Catholicity to a Ford sedan and drove it into the backwoods.

The Paulist Fathers were fitting representatives of the Catholic Church to rural Tennessee. As the first community of Catholic priests established in the United States in 1858, the Paulists had a deep organizational understanding of what it meant to be both Catholic and American. They also possessed a unique communal legacy of having been founded by former Protestants. Their missionary work sought to bridge the gap between Americanism and Catholicism. Their parish missions both educated non-Catholics on the doctrines of the Church and helped the Church understand the perspectives of rural inhabitants. Importantly for their largely evangelical audiences, the Paulists also shared a focus on the Holy Spirit.<sup>63</sup> Unlike the image of a crucified Christ that smacked of superstition to evangelicals, discussions of the charismatic gifts of the Spirit of God provided a starting point of mutual understanding. Such starting points were crucial for the missionaries to effectively recruit souls in the hyper competitive American religious marketplace.<sup>64</sup> From a Protestant point of view, one that was

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<sup>62</sup> David S. Bovee, *The Church and the Land: The National Catholic Rural Life Conference and American Society, 1923-2007* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 78

<sup>63</sup> "Our History," Paulist Fathers, accessed March 9, 2026, <https://paulist.org/who-we-are/our-history/>.

<sup>64</sup> R. Lawrence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7.

predicated on an ignorance of Catholic tradition, the elaborate rituals and vestments of the Catholic Church appeared as a kind of heretical magic that precluded spiritual engagement by outsiders. The Paulists understood that the church had to make itself more relatable and accessible to produce converts who could become steeped in Catholic ritual afterward. After all, “people had to be converted to religion before they could practice it.”<sup>65</sup>

According to Jay Dolan, the most important result of Paulist activity in the eighteenth century was the advent of Catholic revivalism. Together with the Jesuits and Redemptorists, Paulists fostered an evangelistic revival movement typically attributed only to Protestants. Dolan argues, however, that Catholic revivalism was not a derivative of Protestant evangelism but rather a descendant of older European revival traditions that were particularly well suited for America’s religious climate. As such, “similarities could be so strong and so successful that Catholic revivals sparked Protestants to react and adapt in areas where Catholics were evangelizing.”<sup>66</sup> R. Scott Appleby agrees that Catholic revivals had European origins but argues there was also a high degree of “selective borrowing” between Catholic and Protestant revivalism.<sup>67</sup> Dolan and Appleby’s characterizations fit cleanly within Wilfred McClay’s reciprocating engine concept, meaning that Catholic and Protestant revivals mirrored each other not because one derived from the other but rather because “the movement of one part [was]

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<sup>65</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *Catholic Revivalism: The American Experience 1830-1900* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 185-186; Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 3, 182.

<sup>66</sup> Dolan, *Catholic Revivalism*, 190.

<sup>67</sup> R. Scott Appleby, “Missions and the Making of Americans: Religious Competition for Souls and Citizens,” in *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream*, ed. Jonathan D. Sarna (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 241.

registered in the other.”<sup>68</sup> Additionally, Dolan characterizes the Catholic revival movement as neither conservative nor liberal. The founders of the movement hailed from both ends of the religious spectrum. As a result, Catholic revivals were simultaneously Romanist in their traditions, rituals, and intimate connection to the Church hierarchy and “strikingly American” in their fiercely evangelical and individualistic characteristics.<sup>69</sup>

The Paulists brought this revival model to Tennessee in 1900. Settling into the unfinished castle of Arthur Handley Marks in Winchester, they quickly began outreach programs to the far-flung rural counties that surrounded Franklin County.<sup>70</sup> One of the earliest mission endeavors was focused on Shelbyville in Bedford County. Fr. Hugh Swift began working the town around 1912 before expanding his preaching to the even more rural settlements beyond. Arriving in Shelbyville by train, he typically borrowed a friend’s horse, known as ‘Old Grey,’ and set out like a circuit rider of old to spend a day or two in each small community. Sending letters a week in advance of his arrival, Fr. Swift was frequently treated by excited locals to feasts of cake, pie, and fried chicken. On one visit, a local boy who could not remember the word priest burst into his mother’s kitchen exclaiming, “Mother, Mother, yonder comes God riding on Old Grey.” When Hugh dismounted at the farmhouse gate, the boy rushed to his side and welcomed the Paulist: “Come in, come in quick, God, we got cake.”<sup>71</sup> The humorous anecdote foreshadowed the warm reception given to a new generation of Paulists who followed

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<sup>68</sup> Wilfred McClay, “The Catholic Moment in American Social Thought,” in *Catholics in the American Century: Recasting Narratives of U.S. History*, ed. Scott Appleby and Kathleen Sprows Cummings (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 137.

<sup>69</sup> Dolan, *Catholic Revivalism*, xvi, 186-187, 203.

<sup>70</sup> Farrar Hood Cusomato and Whit Stiles, *Diocese of Nashville: A Family of Faith* (Franklin, Tennessee: Grandin Hood Publishers, 2022), 174-175.

<sup>71</sup> “Motor Priests ‘Tread Where Saints Have Trod’ in Past,” *The Register*, August 18, 1940, last, 9.

Fr. Swift a quarter century later. Those Paulist Fathers, however, carried God into the backwoods on the back of entirely different ‘Old Grey.’

The story of the Paulist trailer missionaries began in 1937 when Very Rev. John B. Harny, superior general of the Paulist order, visited the remote Winchester enclave and was dissatisfied with the available options for reaching the 175,000 people who lived inside the 7,000 square mile parish. In the 13 counties entrusted to the Paulists, there were only 375 Catholics, but the Paulists were undeterred. Their order was just as concerned with teaching non-Catholics as they were with tending the existing flock. To reach them, Paulists like Fr. Michael Frassrand spent upwards of 25 weeks at a time on tour in rural court houses, school rooms, and other impromptu locations. Despite their valiant efforts, however, the Paulists’ results were lackluster.<sup>72</sup> Few people attended their meetings and even fewer converted. A new strategy was desperately needed.

The opportunity came after Rev. Harny’s visit. He returned to New York and approached a “generous friend” who offered to donate \$5,200 for the construction of a specially built mobile chapel. Harny designated Father James F. Cunningham and Rev. Thomas M. Halloran to use the funds to procure either a motor coach or a trailer. Cunningham was a Connecticut transplant who had served mostly in Los Angeles and New York before arriving in Winchester in 1936. Halloran, who hailed from McEwen, was a prime example of the type of native-born Tennessean that Bishops Byrne and Smith had worked hard to cultivate over the previous three decades. Together, the priests settled on a trailer because of the potential for one of the priests to detach the lead vehicle and minister to families in their homes while the other stayed with the trailer to

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<sup>72</sup> “Religion: Trailer Fathers,” *TIME* Magazine, November 15, 1937, <https://time.com/archive/6757612/religion-trailer-fathers/>; “Motor Chapel Now Serving Huge Parish,” *The Register*, October 3, 1937, last, 5.

oversee Mass and evening sermons. Cunningham, however, noted that information on how to construct the trailer was “very sketchy.”<sup>73</sup> Catholic street preaching had emerged in England as early as 1918 and similar work using portable pulpits was underway in Oklahoma and Minnesota, but there were no readily available designs on which to base a trailer of the type he imagined.<sup>74</sup> As a result, Cunningham took on the task of designing the layout and function of the trailer himself. He was assisted by trailer-engineer Goerge Chaplin and Maurice Lavanoux of *Liturgical Arts Magazine*.<sup>75</sup> Lavanoux and his magazine were known for promoting “liturgical correctness and good taste,” so his presence on the design team points to Cunningham’s concern for the trailer chapel’s legitimacy as an authentically Catholic space.<sup>76</sup> He wanted the trailer to be an extension of the Church that reflected Catholic prestige rather than just an evangelical gimmick.

Then came the decision on which type of trailer to utilize. Fr. Cunningham settled on the newly available Bender Travel Manion No. 23.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps Cunningham made his choice after encountering ads in the *Nashville Banner* from Tyler Sales Company on Second Avenue that called the travel mansion a “complete apartment on wheels.”<sup>78</sup> That would have certainly been a selling point to priests who faced the prospect of spending weeks at a time in the living quarters.

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<sup>73</sup> “Motor Chapel Now Serving Huge Parish,” *The Register*, October 3, 1937, last, 5.

<sup>74</sup> Douglas J. Slawson, “Thirty Years of Street Preaching: Vincentian Motor Missions, 1934-1965,” *Church History* 62, no.1 (March 1993), 63-64, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3168416>.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Robert F. McNamara, review of *Art, Architecture, and Liturgical Reform: The Liturgical Arts Society, 1928-1972*, by Susan J. White, *The Catholic Historical Review* 76, no. 4 (Oct. 1990), 896-898, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25023458>; “Lavanoux, Church-Art Expert, Is Dead,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1974, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1974/10/23/issue.html>.

<sup>77</sup> “Motor Chapel Now Serving Huge Parish,” *The Register*, October 3, 1937, last, 5.

<sup>78</sup> “Auto Trailers,” *Nashville Banner* August 3, 1947, 11.

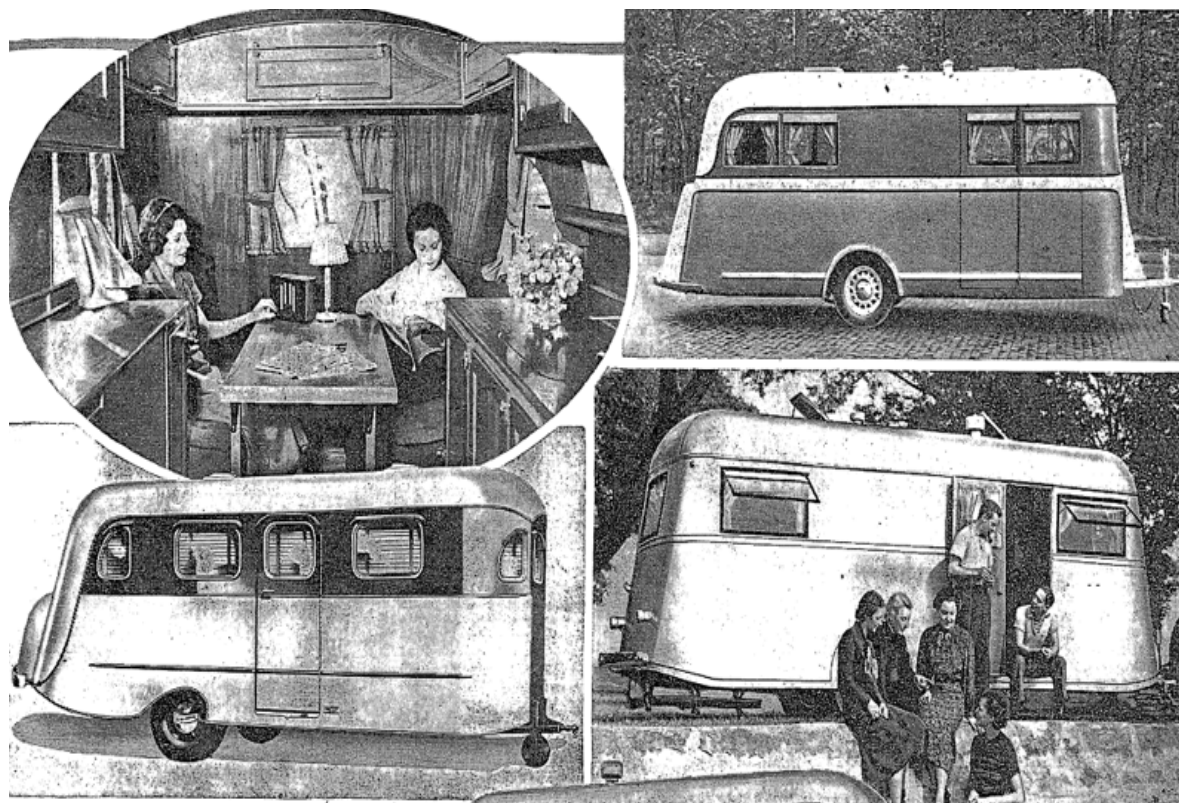


Figure 30: Bender Body Company Trailers for 1937, "Trailers Take Floor," *New York Times*, November 8, 1936, AA8, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/trailers-take-floor/docview/101721144/se-2>.

Then again, one of Cunningham's compatriots in New York may have made the recommendation after seeing articles in the *New York Times* that referenced trailers like the Travel Mansion as potentially useful for circuit riders and travelling preachers.<sup>79</sup> Regardless of how Cunningham discovered it, the 23-foot, all-steel trailer was soon undergoing extensive modifications to become a "Cathedral on Wheels."<sup>80</sup>

The vehicle that emerged was a revivalist wonder. The rear of the trailer was altered to open vertically, creating a speaking platform equipped with flood lights and giant RCA loudspeakers that could reach crowds of up to 20,000 people. Compatible with multiple forms

<sup>79</sup> "Trailers Take Floor," *New York Times*, November 8, 1936, AA8, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/trailers-take-floor/docview/101721144/se-2>.

<sup>80</sup> "Rolling Cathedral Traveling in State," *The Register*, September 26, 1937, last, 5.



Figure 31: Fr. Halloran and Cunningham inside the St. Lucy, "Touring Tennessee," *The Register*, October 3, 1937, 5.

of media, including radio, phonograph, microphone, and motion picture, the sound system could accept input from two of those sources at once, allowing the priests to provide real-time commentary on movies like *King of Kings*.

Inside the trailer, an altar,

vestment case, Stations of the Cross, library, and fold-out confessional created a fully immersive Catholic experience for both absentee Catholics and rural Protestants who would likely have never set foot in a Catholic church otherwise. Behind a set of sliding doors, the front of the trailer contained the priests' living quarters, which included a kitchenette, sink, stove, table, and a divan that opened to make a double bed. The interior was predominantly white, with blue accents on the upholstered benches, floors, and ceiling strips. The exterior was painted "Confederate grey" with a thin blue stripe. The choice of 'Confederate grey' fit with the longstanding Catholic tradition of disarming their fellow Tennesseans through emphasizing Catholics' regional loyalty and historical connection to the Confederacy. As a result, the Paulists would come to town like Fr. Swift a generation prior: riding on 'Old Grey.' The completed trailer was christened the St. Lucy in honor of the benefactor's wife, who had died giving birth to their

daughter. Blessed by Bishop Adrian on September 18, 1937, the trailer set out for its first Catholic revival in Cowan, Tennessee, on September 22.<sup>81</sup>

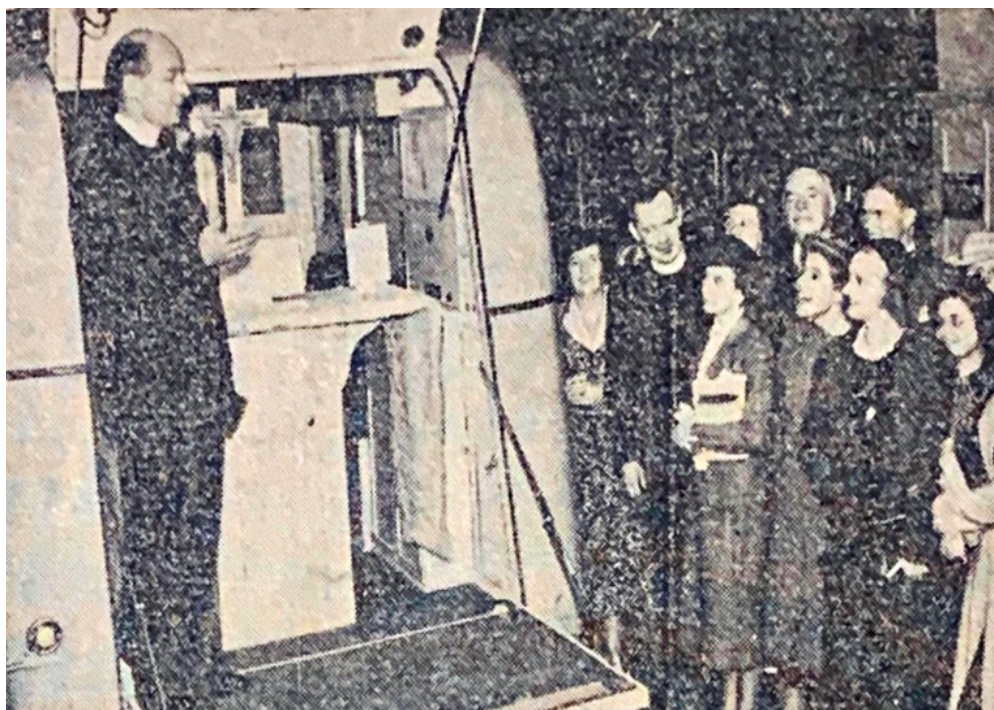


Figure 32: Fr. James Cunningham with the St. Lucy Trailer Chapel prior to departing New York, "Religion on Wheels," *The Register*, September 36, 1937, 6.

Dolan argues that Catholic revivalists of the nineteenth century reduced the drama of the revival experience to a science, following the same formula in location after location, usually for a week at a time.<sup>82</sup> Cunningham and Halloran epitomized that concept. Travelling to Cowan, Tullahoma, and Dechard on their inaugural outing, the priests held a Mass daily at 7am and a sermon open to the public each evening at 7pm. The evening services always began with 15 minutes of music played through the potent RCA speakers. *Ave Maria* and *Lead Kindly Light* could be heard for blocks, drawing in crowds of up to 300 people, the vast majority of whom were non-Catholics. After the musical program, the priests made announcements and answered

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<sup>81</sup> "Motor Chapel Now Serving Huge Parish," *The Register*, October 3, 1937, last, 5.

<sup>82</sup> Dolan, *Catholic Revivalism*, 78.

questions from an anonymous question box placed beside the trailer each afternoon.<sup>83</sup> Question boxes like these had also been used by travelling priests in Oklahoma as early as 1934, but those efforts achieved varying degrees of success due to the submission of lewd questions by attending nativists.<sup>84</sup>

Successful use of question boxes in the Diocese of Nashville, however, dated back to a mission program at old St. Mary's in downtown Nashville in 1898. Though some of the questions were noted for "bordering on the ridiculous," the attending priests answered all of them "in sound, logical, and convincing terms."<sup>85</sup> The track record of the trailer missionaries' question box was even better. In fact, *The Register* did not report on a single lewd question in the decade and a half that they were in use with the trailer missions. Instead, the boxes became a wildly popular attractant for curious non-Catholics. In community after community, the boxes offered non-Catholics the chance to ask questions without fear of judgement and provided the priests the opportunity to dispel common myths spread by nativists. One of the most common questions was "Why do Catholics call the priest Father?"<sup>86</sup> The combined effect of the boxes and patiently presented sermons was immediate. "This is the first Catholic preaching those folks ever heard," said one man in Cowan, "and it sure is a surprise to know that you all worship Jesus."<sup>87</sup> Afterward, the man clarified that the locals had been told by outsiders that Catholics did not worship Jesus at all. Such realizations put the first cracks in the wall of fear and

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid; "Religion: Trailer Fathers," *TIME* Magazine.

<sup>84</sup> Slawson, "Thirty Years of Street Preaching," 65.

<sup>85</sup> "The Cathedral Mission," *The Catholic Herald*, March 30, 1898, 6.

<sup>86</sup> "Trailer Chapel on Display at DCCW Congress," *The Register*, May 4, 1941, last, 5.

<sup>87</sup> "Motor Chapel Now Serving Huge Parish," *The Register*, October 3, 1937, last, 5.

ignorance that nativists had constructed between Catholics and small-town America. The effect was most satisfyingly evident for the priests in another of the most frequently asked questions: “How can I become a Catholic?”<sup>88</sup>

After the question box, a 12 minute ‘sound picture’ held the audience’s attention before the priests launched into a 20-minute sermon.<sup>89</sup> The deep vein of religiousness that the Paulists experienced in rural Tennessee was evident in Cunningham’s response to a question in *TIME* magazine regarding if crowds would listen for that long. “They can take it down there,” he said, “if you give a 15-minute sermon you’re a sissy.”<sup>90</sup> Following the sermon, the revival meetings concluded with a 40-minute segment of a movie, typically *The King of Kings*. Since the movie



Figure 33: Movie screening at trailer mission, "Trailer Mission at Penile Hill," *The Register*, August 24, 1952, 1.

<sup>88</sup> “Motor Missionary Tells of Converting Mountaineers,” *The Register*, November 19, 1939, last, 3.

<sup>89</sup> “Motor Chapel Now Serving Huge Parish,” *The Register*, October 3, 1937, last, 5.

<sup>90</sup> Religion: Trailer Fathers,” *TIME* Magazine.

was over two hours long, however, locals had to return each night if they wanted to view the entire film.<sup>91</sup> At times, the priests believed that the movies were the primary draw for rural populations, many of whom had rarely, if ever, seen a motion picture before, especially children. When they jokingly suggested such to a group of 20 non-Catholic children, however, one responded, “No sir, we come to hear them sermons.”<sup>92</sup>

Youth were in fact an important part of the missions. Cunningham and Halloran noted during the earliest missions that they were often the most ravenous questioners and “seem[ed] to drink in religion...as they might listen to a radio program or see a motion picture.”<sup>93</sup> Local children helped set up chairs prior to sermons, and high schoolers “showed marked interest” in the priests’ teachings.<sup>94</sup> Like their audiences, the trailer priests were younger than many of their religious peers. They represented the fruits of the youth programs established by Bishops Byrne and Smith and were hearty enough to endure the physical demands of spending long weeks on the road in the heat, cold, and dust. In time, the Paulists’ Winchester compound became its own proving ground, producing seven young priests trained in the specifics of trailer mission work by 1940.<sup>95</sup>

Early successes also led the Paulists to begin expanding their roster of trailer chapels, some of which would go on to serve in other states as well. The St. Rita joined the St. Lucy in

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<sup>91</sup> “Motor Chapel Now Serving Huge Parish,” *The Register*, October 3, 1937, last, 5.

<sup>92</sup> “Movies Draw Crowds to Trailer Missions,” *The Register*, August 21, 1938, last, 3; “Many Humorous Incidents Are Aids to Trailer Missions,” *The Register*, September 10, 1950, 1.

<sup>93</sup> “Non-Catholics Attend Trailer Chapel Rites,” *The Register*, October 24, 1937, last, 5.

<sup>94</sup> “Trailer Missions Draw Big Crowds in Shepperd,” *The Register*, July 13, 1952, 1.

<sup>95</sup> “Motor Priests Tread Where Saints Have Trod in Past,” *The Register*, August 18, 1940, last, 9; “Trailer Mission Work Brings 29 Into Church,” *The Register*, July 7, 1940, last.

1940, but *The Register* noted early that both Texas and South Carolina expressed interest in using the trailer in their own states' missions.<sup>96</sup> The Holy Family trailer was added as a permanent Tennessee partner to the St. Lucy in 1943.<sup>97</sup> The St. Paul and Queen of Peace were also deployed first in Tennessee and then sent on to other locations across the South.<sup>98</sup> By the late forties, the Paulist Fathers could count three station wagons, two Ford sedans, three trailers, and a school bus as part of their rural mission project, which by then demanded 1,000 gallons of gas a month to operate.<sup>99</sup> Regional demand for the unique chapels was driven by local and national media attention from the *Nashville Tennessean*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Paulist Press*.<sup>100</sup> The work of the Winchester Paulists eventually gained so much fame that Fr. Cunningham, the original trailer missionary, was elevated to Superior General of the Paulist order in New York.<sup>101</sup>

As Cunningham's growing cohort of trailer priests traversed the Tennessee countryside, they were on the cutting edge of a broader Catholic initiative. A growing number of leaders within the American hierarchy concluded by mid-century that "the great American mission fields" lay beyond the boundaries of the cities where Catholics had traditionally gathered. Those rural Catholics often lacked access to religious services to keep their faith alive. The result was

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<sup>96</sup> "Trailer Mission Work Brings 29 Into Church," *The Register*, July 7, 1940, last.

<sup>97</sup> "Trailer Chapel Begins Mission in Setting of Natural Beauty," *The Register*, June 27, 1943, 1,2.

<sup>98</sup> "Motor Chapels Will Start Tour June 5," *The Register*, May 28, 1950, 1; "Faith Comes to McMinnville," *The Register*, September 12, 1948, 1.

<sup>99</sup> "Story of Hundred Oaks, When the Faith Came South," *The Register*, September 12, 1948, 1,5.

<sup>100</sup> "Fr. Cunningham Recounts Incidents in Trailer Work," *The Register*, July 21, 1940, last, 9; "Story of Hundred Oaks, When the Faith Came South," *The Register*, September 12, 1948, 1,5.

<sup>101</sup> "New Paulist Superior Former Tennessee Pastor, Rev. J.F. Cunningham, Trailer Chapel Priest, Named Head of Order," *The Register*, June 30, 1946, 1.

‘leakage,’ or the loss of Catholics to indifference or conversion.<sup>102</sup> Given that nativist waves in

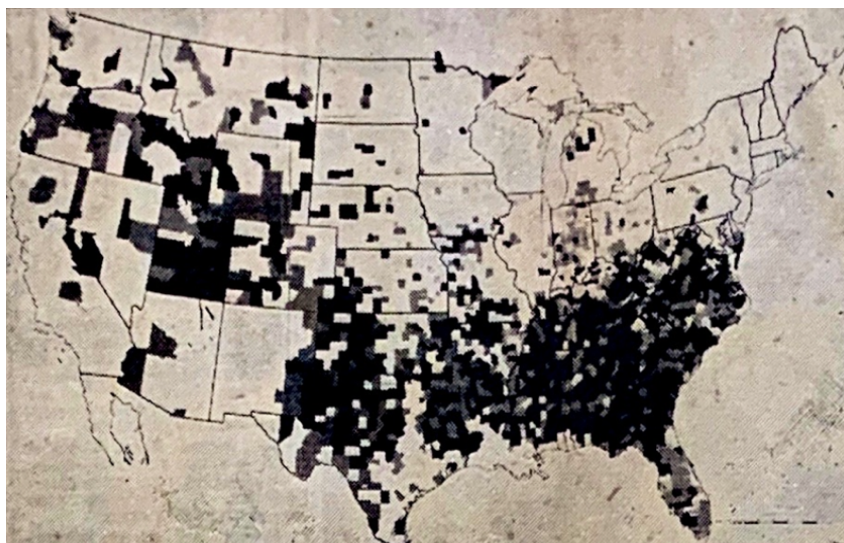


Figure 34: Map of U.S. counties in 1941 with no priests (black) or no rural priests (grey), "Mission Territory Galore," *The Register*, February 2, 1941, 4.

the early twentieth century affected rural areas more than cities, there was also a pressing need to inculcate rural residents against nativist propaganda.<sup>103</sup> As such, Tennessee was an important proving ground for techniques meant to

reach rural communities, and Cunningham’s elevation to the top of the Paulist Fathers ensured that the lessons learned in the Volunteer State would spread to the rest of the South.<sup>104</sup>

Those lessons ranged from the humorously practical to the profound. In the St. Lucy’s ninth season in the field, its attending priests wrote that they were still experimenting with the best remedy for the chigger bites that plagued them during the scorching summer months, but a consensus was forming around Kerosene or red nail polish as the winning candidates. A solution for dealing with the menagerie of “creeping, crawling, and flying insects” that found their way into the trailer, however, was less forthcoming.<sup>105</sup> The priests also become experts in traversing

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<sup>102</sup> Bovee, *The Church & The Land*, 6-7; “Church Is Making Rapid Progress In Old South,” *The Register*, November 9, 1941, 1,2.

<sup>103</sup> Slawson, “Thirty Years of Street Preaching,” 61.

<sup>104</sup> “Mission Territory Galore,” *The Register*, February 2, 1941, 4.

<sup>105</sup> “Trailer Work in Tennessee Is reported on by Paulist,” *The Register*, October 7, 1945, 3.

treacherous mountain roads and dealing with the inevitable mechanical issues that resulted.<sup>106</sup> The payoffs made the lessons learned more palatable. By 1948, the trailer missions were credited with producing 300 converts in their first 10 years of operation.<sup>107</sup> Their performance was especially impressive given that Catholic ‘motor missions’ in 28 other Southern and Western states were producing only one to two converts per year. One key difference between the trailer missions and motor missions was technology. The motor missions used cars or trucks with loudspeakers, but they lacked the ability to show motion pictures. Additionally, motor missions tended to stay in each Protestant town for a couple of hours, while the trailer missionaries stayed for a full week.<sup>108</sup> Finally, the trailers were able to introduce a taste of the mystery and pageantry of the Catholic Church, presenting rural non-Catholic audiences with an otherworldliness that was alien in its specifics but familiar in its sentiment, especially among Pentecostals.

Members of premillennialist, Holiness, and other Pentecostal denominations, deridingly called ‘holy rollers’ by mainstream Protestants, felt oddly at home observing supernatural mysteries of Catholic liturgy. Combined with the Paulist Father’s emphasis on the Holy Spirit, that supernaturalism produced a flavor of worship closer to that of Pentecostals than middle-class Baptists, Methodists, or Presbyterians. The absence of otherworldliness in the sermons of those denominations had triggered the exodus of congregants at the end of the nineteenth century that led to the rise of the wildly successful Pentecostal sects of the twentieth century, such as the Assembly of God, Church of God, International Pentecostal Holiness Church, Church of God in

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<sup>106</sup> “People of Sherwood Receive Trailer Missionaries Openly,” *The Register*, August 6, 1950, 1.

<sup>107</sup> “Story of Hundred Oaks, When the Faith Came South,” *The Register*, September 12, 1948, 1,5.

<sup>108</sup> Bovee, *The Church and the Land*, 78.

Christ, and others. Unlike the Baptists or Methodists, the Catholic trailer missions embodied the “productive tension” between otherworldly primitivism and earthly pragmatism at the core of Pentecostal theology. Like Southern Catholics, Pentecostals sought “timeless truths and universal values” while “holding their proverbial finger to the wind, calculating where they

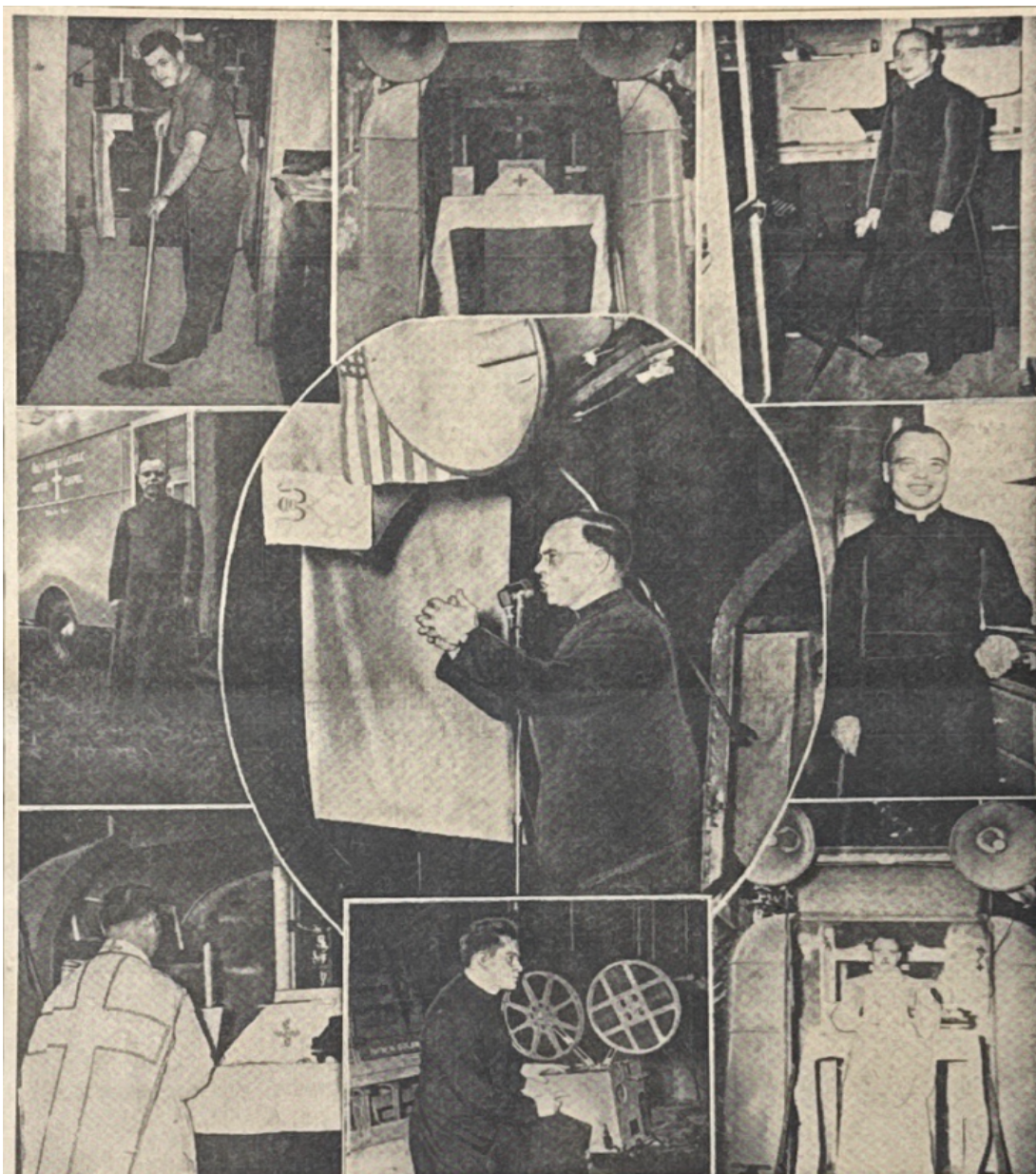


Figure 35: Fr. Charles O'Donnell and James Niedergesses, "Trailer Missionaries In Action," *The Register*, September 5, 1943, 1.

were, where they wanted to go, and, above all, how to get there.”<sup>109</sup> Both were also actively building institutional networks that included conferences, summer camps, books, magazines, colleges, and local associations.<sup>110</sup> The trailer missions proved to be a surprising and vital touchpoint between the two denominations.

Though Grant Wacker insists that “above all things mortal [Pentecostals] reared Roman Catholics,” the experiences of the trailer mission priests do not indicate such hostility.<sup>111</sup> In fact, Pentecostal ministers were among those most frequently listed as visitors to the missions. Though they and fellow evangelical ministers sometimes questioned the priests at length about Catholic doctrine, their demeanor was characterized by intrigue more than open hostility, typically culminating in friendly relations.<sup>112</sup> The priests reciprocated with patient and sometimes humorous responses to question box items that clearly came from members of Pentecostal congregations. At a Reelfoot Lake revival, the priests noted that a Holiness minister and members of his congregation were in attendance. A question submitted by one of those members asked: Do you believe in shouting? The amused priests, noting that Holiness congregants “are vociferous in their religious worship,” replied that God had given man a voice to be used to honor and praise him and, though God is not deaf and shouting is therefore not necessary, they did not see a good reason why one should not shout if it helped one in his religious worship.<sup>113</sup> Through humor, kindness, and exposure to otherworldly Catholic

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<sup>109</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 34.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>112</sup> “Trailer Missioners Work 3,3000 Sq. Mile Parish,” *The Register*, June 25, 1950, 1; “Objections Beginning to Lag, Trailer Missionaries Discover,” *The Register*, July 9, 1950, 1-2.

<sup>113</sup> “Trailer Chapel Beins Mission in Setting of Natural Beauty,” *The Register*, June 27, 1943, 1-2.

traditions, the Paulists reinforced linkages between Catholic and Pentecostals and, in the process, allowed Tennessee's Catholics to blunt the effectiveness of nativist groups that controlled the narrative about Catholicism in the rural areas of surrounding states.

It would be inaccurate to say, however, that moments of hostility were completely absent from the missions. Cunningham and Halloran noted that the earliest missions in 1937 met with not a "single instance of bigotry," but later revival locations proved less universally hospitable.<sup>114</sup> A handicapped, elderly man in Adamsville whom the fathers offered a ride responded that, though he "had nothing against Catholics," he thought "it would be better not to be seen riding with Catholic preachers" so that he did not make any enemies.<sup>115</sup> An 80-year-old grandmother in the same town gasped when she learned the man handing her a revival handbill was Catholic, but recovered saying, "even you can be saved."<sup>116</sup> In Pikeville, a local tossed a revival handbill on the ground "without bothering to read beyond the word Catholic."<sup>117</sup> Yet for every instance of hostility, there was frequently a counterbalancing act of civility. When the man in Pikeville tossed the handbill aside, *The Register* noted that a lady picked it up, read it avidly, and began excitedly showing it to her companions.<sup>118</sup> In Adamsville, young residents followed behind the priests to help securely tack their fliers to the telephone poles.<sup>119</sup> Most townsfolk simply expressed gratitude for having the opportunity to "hear the other side of the story" from

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<sup>114</sup> "Non-Catholics Attend Trailer Chapel Rites," *The Register*, October 24, 1937, last, 5.

<sup>115</sup> "You Too Can Be Saved, Paulists Told," *The Register*, July 13, 1952, 1.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> "Pikeville Citizens Turn Out to Hear Other Side," *The Register*, August 24, 1952, 1.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> "You Too Can Be Saved, Paulists Told," *The Register*, July 13, 1952, 1.

that which nativist groups had long spread.<sup>120</sup> “Before they had heard nothing good about [the Church],” *The Register* noted, but “now they listened to the truth.”<sup>121</sup> Some towns even started phoning in requests for the priests to visit. While the priests were stationed in Flowertown (likely a neighborhood in Tullahoma, Tennessee), they received word that the nearby residents of Liberty wanted them to hold a revival there as well. When the priests acquiesced, they were greeted with gifts like a large ‘Liberty watermelon.’<sup>122</sup> Even reporters from that *Saturday Evening Post* who were briefly imbedded with the trailer missionaries were “amazed at the courtesy and good will of the people” who treated the priests like “long lost brothers.”<sup>123</sup>

When the crowds attending trailer revivals started to dwindle in the mid-1940s, the priests attributed it to the loss of novelty and general indifference. By that point, the missions had run the same basic program for 7 years, often returning to the same communities to help reinforce and grow the infant Catholic populations planted in each. Though that technique had been unquestionably successful in towns like Alto, which started with three to four Catholics and grew to almost 100 congregants serviced by St. Margaret Mary Mission Catholic Church in just over a decade, residents who had already experienced a Catholic revival in years past turned up less to subsequent ones. But the missionaries were adaptable. In Alto and surrounding communities, they began recruiting mules, horses, tractors, trucks, cars, and even school busses to scour the countryside and pick up residents who lacked transportation to get to town.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> “Pikeville Citizens Turn Out to Hear Other Side,” *The Register*, August 24, 1952, 1.

<sup>121</sup> “People of Sherwood Receive Trailer Missionaries Openly,” *The Register*, August 8, 1950, 1.

<sup>122</sup> “Many Humorous Incidents Are Aids to Trailer Mission Work,” *The Register*, September 10, 1950, 1.

<sup>123</sup> “Fr. Cunningham Recounts Incidents in Trailer Work,” *The Register*, July 21, 1940, last, 9.

<sup>124</sup> “Trailer Work In Tennessee Is Reported On by Paulist,” *The Register*, October 7, 1945, 3; “Story of Hundred Oaks, When the Faith Came South,” *The Register*, September 12, 1948, 1, 5; “Priests Go Into Byways for Converts – With Bus,” *The Register*, July 9, 1950, 1.

The Paulists also adopted new modes of advertising. Instead of physically distributing flyers on the morning each revival started, priests began mailing colored handbills to all residents within a seven-mile radius of each revival weeks ahead of time. They also placed ads in local newspapers and distributed bulletins “geared to the local scene.”<sup>125</sup> One veteran trailer missionary even planned to drive a car equipped with a loud-speaking system to attract residents who would not or could not read the flyers.<sup>126</sup> The adaptations worked, and the trailer missions continued drawing crowds of non-Catholics numbering in the hundreds throughout the early 1950s.

Many of those non-Catholics, Pentecostal and otherwise, lived close to the land, travelling to the chapel trailers after long days of fieldwork. “Many of these rural people travel by muleback, in hay wagons, and on foot for several miles,” *The Register* noted in 1938.<sup>127</sup> The attendees at Prairie Plains in Coffee County in 1940 came to the trailer after “working for 12 to 16 hours hoeing corn, tending cotton, digging potatoes, harvesting clover and wheat, and doing chores.”<sup>128</sup> For residents in Alto in 1950, the mission arrived in the middle of plowing time, which meant locals were attending services immediately after leaving the fields each evening. The priests recorded being deeply moved by people’s willingness to come night after night despite their exhaustion. “They are undoubtedly a deeply religious people,” they wrote, who “reach out for truth as the dry soil does for rain.” In fact, the imagery of soil, seeds, and harvests

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<sup>125</sup> “Paradise Ridge Pamphlet Drive Prepares for Mission of Paulists,” *The Register*, July 23, 1950, 1; Mission Chapel is Greeted by Huge Crowds in Bethpage,” *The Register*, August 13, 1950, 1.

<sup>126</sup> “Paradise Ridge Pamphlet Drive Prepares for Mission of Paulists,” *The Register*, July 23, 1950, 1.

<sup>127</sup> “Movies Draw Crowds to Trailer Missions,” *The Register*, August 21, 1938, last, 3.

<sup>128</sup> “Fr. Cunningham Recounts Incidents in Trailer Work,” *The Register*, September 21, 1940, last, 9.

became common tropes through which the trailer missionaries described their work.<sup>129</sup>

Commenting on a 1950 revival in Savannah, the priests noted:

In this particular area the seed has just touched the soil. But the soil, though fertile, demands hard labor and an abundant rain of prayers and grace. Diligently the priests of the South are laboring on this fertile soil.<sup>130</sup>

“We are planting a good seed in good soil,” the priests insisted, “even if the harvest is slow in coming.”<sup>131</sup> By the end of World War II that harvest was fully matured and the institutional growth it fueled fundamentally altered the Diocese of Nashville and caught its rivals off guard.

### **The Great Buildout**

A trailer was one thing. A permanent church building was quite another. For the Diocese of Nashville, however, the two became inextricably linked in a remarkable period of expansion in which physical plants frequently followed the paths blazed by the trailer missionaries. In January 1962, *The Register* ran a headline celebrating the dedication of St. Alphonsus church in Crossville. The occasion was notable because it made Cumberland County the 25<sup>th</sup> county in which Bishop Adrian had opened a church since assuming the role of Bishop in 1936. In that year, only 28 of Tennessee’s 95 counties had a Catholic church or mission. As of December 1961, however, 53 counties had one or more churches present.<sup>132</sup> It was an exciting time for

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<sup>129</sup> “Church Faces Much Work in Rural Areas,” *The Register*, November 14, 1937, 1.

<sup>130</sup> “Objections Beginning to Lag, Trailer Missionaries Discover,” *The Register*, July 9, 1950, 1-2.

<sup>131</sup> “Trailer Work in Tennessee Is Reported by Paulist,” *The Register*, October 7, 1945, 3.

<sup>132</sup> Counties with a Catholic church as of December 1961 included (with number of churches): Anderson (2), Bedford, Benton, Blount, Bradley, Campbell (2), Carter, Coffee, Cumberland, Davidson (15), Dickson, Dyer, Franklin (2), Gibson, Giles, Greene, Hamblen, Hamilton (6) Hardeman, Hardin, Hawkins, Haywood, Henry, Humphreys, Knox (3), Lauderdale, Lawrence (3), Lincoln, Loudon, Madison (3), Marion, Marshall, Maury, Montgomery, Morgan, Obion, Polk, Putnam, Rhea, Roane, Robertson (2), Rutherford, Sevier, Shelby (23), Sullivan, Sumner, Tipton, Warren, Washington, Williamson, Wilson; “Bishop Sees Churches Built in 25 Counties,” *The Register*, January 12, 1962, 1.

both Bishop Adrian and the Diocese of Nashville. Only a year prior, Adrian had celebrated his ‘triple jubilee,’ marking his 78<sup>th</sup> birthday, 50<sup>th</sup> year as a priest, and 25<sup>th</sup> year as a bishop. In that time, he had greatly expanded the physical presence of Catholicity across the state and updated nearly every existing structure in the diocese.<sup>133</sup>

A close examination of that growth reveals the importance of the trailer missions in reaching communities outside Shelby, Davidson, Hamilton, and Knox counties. For the purposes of this analysis, churches built outside those major population centers are considered rural. Though some of the communities in which they were built had sizable populations of their own, they were not as large as Memphis, Nashville, Knoxville, or Chattanooga. Additionally, churches built outside of the four major counties tended to serve the entire county, not just sections of a particular city, meaning that a significant portion of their congregations were drawn from surrounding small towns that the trailer missions frequented.<sup>134</sup> From 1894 to 1923, Bishop Byrne dedicated a total of nine churches, but only four of those were outside the four counties.<sup>135</sup> In line with Bishop Smith’s focus on building a native Catholicity, he opened five

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<sup>133</sup> “Bishop Adrian to Mark Triple Jubilee,” *The Register*, February 17, 1961, 1; Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 353.

<sup>134</sup> Dates for church construction drawn from diocesan histories for three grand divisions: Farrar Hood Cusomato and Whit Stiles, *Diocese of Nashville: A Family of Faith* (Franklin, Tennessee: Grandin Hood Publishers, 2022); Diocese of Knoxville, *History of the Diocese of Knoxville* (Strasbourg Cedex, France: Editions du Signe, 2013); Diocese of Memphis, *That All May Be One: A History of The Catholic Diocese of Memphis* (Strasbourg Cedex, France: Editions du Signe, 2022).

<sup>135</sup> Churches constructed under Byrne: Cathedral of the Incarnation (Nashville), Holy Name (Nashville), St. Ann (Nashville), Sacred Heart (Memphis), St. Therese (Cleveland), Blessed Sacrament (Harriman), Our Lady of Perpetual Help (LaFollette), St. Anne (Lancing), Holy Ghost (Knoxville).



Figure 36: Bishop Adrian at St. Margaret Mary Church in Alto with inaugural congregation, "Church Dedicated, Entire Flock Confirmed," *The Register*, January 8, 1939, 6.

churches from 1924 to 1935, all but one of which was outside the four counties.<sup>136</sup> As a result, the two bishops preceding Adrian opened churches at an overall rate of 0.3 and 0.5 churches per year, respectively. Neither of them, however, matched the expansionist vigor of Adrian as he oversaw the maturing of a diocese flush with post-World War II resources, a growing Catholic population, and inroads into rural counties well laid by the trailer mission program.

A March 1961 *Register* article noted that Adrian came into the role of bishop with a flurry of activity. In his first year alone, he erected six churches and five schools, ordained five priests, convoked a synod, celebrated the diocese's centenary, and established *The Register* as the official diocesan newspaper. In the remainder of the period leading to U.S. entry into World War II, Adrian oversaw the construction of another eleven churches from 1937 to 1941. Only four of

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<sup>136</sup> Churches constructed under Smith: St. Rose of Lima (Murfreesboro), Blessed Sacrament (Memphis), Holy Cross (Paris), Our Lady of Lourdes (South Pittsburg), St. Mary (Johnson City).



Figure 37: St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church, Kenneth Mosier, July 2024.

those, or 36 percent, were rural, but the St. Lucy trailer chapel had only begun its travels in 1937, so it had not yet had time to realize its full impact. As early as 1938, however, St. Margaret Mary Church provided an early testament to the program’s potential. Built of locally sourced sandstone, the beautiful little church was nestled in the fields of Alto where the St. Lucy had once parked. *The Register* called the church “one of the first fruits” of the trailer chapel since it had turned the area’s first 15 converts in 1937 to a group of several hundred persons under instruction by 1939.<sup>137</sup> If the missions could produce such spectacular results in a town of less than 500 people, the future of rural church construction looked bright.

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<sup>137</sup> “Paulist Fathers’ New Chapel at Alto to Be Dedicated December,” *The Register*, December 4, 1938, last; “Church Dedicated, Entire Flock Confirmed,” *The Register*, January 1, 1939, 6.

World War II, however, dramatically dampened diocesan growth. Though religious giving expanded by 64 percent from 1941 to 1945, wartime rationing kept physical expansion projects at bay.<sup>138</sup> During the war, Adrian only opened a single church, St. Stephen, and it stood in the active homefront community of Old Hickory, home to DuPont munition plant. The result was a growing coffer of resources that would be unleashed at war's end in a flurry of new spending.<sup>139</sup> In the meantime, spending could focus on the relatively inexpensive trailer missions that were sowing the seeds for the post-war harvest.

The first four years after the war saw modest institutional growth with only five churches erected. In a testament to the trailer missions, however, 80 percent of them were in communities outside the four major counties. Then came the flood. In the period 1950 to 1953, Adrian oversaw the establishment of sixteen churches, ten of which were rural. From 1954 to 1957, the diocese added another ten churches, six of which were rural. The pace slowed in the period 1958 to 1961 but remained on par with the immediate postwar years. Five new churches opened, four of which were rural. The areas where the rural churches were established read like a greatest hits list of the places where the trailer missionaries had ventured from 1937 to 1953. In 1950, the Paulists told *The Register* that they hoped the base religiousness of rural Tennessee would eventually make the countryside a “storehouse for the Catholic faith.”<sup>140</sup> The Adrain churches, which numbered an astonishing 57 by the time he retired in 1969, represented the physical manifestation of that storehouse. On average, Adrain had erected 1.7 churches per

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<sup>138</sup> Alison Collis Greene, *No Depression in Heaven: The Great Depression, the New Deal, and the Transformation of Religion in the Delta* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 196.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> “Paulist Fathers’ Mobile Chapel Stops in Eastlands Community,” *The Register*,

year, and 63 percent of those lay outside the four major counties.

<b>Catholic Churches Opened Under Bishop Adrian</b>	
<b>Year Range</b>	<b>Church Name (City)</b>
1937-1941	Christ the King (Nashville), St. Margaret Mary (Alto), St. Vincent (Nashville), Immaculate Conception (Memphis), Our Lady of Sorrows (Frayser), St. Anne (Memphis), St. Augustine (Memphis), St. Dominic (Kingsport) Immaculate Conception (Union City), Holy Angles (Dyersburg), Our Lady of Perpetual Help (Chattanooga)
1942-1945	St. Stephen (Old Hickory)
1946-1949	Our Lady of Lourdes (Springfield), St. John Vianney (Gallatin), St. Paul (Memphis), St. Joseph (Norris), St. Elizabeth (Elizabethton)
1950-1953	St. Christopher (Dickson), Holy Rosary (Nashville), St. Edward (Nashville), St. Joseph (Madison), St. Francis Cabrini (Lebanon), St. Catherine (Columbia), St. Teresa (Memphis), Our Lady of Perpetual Help (Germantown), St. Ann (Memphis), St. William (Millington), St. Mary (Camden), St. John (Brownsville), St. Catherine (Copper Hill), St. Mary (Oak Ridge), Our Lady of Fatima (Alcoa), St. Mary (Gatlinburg)
1954-1957	St. Thomas Aquinas (Cookeville), St. Paul (Tullahoma), St. Henry (Nashville), St. John Evangelist (Lewisburg), St. James (Memphis), St. Louis (Memphis), Ave Maria (Ripley), St. Alphonsus (Lovington), Sacred Heart (Knoxville), Notre Dame (Greeneville)
1958-1961	St. Catherine (McMinville), St. Pius X (Nashville), St. Mary (Bolivar), St. Alphonsus (Crossville), St. Francis (Townsend)

Figure 38: Catholic Churches Built By Bishop Adrian

Success on such a scale, however, drew attention. The Southern Baptist Convention watched nervously from their administrative and publishing headquarters in Nashville. As the largest non-Catholic denomination in America, the SBC was well positioned as the natural rival of the Catholic Church in the second half of the twentieth century. In Tennessee, the rivalry was especially acute as the two denominations shared Nashville as their de facto capitals. In the 1950s and 1960s, both Wacker's productive tension and McClay's reciprocating engine were on full display as the Tennessee Catholics and Southern Baptists competed for influence and followers. In the process, the story of Nashville became a tale of two Vaticans.

## Chapter 6

### A Tale of Two Vaticans Baptist Power and Catholic Freedom in the Age of Pluralism

#### Timothy's Travelling Trouble

On July 29, 1965, Colonel James Simmons Timothy stepped from his landing craft onto the beach of Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. At his back were 3,700 members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, an elite fighting force formed in 1918 just one month after his namesake uncle died in the trenches of France.<sup>1</sup> Two months earlier, Col. Timothy and the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade had been in the middle of a counterinsurgency training exercise at Natchez Trace State Park in



*Figure 39: Col. James Simmons "Tim" Timothy, The First Brigade Diplomat and Warrior, July 1998.*

Wildersville, Tennessee, when he received orders to pull his men back to Fort Campbell,

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<sup>1</sup> "History," 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, accessed February 15, 2026, <https://www.101stairbornedivision.com/101st-airborne-history>; "U.S. Army Fort Campbell," U.S. Army, accessed February 15, 2026, <https://home.army.mil/campbell/units/history?ref=101st-airborne-division.ghost.io>.

Kentucky. Once there, he was told to prepare the brigade for deployment to Vietnam by the end of June.<sup>2</sup>

After weeks of frenzied activity to ready the Brigade for active duty, Timothy and his men set sail from Oakland, California, around July 9. Grateful to be back on dry land after a 20-day sea voyage, Col. Timothy walked into Vietnam with a laid-back, confident air while his men cheered and joked around him. Waiting on the beach to greet him were retiring U.S. Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor and General William C. Westmoreland. Taylor had led the 101st during World War II, and Westmoreland had done the same from 1959 to 1961.<sup>3</sup> After welcoming Col. Timothy, who now went by “Tim,” Taylor addressed his men: “If the time comes in battle when the Vietcong are pressing on you from all sides, remember what was said at Bastogne, when the division was surrounded by nine German divisions – They got us surrounded, the poor bastards.”<sup>4</sup> Whether visible or not, Tim must have smiled. He knew well the sensation of being surrounded by the Germans in France. He also knew the feeling of duping them all into surrendering.

Tim led the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade through the jungles of Vietnam from August 1965 to January 1967. In that brief time, he earned a reputation for moving from heated battle to heated battle. As a result, his men were dubbed ‘Timothy’s Traveling Trouble.’ After turning over command of 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade to Brigadier General Willard Pearson, Tim returned to Vietnam from 1968 to 1969 as Assistant Division Commander for the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry and, later, as Commanding General of the 2nd

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<sup>2</sup> “Movement to Vietnam,” *1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Diplomat and Warrior*, July 1998, 1, 3-4; “Airborne Brigade Arrives,” *New York Times*, July 30, 1965; “Military,” SWAIN Country, accessed March 6, 2026, <https://www.swaincountry.com/SwainCountry1.html>; John D. Howard, “Going to War in 1965 with the Army You Have,” HistoryNet, modified December 17, 2019, <https://historynet.com/going-to-war-in-1965-with-the-army-you-have/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> “Airborne Brigade Arrives,” *New York Times*, July 30, 1965, 3.

Corps Advisory Group. He then returned for a third and final tour as a Brigadier General from 1970 until he retired in 1972. Over his seven years of service in Vietnam, he earned an Army Distinguished Service Medal, a Distinguished Flying Cross, three Legion of Merit awards, and the Silver Star.<sup>5</sup>

Despite Tim's distinguished career, he and his fellow soldiers were part of a very different America than had existed in his father and uncle's time. In James and Pat's wars, Catholics had touted war participation as unequivocal proof of their Americanism and had been welcomed home as co-equal heroes beside their Protestant and Jewish brethren. For Tim's generation, however, there were no sun-soaked lawns filled with the strains of patriotic hymns like at his uncle's memorial. Nor were there grand parades or spontaneous celebrations like those that welcomed his Pat's generation home from Europe and the Pacific. The Vietnam War was a divisive conflict in a divisive decade. The social and political upheavals of the sixties frayed America's social fabric to the point of rupture, and soldiers were often caught in the crossfire of broad social realignments. Politics rather than heritage or religion provided the primary identifier against which their insiderhood was judged, and American politics was rapidly bifurcating into leftist and rightist camps that battled for the right to determine that insiderhood. The question of Protestant, Catholic, or Jew was becoming less important than Left, Right, or Center. This realignment occurred because prosperity and pluralism worked in tandem to remake denominations and redraw religious distinctions during the decade and a half after World War II.

In Tennessee, the drama unfolded most vividly between two long-standing rivals: the Diocese of Nashville and the Southern Baptist Convention. For the Diocese of Nashville, the

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<sup>5</sup> "James Simmons Timothy," Hall of Valor by Military Times, accessed March 6, 2026, <https://valor.militarytimes.com/recipient/recipient-6211/>.

post-World War II period offered unparalleled opportunities. It had spent the decade prior preparing for this moment. The Catholic youth programs and trailer missions of thirties were already bearing institutional fruit under Bishop Adrian's guidance, and the most robust period of expansion was just on the horizon. For Southern Baptists, however, the path forward was less clear-cut and fraught with institutional dangers. While the SBC benefitted from post-war prosperity as much as its rivals, the centralization necessary to fully reap those rewards threatened to fundamentally alter the identity of a denomination built on localism. In Nashville, economic changes resulting from rapid urbanization reshaped the social landscape, and the SBC was forced to wrestle with how to hold together a diverse coalition of middle-class urban congregations and alienated rural ones. "Southern Baptists have historically had their strength in the soil; that is, the rural areas, not the cities," the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board's newspaper, *Baptist and Reflector*, reminded readers in 1952.<sup>6</sup> "Southern Baptists must take immediate steps to conserve and strengthen the rural church or else see the undermining of the religious life from which much of their strength has heretofore come," the *Reflector* warned.<sup>7</sup> J. Pope Dyer, a Southern Baptist from Chattanooga, stated the issue bluntly: "We are not living in normal times."<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the SBC's growing national profile felt at odds with its self-imposed segregation from other Protestant sects participating in the rising tri-faith construct. While centrally directed institutional growth was affirming for Catholics, it presented an identity crisis for Southern Baptists.

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<sup>6</sup> "The Crucial Place of the Country Church," *Baptist and Reflector*, August 7, 1952, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid; "Meeting the Needs of Rural Pastors," *Baptist and Reflector*, August 7, 1952, 2; "Where the Rural Church Rises," *Baptist and Reflector*, August 7, 1952, 3.

<sup>8</sup> "Our Present Picture," *Baptist and Reflector*, August 7, 1952, 3.

## A History of Dissent

Baptists in the American South have always experienced tension over the issue of centralization. The intermittent need for coordinated action dated to the first uneasy alliance between Separate Baptists and Regular Baptists in eighteenth century Virginia.<sup>9</sup> In that era, the threat of ‘multiple establishment,’ which would have offered government support for some Protestant groups but not others, created the conditions for the first great step toward centralization and forced the two Baptist subgenres to join forces.<sup>10</sup> When the threat passed, the Regulars emerged victorious from an organizational standpoint, but the Separatist influence remained in a widespread affection among Southern Baptists for local freedom and church autonomy. The differences between Regulars and Separatists tended to split along urban and rural lines.<sup>11</sup> Rural parishioners preferred hyper-localism while urban leaders preferred greater levels of institutional organization. The denomination’s status as an outcast dissenter from the established mainline churches in both the North and South, however, made all Baptists fierce advocates for both the separation of church and state and religious freedom.<sup>12</sup>

Sectional differences on the issue of slavery provided the impetus for the second great step toward centralization. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Baptists had become the second largest Protestant denomination in America, trailing only the Methodists. In the agrarian South, the Baptists’ democratic impulses, which included the local election of pastors, made

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<sup>9</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 320-323.

<sup>10</sup> John Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 146.

<sup>11</sup> Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 320-323.

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 25.

them especially potent evangelizers and helped differentiate them from the better educated and ecclesiastically rigid Methodists and Presbyterians. The importance of missionary work among Southern Baptists, however, proved fatal to denominational integrity at the national level. Beginning in the 1840s, the Baptist agencies responsible for certifying mission service, which were predominantly located in the North, began refusing certification to slave owners. To protect the rights of slaveholding parishioners, Southern Baptist leaders met in Augusta, Georgia, in 1845 to form the Southern Baptist Convention. The birth of the SBC ironically introduced an unprecedented degree of centralization as coordination became a necessary component to safeguard their peculiar institutions.<sup>13</sup> Like with other issues, Southerners sacrificed a lot to protect slavery.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the Southern Baptist Convention ascend to the status of an unofficial establishment church. Overtaking the Methodists by the turn of the twentieth century, Southern Baptists became vocal defenders of Southern social institutions, such as Jim Crow segregation. Their distinctly Southern perspective within a society that was still relatively homogenous protected them from the controversies regarding modernism and the Social Gospel that plagued their denominational brethren in the North. Issues related to labor unrest, urbanization, and pluralism were less vexing in a region where industrialization and migration were just beginning to take hold. In fact, such controversies helped grow the SBC by encouraging dissenting parishioners from rival Baptist conferences in regions outside the South to join SBC.

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<sup>13</sup> Butler, Wacker, and Balmer, *Religion in American Life*, 180; Ellen M. Rosenberg, *The Southern Baptists: A Subculture in Transition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 13; Ahlstrom, *Religious History of the American People*, 720.

The most serious challenges to Southern Baptists, therefore, came from within rather than from without. The nineteenth century Landmark Movement, spearheaded by Tennessean James R. Graves, argued that any church which did not share certain ‘landmarks’ of faith, such as proper Baptism (i.e., performed by a Baptist), membership in a proper Christian church (i.e., a Baptist church), and belief in the apostolic succession of the Baptist faith, was unworthy of Christian communion.<sup>14</sup> While the conservative leadership of the SBC successfully defended against a Landmarkism schism, Graves and his philosophies left an enduring imprint on Southern Baptist thought. Many of his views became so widely accepted in some SBC circles that defiance of them could spell professional ruin. When William H. Whitsitt, professor of church history and president of the Southern Baptists Seminary, supported claims that Baptist theology originated in seventeenth century England rather than in the time of Christ, widespread anger among Landmarkers forced his resignation.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, a movement meant to oppose hierarchical standardization subsequently imposed denomination-wide compliance with its own perspectives. The ideological rigidity of Landmarkism also further ‘othered’ Southern Baptists from their denominational rivals and reinforced the conference’s hyper-vigilance on issues of separation of church and state.<sup>16</sup> In a way, the SBC was becoming a regional ‘insider’ by vigorously promoting itself as a national ‘outsider.’

By the 1920s, Southern Baptists sat atop a trinity of denominations, including Methodists and Presbyterians, that served as a regional Protestant quasi-establishment. Like other denominations, the SBC used lessons learned through wartime ecumenism to usher in an era of

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<sup>14</sup> Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 12, 33, 48; Butler, Wacker, and Balmer, *Religion in American Life*, 180; Ahlstrom, *Religious History of the American People*, 724-725.

<sup>15</sup> Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 41.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 33, 40-41.

unprecedented consolidation. From 1917 to 1931, the SBC founded its first Executive Committee, launched its first united fundraising effort, and adopted a Cooperative Program that funneled tithing revenues from local churches to a new commission headquartered in Nashville.<sup>17</sup>

As the nation's economic fortunes climbed during the 1920s, so did church finances. Though the elites of all three southern 'establishment' churches hailed from the upper and middle classes of major cities, the bulk of Southern Baptist worshipers remained rural, poor, and relatively disconnected.<sup>18</sup> The emerging urban economy of the New South, however, brought many of those rural congregants into Tennessee's major cities. A key challenge for SBC leadership was how to meet the religious and practical needs of those rural migrants without offending their middle-class congregants. Don H. Doyle compared that task to the Americanization campaigns that sought to assimilate foreign born immigrants in Northern cities a generation prior.<sup>19</sup> Because reform movements like the Social Gospel had effected little change among Southern Baptists, however, they were largely unprepared for the task. Southern Methodists and members of the Nashville Council of Jewish Women rapidly established social settlement houses to meet the needs of rural migrants, but the SBC was slow to deploy resources to minister their rural transplants. Instead, there was a general faith that devoted rural Baptists would drift into urban churches without assistance because of their aversion to other denominations.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Alison Collis Greene, *No Depression in Heaven: The Great Depression, the New Deal, and the Transformation of Religion in the Delta* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 5, 73; Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 44-45.

<sup>18</sup> Greene, *No Depression in Heaven*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Don H. Doyle. *Nashville Since the 1920s* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 30.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

The waves of newcomers, however, did not translate into overflowing pews. The middle-class congregants of urban churches prioritized educated pastors, elaborate music, and large, ornate buildings. For rural transplants, those qualities were as alien as any found behind the doors of a Catholic cathedral. As a result, new arrivals frequently drifted into the waiting arms of upstart sects who shared rural suspicion of “high toned,” middle-class sentimentalities. As a result, Pentecostal and Holiness churches, which featured the type of unadorned churches and fiery preachers that were familiar to rural Baptists, began to represent a legitimate threat to SBC power.<sup>21</sup>

When the first rumblings of economic trouble began emanating from Wall Street in 1929, some SBC leaders wondered if trying times might solve the issue for them by swelling their rosters with worshipers desperate for an otherworldly distraction from their economic woes. As historian Alison Collis Greene notes, however, “instead of driving people to the churches...the Great Depression drove the churches to the state.”<sup>22</sup> For the SBC, the Great Depression was the beginning of yet another era of change. Financially incapable of tending its flock in such trying times, the SBC and others yielded much of their moral authority over social services to Roosevelt’s New Deal government. The resulting cooperation with and competition against the federal government further transformed the SBC.

Though the Depression was somewhat delayed in Nashville until 1930, Southern Baptists reported in 1931 that the Convention’s total financial resources had fallen by 25 percent compared to 1928. Convention wide, churches were “putting off the Lord’s cause” in favor of

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>22</sup> Greene, *No Depression in Heaven*, 194.

settling with their creditors.<sup>23</sup> Even the staunchest opponents of social activism within the SBC yielded to the necessity of federal intervention. Roosevelt's use of religious language in discussing New Deal programs opened the door to justified participation for Baptists just as much as it had for Catholics and others.<sup>24</sup> As the scope of Roosevelt's administration took shape, however, the divided Protestant establishment grew ever more worried about the federal Leviathan growing in their midst.

Though Alison Greene notes that "no religious cohort in the South played a more active role in the New Deal's administration than members of the southern Protestant establishment," Southern Baptists were among the first to sound alarm at the growing scale and permanence of federal power.<sup>25</sup> As New Deal agencies increasingly encroached on areas of social service that were previously part of missionary work, Southern Baptists worried that the church-state relationship was blurring and, as a result, religious freedom was endangered. If it was indeed too late to expel the federal Leviathan, the SBC could at least serve as a watchdog for the New Deal and its increasingly Catholic-heavy coalition.<sup>26</sup>

By the end of the decade, the federal government had fully transitioned from collaborator to competitor. As a result, Southern, Northern, and National (Black) Baptists began working together to counter growing government interference. In an opening salvo, Southern Baptists joined with their Northern counterparts and twenty-three other mainline and evangelical denominations to defeat a 1939 Congressional measure that proposed taxing churches and

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<sup>23</sup> Greene, *No Depression in Heaven*, 80, 117.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 195.

<sup>25</sup> Greene, *No Depression in Heaven*, 168.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 168, 190.

ministers under the Social Security Act. Southern Baptists argued that payroll taxes were irrelevant to the unique employment position of ministers and, more importantly, a dangerous step toward making churches subservient to the federal authority.<sup>27</sup> That same year, the three Baptist conventions also released “The American Baptist Bill of Rights,” a first-of-its-kind joint statement focused on promoting the separation of church and state. In 1942, the three conferences formed the Joint Conference Committee on Public Relations to further guard church-state divisions.<sup>28</sup>

Even more worrisome than federal growth during the Depression, however, was the ecumenical project that accompanied it. When Roosevelt sent his Christmas letters in 1938, none arrived at the Protestant Vatican. Though Rooseveltian ecumenism ostensibly favored Protestantism, Southern Baptists had long preached that their denomination was a fourth faith that lay outside of Protestantism, which placed them on the periphery of Roosevelt’s political vision. As it became clear that Roosevelt intended American civic religion to rest on a tri-faith rather than a quad-faith alliance, Southern Baptists felt increasingly isolated.

The coming of World War II temporarily alleviated such worries by drawing most denominations into patriotic support of the Allied effort. For their part, Southern Baptists temporarily allied with the newly formed National Association of Evangelicals (NEA) to counterbalance the influence of the Federal Council of Churches (FCC). Despite their wartime support, Southern Baptists, the NEA, and other non-mainline Protestant alliances were still

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<sup>27</sup> “Want Church Free of Security Taxes,” *New York Times*, February 19, 1939, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Greene, *No Depression in Heaven*, 191.

considered overly small and, therefore, inconsequential by the White House.<sup>29</sup> As a result, Southern Baptists could only watch as their rivals secured places in the halls of political power.

The ascension of a Baptist to the White House in the person of Harry Truman, therefore, undoubtedly sparked hope among Southern Baptists of checking mainline Protestant influence. That hope, however, proved fleeting. Truman was a self-described ‘lightfoot Baptist’ who cared little for denominational concerns. He earnestly believed that the Baptist church offered “the shortest and most direct approach to God” but remained disconnected from the particulars of Baptist faith because they would prohibit him from “doing anything for a good time.”<sup>30</sup> Instead, Truman advanced a civic religion project similar to his predecessor that ultimately proved even more problematic for the SBC. Like Roosevelt, Truman often used inclusive language when speaking about American religion but made it even clearer than Roosevelt that by ‘religion’ he meant a vague sense of Protestant Christianity. This approach alienated Catholics and Jews while also failing to win the full support of any one Protestant sect. His support of universal military training (UMT) further divided support among religious leaders of all faiths, including 650 ministers, priests, and rabbis who labeled such policies as un-American in a 1947 petition.<sup>31</sup> If the Baptists had hoped for a political savior in Truman, they were sorely disappointed.

‘Tri-faith’ ecumenism, however, still depended on public support, and Southern Baptists had certainly elevated their denomination’s visibility as a kind of loyal opposition whose numbers were on the rise. In just the first four years following Japan’s surrender, Southern

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<sup>29</sup> Andrew R. Polk, *Faith in Freedom: Propaganda, Presidential Politics, and the Making of an American Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 42.

<sup>30</sup> “First Baptist Church of Grandview,” Harry S Truman Library and Museum, accessed April 29, 2025, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/education/student-resources/places/grandview/first-baptist-church-of-grandview>.

<sup>31</sup> Polk, *Faith in Freedom*, 76-77, 83.

Baptists erected 500 new churches, filled their pews with 300,000 new members, and engaged in a concerted program of institutional expansion. “The Southern Baptist Convention,” insists historian Nancy Ammerman, “was, for the first time, acting like a national body, placing itself squarely in the midst of the problems of the day.”<sup>32</sup> It was also beginning to view itself as a legitimate national competitor of both the numerically larger Catholics and politically entrenched mainline Protestants. In the process, it harnessed the religiousness of its de facto capital, Nashville, to make it a true ‘Protestant Vatican.’

The evangelical zeal of Nashville was evident when a month-long Billy Graham revival at Vanderbilt’s Dudley Field in 1954 drew 650,000. By 1958, 637 congregations spread across 56 denominations made Nashville home to more churches per capita than any other city of similar size. Colleges, publishing houses, and administrative headquarters established in the



Figure 40: Billy Graham at Vanderbilt's Dudley Field, 1954, "Major Events At Vanderbilt Stadium Over the Years," *The Tennessean*, July 11, 2015, <https://www.tennessean.com/picture-gallery/entertainment/music/2015/07/10/major-events-at-vanderbilt-stadium-over-the-years/29981115/>.

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<sup>32</sup> Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 57.

nineteenth century continued to expand for Methodists, Presbyterians, and Catholics, but Southern Baptists dominated the religious landscape. Despite its strong vein of localism, the Southern Baptist Convention centralized authority in Nashville to an extraordinary degree over the course of only a few decades. By mid-century, the SBC Executive Committee, SBC Executive Commission for Publishing and Education, Southern Baptist Foundation, Southern Baptist Education, Christian Life, and Historical Foundation, and Southern Baptist Sunday School Board all called Nashville home.<sup>33</sup> While the Catholic Vatican ruled from the Rome of Italy, the Protestant Vatican did so from the Athens of the South.

Growth, however, brought new challenges. Migration patterns shifted, and waves of socially and religiously diverse transplants from other regions made Nashville increasingly pluralistic. Such rapid diversification threatened the SBC's pseudo-establishment status as denominational membership ceased to be the primary marker of one's social status. At the same time, the SBC's growing national perspective drove it to increasingly standardize sermons, hymnals, and even church architecture across the country. By mid-century, a Southern Baptist family in Tennessee could read a Sunday school primer on Saturday night, leave for vacation in California the following morning, and attend services there on Sunday night without missing a beat. Though this standardization produced a nationally cohesive sense of 'family' for parishioners, it also shifted Southern Baptists toward a ritualized form of worship of the ilk that previous generations had criticized among both mainline Protestants and Catholics.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Doyle, *Nashville Since 1920*, 110-119, 143, 174-178.

<sup>34</sup> Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 56-60.

## Guardians on the Wall

As a result of those shifts, Southern Baptists entered 1950 surrounded by both threats and opportunities. Southern Baptists were in no way strangers to the role of ‘outsider’, but their numerical triumph in the first half of the twentieth century complicated that identity. R. Laurence Moore argues that “those who play the role of outsiders can wield enormous public influence that the alleged insiders are powerless to block,” but what does a group do when it is both and neither simultaneously?<sup>35</sup> As Baptists surveyed their spiritual empire from this grey space between insider and outsider, they observed “the seeming chaos of the cities and the apparent impotence of liberal denominations” and attempted to chart a path for “spiritual survival in a sometimes alien land.”<sup>36</sup>

As it had in previous generations, Baptist localism triggered instinctive resistance to formalized liturgy and bureaucratic consolidation. The more the SBC centralized to keep pace with its mainline and Catholic rivals, the more it appeared like a mirror image of them. To defend the boundaries of its influence, therefore, the Southern Baptists harnessed their widely distributed newspapers, including Tennessee’s *Baptist and Reflector*, to both advocate its rightful position at the center of American society and highlight the faults of its rivals. Tri-faith comity, however, precluded the type of bigoted language used in anti-Catholic publications at the turn of the century. Instead, Southern Baptists shifted focus to the separation of church and state.

January 1950 offered Southern Baptists an opportunity to deploy this new approach. On January 18, Myron C. Taylor, personal representative of the president to Pope Pius XII since the

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<sup>35</sup> R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), xiii-xiv.

<sup>36</sup> Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 63.

Roosevelt, offered his resignation to Truman.<sup>37</sup> Despite significant pushback from both liberal and conservative Protestants, Taylor's position had persisted because his presence in the Vatican had become a crucial component in the new ideological battles of the Cold War. Regardless, Southern Baptists were among the loudest and most persistent voices decrying Taylor's role as a violation of church-state separation.<sup>38</sup> The battle over replacing him, however, stirred even greater controversy than his appointment and steered the evolution of anti-Catholic language in religious newspapers for years.<sup>39</sup>

Historian Justin Nordstrom argues that anti-Catholicism in America progresses through a cycle of defeat and rebirth tied to shifting concepts of American nationalism. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, anti-Catholic writers frequently deployed nativist language to cast doubt on the ability of average Catholics to conform to '100 percent Americanism.' Thanks to Catholic efforts in World War I, those attacks unraveled by the end of the twenties.<sup>40</sup> By the 1950s, the tri-faith campaign and Catholic valor in World War II brought Catholics into the mainstream and made the use of nativist language riskier.

As a result, Kyle Haden argues that mid-century secular newspapers largely avoided "blatant anti-Catholic jargon" and chose to focus on issues of the separation of church and state

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<sup>37</sup> United States Department of State, "Myron C. Taylor Resigns as Personal Representative to Pope Pius XII," *The Department of State Bulletin*, XXII, No. 552, January 30, 1950, 177-179, accessed February 16, 2025, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.319510012284370&seq=146>.

<sup>38</sup> Polk, *Faith in Freedom*, 21; Andrea Di Stefano, "Reframing Southern Baptist Responses to U.S. Diplomatic Relations with the Holy See, 1925-1984," *Baptist History and Heritage*, 57, no. 1 (Spring 2022), 68, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/A717495770/AONE?u=tel\\_middleten&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=d640d7b8](http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A717495770/AONE?u=tel_middleten&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=d640d7b8).

<sup>39</sup> Rick Nutt, "United States Diplomatic Representation at the Vatican: The Presbyterian Reaction," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 95, no.2 (Fall/Winter 2017), 68.

<sup>40</sup> Justin Nordstrom, *Danger on the Doorstep: Anti-Catholicism and American Print Culture in the Progressive Era* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 2, 17, 210.

instead.<sup>41</sup> Mainline Protestant newspapers also avoided overtly anti-Catholic language. Although Haden views the Baptist denomination as part of that trend, he commits two major oversights. First, he equates Northern and Southern Baptists during a period when Southern Baptists still viewed themselves as distinct from their Northern and National Convention counterparts. Second, Haden relies on articles from mainstream national newspapers like the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Washington Post*.<sup>42</sup> His dependence on national media limits the Southern Baptist perspectives preserved in the *Baptist and Reflector* and, consequently, omits the church's uniquely assertive position on the wall of separation.

Southern Baptist arguments against replacing Taylor in 1950 centered on their political potency vis-à-vis Catholics. A March 1950 *Baptist and Reflector* article featured a letter from the Baptist Joint Conference Committee to President Truman, reminding him that the votes of 14,000,000 Baptists were at stake should he violate his 1946 promise to terminate U.S.-Vatican relations. In an unusual move, the letter also invoked the voting power of Protestants generally, Baptists included, claiming that they constituted 70% of the electorate.<sup>43</sup> This statement contradicted broader Southern Baptist assertions that their denomination represented a fourth American religion, distinct from traditional Protestantism. In a separate article in the same edition, Baptist minister M.E. Dodd insisted there were four major American faith groups: "(1) Jews, (2) Baptists, (3) Roman Catholics, (4) Protestants."<sup>44</sup> For the committee, however, a

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<sup>41</sup> Kyle Haden, "The Myron Taylor Appointment, Protestant Churches, and the United States Press," *American Catholic Studies* 120, no.4 (Winter 2009), 74.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 58-62.

<sup>43</sup> "Taylor's Resignation," *Baptist and Reflector*, March 9, 1950, 3.

<sup>44</sup> M.E. Dodd, "The Baptist Message, Mission and Method," *Baptist and Reflector*, March 9, 1950, 5.

momentary equivalence between Baptists and Protestants was likely expedient to generate political results.

As 1950 progressed, articles in the *Baptist and Reflector* tentatively repackaged old anti-Catholic tropes for a new Cold War generation. In an October article, the paper noted that the Baptist Ministers' Conference of Knoxville had characterized the Roman Catholic Church as an alien institution that threatened the traditions of the 'real' Americans.<sup>45</sup> Catholics, the conference insisted, were distinct from the "English, Scotch, Scotch-Irish, Dutch, French, and other illustrious emigrants of like character" who had built "true Christianity" into the foundations of American government.<sup>46</sup> It also labeled the Roman Catholic Church as a "dictatorial and intolerant" institution that was "equally as totalitarian" as the Soviet Union.<sup>47</sup> Together, these accusations painted the Catholic Church as an ethnic and political antagonist to the virtuous institutions of the Western block. The article's lack of condemnation for individual Catholics, however, was conspicuous. The echoes of early twentieth century hyphenism were unmistakable, but the vitriol was not quite as severe or personal. Unlike earlier decades, accusations were carefully levied against the Roman institution, not its American followers.

In a period characterized by McCarthyism and a second red scare, rhetoric about a subversive, totalitarian, communist-aligned institution should have been red meat for media sensationalism and an open door for Southern Baptists to reassert their cultural leadership and steer national policy away from relationships with the Vatican. An analysis of Nashville's mainstream newspapers, however, reveals the *Reflector's* messaging fell flat in the Protestant

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<sup>45</sup> "No Vatican Representative," *Baptist and Reflector*, October 26, 1950, 6.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

Vatican. The consistently conservative, Republican-leaning *Nashville Banner* did not share Southern Baptists' concerns about Taylor's office.<sup>48</sup> Instead, the *Banner's* references to Taylor were blandly routine.<sup>49</sup> The paper's lack of alarmism was particularly noteworthy given its outspoken, Protestant editor, Alvand "Dunk" Dunkleberger, who was known for allowing "verbal blows to fall where they may."<sup>50</sup> The only hint of tension toward U.S.-Vatican relations in the *Banner* appeared in an article where Dunkleberger detailed accusations of abuse against Church of Christ evangelists in Rome. As a devoted member of the Madison Church of Christ, Dunk likely felt kinship with the missionaries. He nonetheless refrained from directly implicating American Catholics as culpable.<sup>51</sup> The remainder of the *Banner's* coverage of Taylor was reserved for self-described "conservative liberal" David Lawrence of *U.S. News and World Report*. A staunch anti-Communist, Lawrence presented U.S.-Vatican relations as an essential element of a common-sense Cold War strategy. In direct contradiction to the *Reflector*, Lawrence pointed to the Catholic Church as one of the America's most potent and reliable allies in the fight to contain communism, a perspective that *The Register* incessantly promoted as well.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> David E. Sumner, "Nashville Banner," *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, online edition, accessed February 17, 2025, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/nashville-banner/>.

<sup>49</sup> "U.S. Diplomatic Office at the Vatican Closed," *Nashville Banner*, January 20, 1950, p.6; "Marshall," *Nashville Banner*, September 30, 1950, p.2.

<sup>50</sup> "Services Monday for Dunkleberger," *The Tennessean*, September 27, 1980, p.17.

<sup>51</sup> Alvand C. Dunkleberger, "Church of Christ Evangelists Continue Work Near Rome," *Nashville Banner*, January 28, 1950, p.1.

<sup>52</sup> Alex Kingsbury, "David Lawrence: A Profile," *US News and World Report*, accessed February 17, 2025, <https://www.usnews.com/news/national/articles/2008/05/16/david-lawrence-a-profile>; David Lawrence, "Recognition Problems Confront President," *Nashville Banner*, February 1, 1950, p.6; David Lawrence, "An Indorsement of Mission to Vatican," *Nashville Banner*, June 9, 1950, p.6; David Lawrence, "Truman Sits Tight on Vatican Issue," *Nashville Banner*, June 27, 1950, p.4.

The Democratic-leaning *Nashville Tennessean* was equally restrained. Despite its reputation for producing liberal journalism “as distinctly flavored as Tennessee sour mash bourbon,” the paper barely mentioned Taylor.<sup>53</sup> Two January articles referenced Taylor’s resignation but did not offer significant comment.<sup>54</sup> A third article featured a positive view of Taylor from Eleanor Roosevelt’s perspective. Roosevelt recalled that Taylor’s appointment had caused “a certain amount of difficulty among some of our Protestant groups” but countered that “on the whole” he was “well known and respected” because most citizens “recognized the Pope’s influence as a peacemaker.”<sup>55</sup> Southern Baptists reading Roosevelt’s words would have immediately felt their inclusion in her indictment of “some” Protestant groups. Just over a month later, the *Reflector* responded with the story of an encounter between Baptist pastor M.E. Dodd and Mrs. Roosevelt in April 1945. When Roosevelt expressed surprise that Southern Baptists did not count themselves as part of the Federation Council of Churches, Dodd defiantly informed her that his denomination possessed a “different, definite and distinct message, mission and method.”<sup>56</sup>

By 1951, the *Baptist and Reflector*’s inability to stir anti-Catholicism in its fellow Nashville-based papers highlighted the need for a change in strategy. Though the threat of a Taylor replacement still loomed, the repackaging of anti-Catholic tropes had proven ineffective

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<sup>53</sup> “The Press: Exit Evans, Enter Evans,” *TIME Magazine*, July 18, 1955, accessed February 17, 2025, <https://time.com/archive/6804096/the-press-exit-evans-enter-evans/>; David E. Sumner, “Nashville Tennessean,” *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, online edition, accessed February 17, 2025, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/nashville-tennessean/>.

<sup>54</sup> “Taylor Resigns as Vatican Envoy,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, January 19, 1950, p.6; “Free To Do As Pleases, Truman Says of Byrnes,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, January 20, 1950, p.16.

<sup>55</sup> “This I Remember by Eleanor Roosevelt,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, January 24, 1950, p.4.

<sup>56</sup> M.E. Dodd, “The Baptist Message, Mission and Method,” *Baptist and Reflector*, March 9, 1950, 5.

in swaying the public. Tri-faith ecumenism was already providing a potent shield for Catholics nationally. They were no longer the easy targets that their predecessors had been, and blatant anti-Catholic rhetoric increasingly drew the label of “bigot,” which Southern Baptists deeply resented.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, Tennessee Catholics had supported pro-assimilation ‘Americanists’ dating back to Bishop Byrne, which made ‘Romanist’ attacks against them even less effective. Economic success, wartime participation, institutional expansion, and the enthusiastic promotion of the diocese’s particular brand of regional patriotism had done their job. Tennessee’s Catholics were firmly entrenched in the Protestant Vatican, and the Southern Baptist Convention had to reframe its language as a result. The question was how to promote SBC interests while avoiding the dreaded label of bigot?

The first approach from the *Baptist and Reflector* was to draw clearer lines between Southern Baptists and other Protestants. Answering the question as to whether Baptists were indeed Protestant, Owen insisted that it depended on what meaning of Protestant the questioner applied. If Protestant was defined by the first meaning found Webster’s New International dictionary, which was “to make a solemn declaration or affirmation of; to declare; assert; affirm; asseverate; aver,” then Southern Baptists were Protestants. If taken by the second meaning of “to make a protest against,” however, Owen argued Baptists did not belong under the Protestant umbrella.<sup>58</sup> He reasoned that since Baptists fit the pattern of the first churches chronicled in the New Testament, they had not broken away from the Catholic Church and, therefore, had not been significantly affected by the Reformation; as a result, they were distinct from and older than all other denominations. He was careful, however, to avoid stepping fully into the old

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<sup>57</sup> “Who Is A Bigot?” *Baptist and Reflector*, January 26, 1950, 3.

<sup>58</sup> “From the Editor’s Desk: Baptists....Protestants,” *Baptist and Reflector*, April 25, 1951, 2.

Landmarkist position, asserting that Southern Baptists no longer claimed an “outward, historically traceable [apostolic] succession.”<sup>59</sup>

The second step in recalibrating the *Reflector*'s approach was focusing opposition to Roman Catholic influence in purely political terms.<sup>60</sup> An initial concern was the balance of power in Congress. After all, if the Truman Administration would not defend the wall of church-state separation, Baptist lawmakers would have to do so from Capitol Hill. A June 1951 article highlighted the shortfall of Baptists (56 members) in the House of Representatives compared to Methodists (84 members) and Catholics (72 members).<sup>61</sup> In the U.S. Senate, Methodists (19), Presbyterians (11), and Episcopalians (11) led, while Baptists and Catholics were tied for third with 9 senators each.<sup>62</sup> While Presbyterians and Episcopalians were acknowledged, Methodists and Catholics were the paper's primary targets. Not only were they numerous, but they also represented the greatest social threats to Southern Baptist power.

The political issue that would come to define Southern Baptist opposition to both Catholic and Methodist influence, however, was school funding and release time. Southern Baptists viewed both concepts as dangerous to church-state separation. After all, federal funding could lead to integration. The *Reflector* reported negatively on cases where Methodist and Catholic institutions accepted federal funds, insisting that “the use of tax money to support sectarian institutions is a violation of the rights of conscience of American citizens who do not

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> “Strategy of Catholics,” *Baptist and Reflector*, May 11, 1950, 7; “Should the American Seminary Be Maintained,” *Baptist and Reflector*, August 17, 1950, 6; Louie D. Newton, “Influence,” *Baptist and Reflector*, August 17, 1950, 6; “Ecclesiastical Dictatorship Destroys Freedom,” *Baptist and Reflector*, September 7, 1950, 8.

<sup>61</sup> “Baptists Third in House Members,” *Baptist and Reflector*, June 14, 1951, 8.

<sup>62</sup> “The Church Membership of United States Senators,” *Baptist and Reflector*, March 22, 1951, 9.

hold to these particular faiths.”<sup>63</sup> Summoning the precepts of masculine Christianity from the turn of the century, the *Reflector* called on Baptists to “stand up like men” and resist the duplication of “ills which have plagued and cursed the lands where Church and State are joined together.”<sup>64</sup>

As it crafted attacks against its rivals, the SBC was also redefining “100 percent Americanism” to rest almost exclusively on one’s willingness to defend church-state separation. All those who pursued the union of church and state were framed as ideological aliens unworthy of inclusion in Americanness. Though it did not fully exonerate other Protestant denominations, the *Reflector* targeted the Catholic hierarchy as the only entity to launch an “organized effort” to fully “eradicate” the Bill of Rights.<sup>65</sup> “Of 257 different church groups within the United States, only one, the Roman Catholic hierarchy, has sought to invalidate the fundamental American principle of a free church in a free state,” the *Reflector* insisted.<sup>66</sup>

In October 1951, Truman poured fuel on SBC’s fire by nominating General Mark Clark as the official United States Ambassador to the Vatican.<sup>67</sup> Though Clark was a Protestant and decorated veteran, his nomination stirred fury among Southern Baptists. “We do not disapprove of the person of General Mark Clark,” the *Reflector* insisted, “but we do absolutely condemn the creation of such a post of ambassador to the Vatican and therefore are opposed to anyone named

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<sup>63</sup> “Opening the Public Treasury to Religious Institutions,” *Baptist and Reflector*, August 23, 1951, 2; “Tax Money to Go For Church Hospitals,” *Baptist and Reflector*, July 31, 1952, 3.

<sup>64</sup> David M. Gardner, “Present Problems in Church-State Relationship,” *Baptist and Reflector*, August 30, 1951, 4-5; “Opening the Public Treasury to Religious Institutions,” *Baptist and Reflector*, August 23, 1951, 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Gardner, “Present Problems in Church-State Relationship,” *Baptist and Reflector*, August 30, 1951, 4-5.

<sup>67</sup> Conway, “Myron C. Taylor’s Mission to the Vatican, 1940-1950,” 99.

to such a position.”<sup>68</sup> The situation was aggravated further by Truman’s decision to announce his nomination on the final day of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Congress, which the *Reflector* called “a sorry political concession to the greatest political pressure group this country has ever known – the Roman Catholic hierarchy.”<sup>69</sup> In the paper’s estimation, the president had “acted as the politician not as a statesman” and “seemed concerned to have the votes of the big city machines, where Catholic power has been apparent.”<sup>70</sup>

Careful to not step too far afoul of tri-faith sentiment, however, the *Reflector* adapted its language to reflect the possibility of common cause with non-Baptists. Truman’s decision to appoint Clark was framed as “a major blow to the cause of victory and peace” that could “be disruptive of national unity and dissipate good will between Protestants and Catholics.”<sup>71</sup> The paper’s language suggested interfaith relationships were acceptable if the Vatican and its Roman hierarchy remained at arm’s length. When articles later that month spoke of Communism and Catholicism being equally totalitarian, the accusation was exclusively against the hierarchy in Rome.

The echoes of turn-of-the-century anti-Catholicism, however, were not yet fully exorcised. A December article played on old fears of a Catholic takeover of America. Rev. A. Mauricio, President of the Baptists Convention of Portugal, wrote that “upon the first news of the decision of Mr. Truman, the Catholic here exclaimed, ‘Truman kisses the hand of the Pope!

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<sup>68</sup> “Rome’s Only Answer,” *Baptist and Reflector*, November 1, 1951, 2.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid; “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, Europe: Political and Economic Developments, Volume IV, Part 1, No. 462,” U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, accessed May 3, 2025, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v04p1/d462>.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> C.W. Pope, “President Truman Appoints Ambassador to Rome,” *Baptist and Reflector*, November 1, 1951, 3; “Baptist Leaders React to Vatican Appointment,” *Baptist and Reflector*, November 8, 1951, 3.

America kneels to the Vatican! Soon America will be Catholic!” The imagery of kissing the Pope’s hand undoubtedly grated against the masculine Christianity of many Southern Baptist readers. Additionally, the promise that America would soon be Catholic harkened to conspiracy theories about Papal conquest via New York’s Holland Tunnel in the 1920s.<sup>72</sup>

Then came Paul Blanshard. In 1949, Blanshard published what would become a national best-seller, *American Freedom and Catholic Power*. Though he immediately drew criticism from across the academic spectrum for “arguing for effect rather than for the balanced truth,” Blanshard nonetheless set the tone for public debate on American Catholicism in the early 1950s.<sup>73</sup> Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (POAU), the organization he helped found, sent him on a national speaking tour that brought him to Nashville’s War Memorial Auditorium in February 1952.<sup>74</sup>

In the weeks leading to the speech, Baptists and other Protestant denominations bought advertisements for Blanshard’s speech and books in the city’s mainstream newspapers. Five ads appeared in the *Nashville Banner*, two of which were explicitly sponsored by the Baptist Book Store at 125 Ninth Avenue.<sup>75</sup> Another pair of ads in the *Tennessean* were sponsored by the

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas J. Shelley, “‘What the Hell Is an Encyclical?’: Governor Alfred E. Smith, Charles C. Marshall, Esq., and Father Francis P. Duffy,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 87, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/25154585>.

<sup>73</sup> Will Herberg, “American Freedom and Catholic Power by Paul Blanshard,” *Commentary*, August 1949, accessed May 3, 2025, <https://www.commentary.org/articles/will-herberg/american-freedom-and-catholic-power-by-paul-blanshard/>; Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*, 95.

<sup>74</sup> “Rally Permitted At Auditorium,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, January 18, 1952, p. 21.

<sup>75</sup> “Hear Paul Blanshard,” *Nashville Banner*, January 22, 1952, 2; “Hear Paul Blanshard,” *Nashville Banner*, January 25, 1952, 23; “Hear Paul Blanshard,” *Nashville Banner*, January 26, 1952, 14; “Hear Paul Blanshard,” *Nashville Banner*, January 30, 1952, 2; “America’s Two Most Talked About Books,” *Nashville Banner*, January 31, 1952, 2.

Methodist Book Store.<sup>76</sup> Beyond those advertisements, however, coverage of Blanshard in mainstream papers was less than flattering. Both the *Banner* and *Tennessean* focused on efforts by opposition groups to convince Governor Gordon Browning to deny Blanshard use of the auditorium. Of particular interest to both was a petition by state Senator H. Frank Taylor on behalf of ten Catholic and non-Catholic veterans who claimed Blanshard's use of the auditorium was "inappropriate to the memory of the World War I dead."<sup>77</sup> The local sponsors of the speech, led by Dr. J. Harold Stephens of Inglewood Baptist Church, countered that Blanshard was ultimately allowed to move forward as planned but only after the POAU and Blanshard promised to make "no attack on the Catholic Church."<sup>78</sup> Both papers cited Gov. Browning's compromise approvingly.

The *Reflector* was displeased with such developments, but it did not fault the governor. The villains were the petitioners. "This challenge to the freedom of assembly," the paper wrote, "is not in some far distant place, such as Bogota, Columbia, where Catholics, incited by priests, wrought heavy damage to one of our churches, but it is *here* – right HERE in Nashville."<sup>79</sup> Appealing once again to concepts of masculine Christianity, the paper rallied local churches to attend Blanshard's presentation, saying "surely we are not so spineless folk as to fail in this critical hour our forebearers who fought so valiantly to preserve for us the priceless heritage of separation of church and state."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> "Hear Paul Blanshard," *The Nashville Tennessean*, January 26, 1952, 5; "Paul Blanshard's," *The Nashville Tennessean*, January 27, 1952, 48.

<sup>77</sup> "Rally Permitted At Auditorium," *The Nashville Tennessean*, January 18, 1952, 21.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> "Paul Blanshard to Speak," *Baptist and Register: The Nashville Baptist Association Edition*, January 31, 1952, 9; "Governor Gordon Browning Refused to be Pressured," *Baptist and Reflector*, January 31, 1952, 3.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

When Blanshard finally came to town, coverage of the speech's reception varied significantly among the papers. The *Reflector* provided an upbeat account in which Blanshard and the POAU were righteous defenders of American traditions against Catholic interference. Despite having been advertised as a response to the Vatican ambassador controversy, Blanshard mainly focused on Catholic differences in "cultural, educational, political and personal areas of marriage, divorce, and child guidance."<sup>81</sup> Insisting that he was not a "Catholic baiter," Blanshard proposed a very Baptist-friendly solution to the problem of Catholic power in America:

the ultimate solution of the deep-lying problems created by the Catholic hierarchy's encroachment on the democratic way of life in America was for the Catholic peoples, the membership, to get control of their own Church...if the Church could become a democratic church, the tension now existing in America between the great religious groups would be removed.<sup>82</sup>

Blanshard's advice to Catholics might have slipped just as easily from the lips of any independent-minded, rural Southern Baptist still clinging to the church's early heritage of fierce congregationalism. In promoting Blanshard, the Southern Baptists were once again looking in an institutional mirror.

The *Banner* and *Tennessean* focused more heavily on aspects of protest to Blanshard's appearance. Like the *Register*, the mainstream papers noted Blanshard's wide ranging appeal in having attracted delegations from Cookeville, Columbia, Clarksville, Murfreesboro, Springfield, Gallatin, Winchester, Milldale, Franklin, LaFayette, and Hartsville. They also pointed to the diversity of denominations participating, citing sponsors from the Methodists, Presbyterians,

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<sup>81</sup> "Vatican envoy May Have Been Defeated, but the Deeper Issues Yet Have to Be Resolved," *Baptist and Reflector*, February 14, 1952, 3.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

Lutherans, and Nazarenes. Unlike the *Reflector*, however, the *Banner* and *Tennessean* included discussions of fractures within the Nashville Protestant community. Both cited the refusal of Dr. Walter Courtenay, pastor of First Presbyterian Church, to introduce Blanshard despite being originally scheduled as the opening speaker. The *Banner* mentioned a message sent to Gov. Browning from James W. Perkins, a “Methodist and former commander of Legion Post No. 5,” in which he claimed Blanshard “has seized upon this opportunity to use this very controversial subject [Vatican ambassador] for the purpose of insidiously creating a greater barrier between the Catholic and Protestant faiths.”<sup>83</sup> Both papers also devoted space to describing protestors who distributed “valuable antidotes to the poison being spread by Blanshard and his books” outside the auditorium.<sup>84</sup> The cumulative effect shaded Blanshard in more skeptical tones than did the *Reflector* and further revealed the declining SBC influence in Nashville’s mainstream culture.

Meanwhile, the Diocese of Nashville appeared unperturbed by Blanshard’s visit. Not a single article in the *Register* mentioned his presence. Instead, the Catholic paper focused on refuting Blanshard’s claims at a national level using James M. O’Neill’s *Catholicism and American Freedom*.<sup>85</sup> Its tone was especially triumphant when Dr. Daniel A. Poling, prominent Presbyterian and editor of the Protestant *Christian Herald*, cited O’Neill’s work as having reversed his assessment of Blanshard.<sup>86</sup> It also harnessed local examples that exposed

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<sup>83</sup> “Second Group Protests Talk by Blanshard,” *Nashville Banner*, February 1, 1952, 29; “Church State Separation is Discussed,” *Nashville Banner*, February 2, 1952, 3; “2<sup>nd</sup> Protest Made to Blanshard’s Talk,” *Nashville Banner*, February 1, 1952, 18.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> “How to Find Fault,” *The Register*, February 10, 1952, 5; “O’Neil Wins in Reply to Blanshard: book without Peer in History,” *The Register*, March 30, 1952, Section 2, 1; “Blanshard Revisited,” *The Register*, April 5, 1952, 1; “Prof. O’Neill Throws Blanshard for Loss,” *The Register*, May 4, 1952, 1-2; “Paul Blanshard Misfires in Presentation of Catholic Schools and Life of Nuns,” *The Register*, May 25, 1952, 6; “Blanshard Confuses Cannot With Ought Not In His Book,” *The Register*, June 8, 1952, 3.

<sup>86</sup> “Dr. Poling Changes Mind,” *The Register*, July 6, 1952, Section 2, 1.

weaknesses in Blanshard's attacks, such as St. John's school in Memphis receiving an award from the Freedom Foundation for its essays and projects "showing the American way of life and the liberties of American democracy."<sup>87</sup>

Another source of anxiety evident in the *Baptist and Reflector* was the denomination's increasingly urban makeup and falling number of rural pastors. "We are in a world of rapid change, the *Reflector* warned, and "Southern Baptists must take immediate steps to conserve and strengthen the rural church or else see the undermining of the religious life from which much of their strength has heretofore come."<sup>88</sup> The SBC made no effort to hide the fact that Catholic success was a primary source of concern. Articles by Louie D. Newton, former president of the SBC from 1947 to 1948, and others pointed to a "200-year program" by the Catholic Church to win rural America by working among rural Americans while the Baptists and others were distracted with mission work in South America and elsewhere.<sup>89</sup>

While it is certainly true that the Diocese of Nashville's trailer missionaries made significant strides toward establishing Catholicity in rural towns across the state, it would be inaccurate to characterize their work as a serious threat to completely unseating Southern Baptist hegemony. The trailer mission program was important institutionally for the Diocese, but their astonishing success was measured only against the near absence of Catholic institutions prior. Within that context, increasing overall goodwill toward Catholics and producing 300 converts in a decade were significant victories, but Baptists still held sway in nearly every metric. Small

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<sup>87</sup> "Attention, Mr. Blanshard! Memphis School Honored by Freedom Foundation," *The Register*, February 24, 1952, 1.

<sup>88</sup> "The Crucial Place of the Country Church," *Baptist and Reflector*, August 7, 1952, 2.

<sup>89</sup> "Religious Destiny of America," *Baptist and Reflector*, January 5, 1950, 5; "Catholic 200 Year Plan for Rural America," *Baptist and Reflector*, December 7, 1950, 3.

towns and rural villages, after all, had been the bread and butter of Baptist power since the nineteenth century. As a result, Baptist anxiety was more an expression of tension related to internal battles over SBC structure and broader challenges from Catholics and others in the realm of political and social influence than a reaction to Catholic incursion into rural areas alone.

A national survey in 1952 deepened SBC concerns further by revealing that Southern Baptists no longer held a monopoly over theological certainty. When asked about their belief in God, 99 percent of Americans responded affirmatively, and 87 percent insisted that they were ‘absolutely certain’ of God’s existence. While the high percentage of believers was unsurprising given that the 1950s were a period when general belief in God was in vogue, Southern Baptists were surprised by the denominational breakdown of the ‘absolutely certain’ category. Ninety-three percent of Baptists responded as ‘absolutely certain,’ but so did 92 percent of Catholics, followed by 90 percent of Presbyterians and 86 percent of Methodists. The data implied that the greatest threat the SBC’s status as the staunchest defender of American religiosity was now the Catholic Church. “It should...be a matter for thought,” the *Reflector* noted, “that the two denominations with the highest percentages in certainty of belief are Baptists and Roman Catholics.”<sup>90</sup>

Other developments were also troubling. In May 1952, the Knights of Columbus began purchasing prominent ads in both the *Nashville Banner* and *Nashville Tennessean* to explain Catholic positions directly to Tennesseans. Each addressed common myths used by anti-Catholics to make the Church appear at odds with American culture. One ad clarified that Catholics indeed considered Jesus to be the Son of God and did not directly worship Mary.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> “The Need For A Sure Faith,” *Baptist and Register*, November 6, 1952, 2.

<sup>91</sup> “God...Or the Greatest Fraud that Ever Lived,” *Nashville Banner*, May 6, 1952, 3.

Another invited Protestants to request free pamphlets so as to “easily investigate Catholic faith and worship in the privacy of your home.”<sup>92</sup> Other ads promised that Catholics did not intend to “challenge the various shades of Christian thought” held by “sincere and devout people” but instead wanted Protestants to “know us as we are – not as false rumors or slanders represent us to be.”<sup>93</sup> KOC ads on a wide range of topics continued to be a frequent feature in secular papers for the rest of the 1950s.<sup>94</sup>

The advertising blitz, however, was reaching Tennessee rather late as the KOC had been purchasing similar ads in other regions as early as 1948. Given that the ads were primarily a tool to increase inter-faith relations and reduce instances of anti-Catholic nativism, it is a testament to the lower amounts of bigotry in Tennessee that the KOC did not initially focus on the state. In 1960, the *Register* noted the campaign’s effectiveness: “Many of these people relate that they have been exposed to vicious and sometimes vulgar anti-Catholic propaganda for years and they take pleasure and satisfaction in seeing this propaganda contradicted and refuted.”<sup>95</sup> In Tennessee, the ads also served somewhat as a substitute for the trailer missionaries, which came to an end around 1953. Radio addresses and television programs also occupied increasing places

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<sup>92</sup> “Learn the Truth About the Catholic Church by Mail...At No Cost,” *Nashville Banner*, April 8, 1952, 2.

<sup>93</sup> “What Do You Mean – Only ONE True Church,” *Nashville Banner*, March 11, 1952, 2; “Yes – I Condemned the Catholic Church,” *Nashville Banner*, March 4, 1952, 24.

<sup>94</sup> “No – Belief in God Is NOT Enough,” *Nashville Banner*, March 25, 1952, 10; “The Real Secret of SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE,” *Nashville Banner*, April 1, 1952, 4; “Why The Catholic Church Says Investigate,” *Nashville Banner*, April 29, 1952, 7; “You Hear Strange Things About Catholics,” *Nashville Tennessean*, February 20, 1955, 9; “Must We Go to Church To Be Christians,” *Nashville Tennessean*, March 20, 1955, 13; “Yes...I Condemned the CATHOLIC CHURCH,” *Nashville Tennessean*, March 18, 1956, 37; “Why So Many Decide to BECOME CATHOLICS,” *Nashville Tennessean*, March 17, 1957, 33; “All Right...Let’s TEST CATHOLIC LOYALTY,” *Nashville Tennessean*, December 8, 1957, 13; “I was Warned About the CATHOLIC CHURCH,” *Nashville Tennessean*, August 17, 1958, 21; “Is the Catholic Church Out of Place in America,” *Nashville Tennessean*, March 15, 1959, 47; “God’s Long Arm Reached Down to Help Me,” *Nashville Tennessean*, June 14, 1959, 27.

<sup>95</sup> “K. of C. Ads Improve Inter-Faith Relations, Non-Catholics Praise Program,” *The Register*, August 19, 1960, Section 2, 1.

of importance as means of both converting non-Catholics and combatting ignorance-based nativism. In 1959 alone, the national KOC ad campaign produced 369,480 non-Catholic inquires and 50,303 applications for Catholic instruction.<sup>96</sup>

In 1953, American Catholics went on the rhetorical offensive, forcing Southern Baptists to defend their own credentials as ‘100 percent Americans’ against accusations of communist collusion. Leading Catholics, such as Senator Joseph McCarthy and his chief investigator, J.B. Matthews, turned the tables on anti-Catholic Protestants and charged them with being the “largest single group” backing communism in America.<sup>97</sup> Among Matthews’s targets were several Baptists, including Dr. Rufus W. Weaver, the Southern Baptist founder of the Joint Committee on Public Affairs for the Baptists of the United States.<sup>98</sup> The *Reflector’s* reaction was immediate and sometimes ironic considering its own previous attacks. Accusing Matthews of stoking “fear and suspicion of religious leaders,” the paper denounced his “baseless” and “ridiculous” charges as a “foul blow” against preachers who were “as patriotic and loyal as any group in our country.”<sup>99</sup> “Let it be remembered,” the paper retorted, “that the gains of communism have been greatest in those countries which have been largely dominated by Catholicism” while “no Protestant country has been seriously infiltrated by communism.”<sup>100</sup> In a statement too staccato to disguise its defensiveness, the paper concluded that “America today is not being endangered by the Protestant ministry.”<sup>101</sup> Assuming a stance used by the Catholic

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> “Tactics of a Demagogue,” *Baptist and Reflector*, July 16, 1953, 2.

<sup>98</sup> “Scurrilous Charge Against Protestant Ministry Rebuked,” *Baptist and Reflector*, July 23, 1953, 3.

<sup>99</sup> “Tactics of a Demagogue,” *Baptist and Reflector*, July 16, 1953, 2.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

press repeatedly in the first half of the twentieth century, a later article in the same issue attempted to assuage Southern Baptist anxieties by insisting the church's influence was so deeply woven into the fabric of American thought that it had even provided the inspiration for Thomas Jefferson's viewpoints on republicanism and freedom of religion.<sup>102</sup>

In the heat of Cold War excitement, Catholics were well positioned to lead the three faiths of democracy in America's anti-Communist crusade. Both the Vatican and the American hierarchy had diligently worked to position the Church as the chief antagonist against global communism since the days when James Simmons Timothy was fighting in World War I. Roosevelt and Truman had also spoke of the Catholic Church as a valuable ally in the fight against global communism in the 1940s. As a result, the door to pluralism of participation for Catholics was propped wide open as Dwight D. Eisenhower prepared to assume the Presidency in 1953.<sup>103</sup>

### **From Eisenhower to Kennedy**

When Eisenhower declared that "a deeply felt religious faith" undergirded the logic of American government following his victory in the 1952 election, he added a striking caveat: "I don't care what it is."<sup>104</sup> The statement was indicative of the broad definition of faith that came to characterize his administration. Leaning on the inherent ambiguity of a 'Judeo-Christian' tradition, Eisenhower created a middle ground between church and state where the two could harmlessly overlap as long as religious expressions remained overtly patriotic and within the

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<sup>102</sup> C. Spurgeon Paschall, "Jefferson and the Baptists," *Baptist and Reflector*, July 16, 1953, 4.

<sup>103</sup> Polk, *Faith In Freedom*, 126.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

realm of the public good as Eisenhower saw it. Though technically a Presbyterian, Eisenhower spoke of religion only in vague terms and rarely mentioned Jesus Christ by name. If religious leaders ventured into the realm of specific doctrine or scripture, such expressions were expected to remain internal and at arm's length from politics. As president, Eisenhower lauded historic leaders like Washington and Jefferson who invoked the blessings of a non-specific Supreme being rather than a God laden with Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish dogma. He was open to using God as an ideological sword in the struggle against communism as long as 'God and Country' remained innocuous synonyms for what Andrew Polk has called a generic "faith in freedom."<sup>105</sup>

The issue for faith leaders in this new environment was how to harness Eisenhower's open door religious policy to advance their institutions without crossing political red lines.<sup>106</sup> Analysis of the *Baptist and Reflector* reveals that Baptists proceeded cautiously. Eisenhower was a Republican after all. Only two articles in the early 1950s mentioned Eisenhower by name. One was published prior to Eisenhower's election and contrasted his statement that he was a "convinced, nearly fanatic Protestant" compared to his opponent, Adlai Stevenson, who the paper noted might be a Unitarian, Presbyterian, or even a Catholic, though the last was unfounded.<sup>107</sup> The other referenced Eisenhower's condemnation of J.B. Matthews's accusations of communist activity among Protestants.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 125-132, 140-141, 151-152; Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*, 73-74.

<sup>106</sup> Polk, *Faith in Freedom*, 151.

<sup>107</sup> "About Presential Nominees Religious Affiliation," *Baptist and Register*, August 21, 1952, 2.

<sup>108</sup> "Propaganda of a Former Fellow Traveler," *Baptist and Reflector*, July 30, 1953, 2.

Catholics, on the other hand, threw caution to the wind and embraced Eisenhower on a level achieved by neither of his predecessors. As it turned out, Eisenhower cared little for religious unity as a prerequisite for tri-faith acceptability.<sup>109</sup> For him, religious groups need only align with

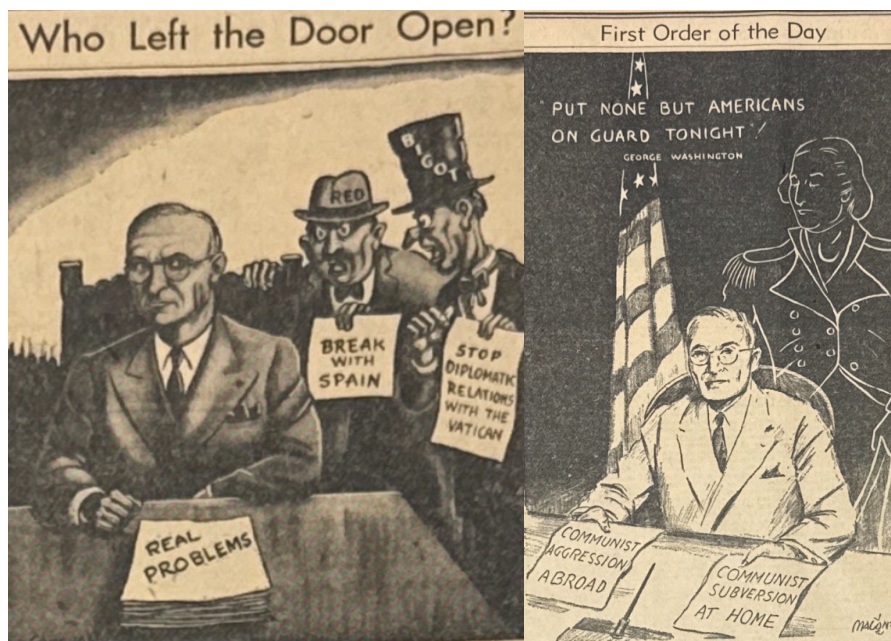


Figure 41: Depictions of President Truman, "Who Left the Door Open?" *The Register*, June 23, 1946, Section 2, 2; "First Order of the Day," *The Register*, July 23, 1950, 5.

their rivals in terms of patriotism, not theology. That shift in policy removed the greatest hurdle Catholics had faced with tri-faith ecumenism. Acknowledging the type of ecumenism that both Roosevelt and Truman had sought would have risked compromising the theological underpinnings of Church dogma. *The Register* noted that both Catholics and many Protestants were "anxious for good feelings," but it also reminded readers that Catholics were bound by a strict doctrine of faith unity that marked them as the one true church.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Polk, *Faith in Freedom*, 127.

<sup>110</sup> "Listening In: Too Much Protestant-Catholic Tension," *The Register*, January 18, 1953, 1, 3.

Catholic enthusiasm for Eisenhower-style ecumenism manifested in several ways. The first was in the extent of coverage he received in the paper. Roosevelt had been a frequent topic of interest and was just as frequently pictured in moments both personal and political. Truman was less popular. He was featured in few articles and appeared in only a handful of photographs and cartoons. When he was depicted, he was typically shown in the position of making difficult

choices in the face of competing interests. None were particularly flattering or supportive.

Eisenhower, however, was an immediate darling in *The Register*. Over the course of his tenure, he was featured positively in more articles, photographs, and cartoons than any other twentieth century president to that point and was often accompanied by religious iconography. Importantly, the relationship appeared to be mutual.

Many of the items featuring Eisenhower were possible because he went out of his way more than either Roosevelt or Truman to appear alongside lay organizations and prominent Catholic



Figure 42: Depiction of President Eisenhower, post-election in 1953, "May She Guide Our New Skipper," *The Register*, January 11, 1953, 1.

leaders, even taking a trip to the Vatican in 1959 to meet with Pope John XXIII.<sup>111</sup> The men had met previously during World War II when Eisenhower was commander of the Allied Powers and John was an Archbishop in France.<sup>112</sup> Their meeting, which was only the second such encounter between a sitting President and a Pope, was a strong signal to Catholics that support of Eisenhower's administration represented a ladder toward full participation. In a letter thanking the president for his visit,

Pope John XXIII

expressed the reciprocal nature of Eisenhower's relationship with Catholics. "We have no doubt that Your Excellency will continue to receive also from the Catholics of the United



Figure 43: Jovial Relationship Between President Eisenhower and Pope John XXIII, "Share Hearty Laugh," *The Register*, December 18, 1959, 6.

<sup>111</sup> "U.S. President At Vatican," *The Register*, February 15, 1953, Section 2, 1; "Call on President," *The Register*, February 20, 1953, 7; "President Eisenhower Praises Family Lie Conference Theme," *The Register*, March 22, 1953, 1; "Ike Asked to Help Send Aid to Car. Stepinac," *The Register*, July 24, 1953; "Pre. Eisenhower to Get Degree from Catholic U," *The Register*, November 8, 1953, Section 2, 1; "President, Mamie to Hear Mass Sunday, January 31, 1954, 1; "President Given Praise for Spiritual Example," *The Register*, February 7, 1954, 1; "Leaders of Catholic Women's Council Greeted by President at White House," *The Register*, February 2, 1954, Section 2, 2; "Eisenhower Pens Letter Scoring Red Cruelty to Card. Mindszenty," *The Register*, February 14, 1954; "Ike Praises Catholic Schoolmen for Tackling Teacher Shortage," *The Register*, April 25, 1954, Section 2, 1; "To Help Koreans," *The Register*, May 16, 1954, 2; "President Greets Catholic Nurses at White House," *The Register*, June 13, 1954, 2; "Freedom Medal," *The Register*, August 8, 1954, 2; "Ike Will Attend NCCW Convention," *The Register*, October 17, 1954, Section 2, 1; "President and Cardinal," *The Register*, October 31, 1954, Section 2, 2; "President and Archbishop," *The Register*, November 21, 1954, 2; "Aid Sought for Italian Refugees," *The Register*, May 29, 1959, 2; "Nixon Pays Visit to Polish Cathedral," *The Register*, August 14, 1959, Section 2, 1; "Courtesy Call," *The Register*, November 29, 1959, 2; "President Moved by Welcome Extended by Pope At Vatican," *The Register*, December 18, 1959, 2.

<sup>112</sup> "Audience With Pius XII 14 Years Ago, Ike's visit to Pope was Historic Occasion," *The Register*, November 12, 1959, 1.

States an exemplary contribution of action, loyalty and discipline.”<sup>113</sup> When Eisenhower asserted federal authority on issues like segregation, American Catholics could offer their support while denominations like the Southern Baptist Convention could not. The mutually beneficial relationship was also manifested in multiple awards and recognitions exchanged between Eisenhower and his vice president, Richard Nixon, and American Catholic leaders. In February 1960, Eisenhower named Cardinal Spellman of New York “Big Brother of the Year” for his dedication to youth and the principle of the “brotherhood of man.”<sup>114</sup> A month later, the University of Notre Dame bestowed its “Patriotism Award” to Nixon for his support of U.S. parochial schools.<sup>115</sup> In June, Eisenhower also appeared at Notre Dame to receive an honorary doctor of laws degree. In return, Eisenhower delivered the university’s commencement speech, becoming the first president to do so.<sup>116</sup>

Cooperation became a dominant theme throughout the Eisenhower administration. Catholic columnist Joseph Breig wrote in a June 1954 edition of *The Register* that “the people are turning away from the impregnable wall of separation nonsense and are moving back toward the original American ideal: the cooperation of state and church, two distinct but by no means antagonistic institutions.”<sup>117</sup> Breig was specifically referencing the successful campaign by the Knights of Columbus to insert ‘under God’ into the pledge of allegiance. Adopted at the 71<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> “Address of His Holiness Pope John XXIII To The President of the United States of America,” The Holy See, accessed March 7, 2026, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/speeches/1959/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_spe\\_19591206\\_usa.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/speeches/1959/documents/hf_j-xxiii_spe_19591206_usa.html).

<sup>114</sup> “Best Wishes for Trip,” *The Register*, February 26, 1960, 1.

<sup>115</sup> “Diversity in US Schools Necessary, Nixon Stresses, Upholds role of Parochial Education,” *The Register*, March 4, 1960, 1.

<sup>116</sup> “Nation’s Leader Honored,” *The Register*, June 17, 1960, last.

<sup>117</sup> “One Nation Under God,” *The Register*, June 27, 1954, 5.



Figure 44: Entwinement of Religious and Patriotic Iconography, "Our Guiding Heritage," *The Register*, December 13, 1953, 5 (top left); "In This Hour of Need," *The Register*, May 22, 1954, 5 (top right); "Time for A Big 2 Conference," *The Register*, June 7, 1953, 7 (bottom left); "Patroness of the U.S.," *The Register*, December 12, 1954, 5 (bottom right).

KOC convention in August of 1953, the ‘under God’ resolution fit well with the broader ‘Back to God’ campaign launched by the American Legion that same year.<sup>118</sup> Catholic enthusiasm for both initiatives further endeared the Church to Eisenhower, who also came to support the ‘under God’ movement after attending a sermon by Presbyterian minister George M. Docherty. Docherty attributed the first use of the phrase to Lincoln and insisted that anyone who failed to support the “Christian ethic” it embodied also fell short of true Americanism.<sup>119</sup> Unqualified support for the inclusion of ‘under God’ in the pledge and ‘In God We Trust’ on currency were therefore vehicles for Catholics to deepen their claim to a new kind of 100 percent Americanism

without compromising their traditional stances.<sup>120</sup>

In a stunning rhetorical maneuver in late 1953, Duke K. McCall, an omnipresent leader within the SBC, posed a simple solution to the problem of Catholicism’s apparent influence and

<sup>118</sup> “Back to God Program,” *The Register*, February 17, 1953, 7; “Knights of Columbus Advocate Words Under god in Oath of Allegiance,” *The Register*, August 30, 1953, 1; Polk, *Faith In Freedom*, 138.

<sup>119</sup> Polk, *Faith In Freedom*, 152.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

sense of invincibility: claim credit for it. McCall argued that “Baptists and other evangelical Christians [had] created a Frankenstein” by lending credibility to the “myth of the invincible power of the Roman Catholic Church.”<sup>121</sup> “Like the nurse who tells her little children of boogie men and ghosts in order to frighten them into being good,” he insisted, “we have amplified our descriptions of the Roman Catholic Church in order to provoke our fellow church members to good works.”<sup>122</sup> In a complete reversal of prior SBC arguments, McCall claimed that the Roman Catholic hierarchy was incapable of delivering Catholic votes en masse, and, therefore, the actions taken by politicians to court their favor were more the result of Southern Baptist influence than Catholic power. In an effort of self-reflection, however, McCall conceded three advantages to the Catholic Church. First, Catholics’ lack of democratization meant they were “under no necessity of washing their dirty linen in public” like the Baptists; second, in the Catholic Church, “only the experts [tried] to act like experts;” third, the Catholic sense of continuity meant that they could patiently wait “for one generation to plant, another to water, and still another to reap the fruits.”<sup>123</sup> Unlike Baptist leaders who “majored in the immediate” and attempted to achieve all goals in their own generation, Catholics were willing to “take a hundred years to build a great cathedral or to buy large areas of land on the edge of a city with the expectation that the city [would] grow around it.”<sup>124</sup>

For Tennessee Catholics, McCall’s last observation struck home. The policy of deliberate patience he described was exactly the approach that the Diocese of Nashville, its priests, and its

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<sup>121</sup> Duke K. McCall, “Roman Catholic Invincibility,” *Baptist and Reflector*, November 5, 1953, p. 9.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

laymen had used to elevate Tennessee Catholics from camped newcomers to economically, socially, and politically established citizens who could stand on equal footing with their Protestant counterparts. Though the Southern Baptist Convention counted more congregants in more places than at any previous time in its history, it remained internally divided and stubbornly suspicious of the type of hierarchical organization that it was becoming. One comfort, however, remained. Though Catholics had ascended into the mainstream, the White House remained elusive. Then came 1959.

The *Reflector* opened 1959 with a curious article by Pastor Jess C. Moody of Florida. Moody focused on the proposition that SBC president Brooks Hays should run as a Democratic vice-presidential candidate in the upcoming election. Though he framed the suggestion as evidence of Baptists' growing political influence, he wondered why people were only mentioning Hays for the *vice*-presidency. Why not the presidency itself? "Could it be," he wondered, "that there are those political aspirants who greatly fear the Baptists and [the] Baptist influenced vote?"<sup>125</sup> Moody further pondered if such an aspirational candidate might also hope that a Baptist on the ticket could quiet opposition to that aspirant's candidacy? He concluded that the answers to those questions signaled that 1959 would be "a time for greatness" for American Baptists.<sup>126</sup> That greatness, however, depended on guarding the principal of separation of Church and State, especially since John F. Kennedy, the prominent Catholic Senator from Massachusetts, was already sending signaling that he intended to run. In the twenty-three months that followed, the *Baptists and Reflector* went through successive phases of

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<sup>125</sup> "Hays for Vice President," *Baptist and Reflector*, January 15, 1959, 5.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

doubt, retrenchment, fair play, resignation, and realignment as it became ever clearer that Kennedy was likely to become the first Catholic president.

The doubt phase lasted from January to March of 1959. During these months, the paper displayed a defiant, lecturing tone that dared Kennedy to take a religious oath that his Catholic faith would not affect his politics; the underlying assumption was that he would not. The paper, however, framed the issue as one of fairness that would confront a devoutly religious candidate from any faith, insisting that Roman Catholics would ask a similar oath of a leading Southern Baptist should he be chosen as a major candidate.<sup>127</sup> Never mind that no such oath had been demanded of Harry Truman in 1948.

There were also signs of internal weakness during this early phase. Disagreements erupted among both columnists and readers over the ecumenical invitation extended by Pope John XXIII. As SBC President, Hayes expressed optimism about the possibilities for Christian Unity, but reader L.E. Barton of Montgomery, Alabama, railed against the idea by evoking the biblical image of the lamb laying down with the lion. “There has never been a Pope on his purple bogus throne that wanted anything in the way of unity except for Baptists and Protestants to stand meekly on the Vatican steps and confess their sins and humbly seek the privilege of being swallowed by Romanism,” he wrote.<sup>128</sup> He ended his op-ed by reminding Hayes that “he cannot make pronouncements on such subjects without many people thinking that he, in some sense, is speaking for the Baptists.”<sup>129</sup> In the same issue, however, Pastor E.B. Self of LaVergne,

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<sup>127</sup> “Protestant Leader Defends Al Smith, Urges Kennedy Follow His Example,” *Baptist and Reflector*, January 15, 1959, 3; “Hays For Vice President,” *Baptist and Reflector*, January 15, 1959, 5; “Religious Issue in ’60 Campaign Remains Alive,” *Baptist and Reflector*, January 22, 1959, 2.

<sup>128</sup> “Mail Bag: Pope John and Christian Unity,” *Baptist and Reflector*, March 5, 1959, 2.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

Tennessee, embodied the more ecumenically minded Tennesseans. He supported Hayes, insisting that “if we at least sat down and talked sincerely with Roman Catholics and others, we could certainly air mutual grievances and perhaps even come to see others as truly brothers for whom Christ died.”<sup>130</sup> Pastor T.A. Patterson of Beaumont, Texas, took the middle ground but sounded exceedingly Catholic in the process. Patterson argued that Baptists were always willing to cooperate as long as it did not compromise their core convictions. The problem with the principle of the ‘brotherhood of man’ for him was that it denied denominational distinctiveness and, implicitly, the ‘rightness’ of the Baptist perspective. “If all men are now the children of God,” he asked, “then why bother to preach the Gospel to them.”<sup>131</sup> The anti-tri-faith undertones were unmistakable.

By April, the paper’s tone began a significant change that continued through early 1960. If Southern Baptists had expected Kennedy to espouse the Catholic hierarchy’s position on a Vatican ambassador, school funding, and opposition to a religious oath, they were sorely mistaken. The *Reflector* noted with surprise that Kennedy had rejected all three issues in an interview with *Look* magazine. It then insisted that the Catholic press was just as shocked and either condemned Kennedy’s position or insisted that it wasn’t genuine.<sup>132</sup> The paper also insisted that the Catholic press was making a bigger deal of ‘religious tests’ than Baptists because Catholics were “nervous and jittery” about Kennedy’s candidacy.<sup>133</sup> *The Register*, however, displayed no open hostility toward Kennedy during this period, even when it espoused

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<sup>130</sup> “Mail Bag: Always the Possibility of Family Harmony,” *Baptist and Reflector*, March 5, 1959, 2.

<sup>131</sup> “Questions Answered,” *Baptist and Reflector*, March 19, 1959, 5.

<sup>132</sup> “Observations by Owen,” *Baptist and Register*, April 2, 1959, 5.

<sup>133</sup> “Catholics, Protestants Discuss Religious Tests,” *Baptist and Reflector*, January 28, 1960.

policy objectives, such as federal funding for schools and the appointment of a Vatican Ambassador, that were at odds with Kennedy's platform. In fact, *The Register* mentioned Kennedy by name only once in October when it noted that he attended the Al Smith memorial dinner in New York as a potential rival of New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller in 1960.<sup>134</sup> Instead, the majority of the paper's focus was on the 'other John,' Pope John XXIII, as well as issues of Christian unity and general Catholic Americanness.<sup>135</sup>

While there were indications in *The Register* of growing tensions both nationally and within the state, they were limited. A cartoon in May 1959 featured a caricature of a nativist opposing a Catholic candidate for president. A reprinting of an article from the *Chattanooga Times* that same month also pointed to the presence of anti-Catholic sentiment among the state's "large and powerful Protestant Church organizations," which included the Baptists, Methodists, and Church of Christ.<sup>136</sup> The paper pointed to growing Catholic prestige, especially if a Catholic were to win the White House, as the source of their hostility. It also noted, however, that most Democratic politicians in the state professed a belief in religious tolerance and their voters were just as likely to accept a Catholic as president as a candidate from another denomination.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> "Smith Dinner," *The Register*, October 30, 1959, 1.

<sup>135</sup> "US Newspapers Praise Ecumenical Council Aim," *The Register*, February 6, 1959, Section 2, 1; "US Strongest Support of Catholicity in World," *The Register*, May 15, 1959, Section 2, 1; "No Conflict, Says New Delegate, US Ideals Are Catholic," *The Register*, May 29, 1959, 1; "Listening In: without Catholics, No United States," *The Register*, June 26, 1959; "US Needs Representative at Vatican, Diplomat Says," *The Register*, July 3, 1959, 1; "Pope Issues Challenge for Unity of Christians," *The Register*, July 10, 1959, 1; "Catholic Could Lead US, Asserts Religion Is No Barrier," *The Register*, July 18, 1959, Section 2, 1; "Catholic Schools get Share of a Federal Science Program," *The Register*, August 15, 1959, 1; "Private Schools Form Bulwark of Democracy," *The Register*, August 21, 1959, 1; "Non-Catholics Are Welcome At Council in Observer Role," *The Register*, November 11, 4, 1959, 1; "Interfaith Meetings Urged," *The Register*, November 4, 1959, 1.

<sup>136</sup> "Religious Intolerance Still High In Tennessee's Political Climate," *The Register*, June 5, 1959, 3.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

Southern Baptists, on the other hand, were undergoing a significant amount of introspection. Articles in July 1959 reinforced the uniqueness of Southern Baptists identity as a fourth faith separate from both Catholics and Protestants.<sup>138</sup> At the same time, subgroups of Baptists began forming alliances in opposition to Kennedy. The Association of Southern Missionary Baptists of Kentucky, which was composed of 6,000 members across 34 churches, began actively campaigning against Kennedy as a “danger to our American freedom.”<sup>139</sup> A March 1960 article attempted to harness that energy and position Baptists as a monolithic voting block of equal potency to Catholics. “All good Catholics will vote for a good Catholic, and all good Protestants will vote for a good Protestant,” E.N. Patterson of Arizona argued.<sup>140</sup> “If one is a Catholic and the other is a Protestant, the United States will elect a Protestant president.”

Just a month later, the tone of the paper was once again in flux. As it became increasingly evident that Kennedy stood a chance of winning not only the Democratic nomination but the election itself, the *Reflector* began making increasing arguments against voters acting as blocs and in favor of what it called ‘fair play.’ Catholics were making headway in labeling overt attacks against Kennedy as bigotry, and the *Reflector* and other Baptist aligned groups, such as the POAU, countered by voluntarily denouncing anti-Catholic literature as antithetical to American values. The newspaper reframed perineal nativist favorites like the mysterious and bogus KOC oath, which supposedly required KOC members to pursue the fall of the American government, and the legend of Maria Monk, which claimed to chronicle the

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<sup>138</sup> “Baptists and BAPTISTS,” *Baptist and Reflector*, July 2, 1959, 5; “Southern Baptists AND ECUMENICITY,” *Baptist and Reflector*, July 2, 1959, 5; “Southern Baptists ALONE,” *Baptist and Reflector*, July 2, 1959, 5.

<sup>139</sup> “Launches Campaign Against Catholic President,” *Baptist and Reflector*, September 24, 1959, 2.

<sup>140</sup> “Let’s Face It,” *Baptist and Register*, March 24, 1960, 3.

physical abuses committed inside convents, as patently wrong. In return, the paper asked Catholics to refrain from labeling its questions about Kennedy's loyalty as bigoted.<sup>141</sup> Another article a month later warned of the dangers of "bloc balloting" by Catholics or any other group. "The sooner the danger of such bloc balloting is recognized," the article insisted, "the better off the country will be."<sup>142</sup>

By August 1960, the *Reflector* was displaying signs of resignation to the increasing likelihood of a Kennedy victory. "When we consider the fact that the Roman Catholic population of this nation is over forty million souls, it is inconceivable that the time will not come when we will have a Roman Catholic President," wrote Pastor Jack R. Kennedy of Lookout Mountain, Tennessee.<sup>143</sup> "A Buddhist from Hawaii, a Jew from Miami Beach, a Baptist from Tennessee, or a Roman Catholic from Boston," he continued, "all stand on the same level before the Constitution." The important thing was that "those who make choices contrary to ours are treated with the same respect and dignity which we want for ourselves."<sup>144</sup>

Resignation turned to realignment when Kennedy finally took the offensive in September, openly voicing a loyalty oath in both a conference with C. Emmanuel Carlson, Executive Director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, and to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association. Drawing from the Baptists' own history, he reminded those gathered in Houston that "Virginia's harassment of Baptist preachers...led to Jefferson's statute of religious

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<sup>141</sup> Andrew S. Moore, *The South's Tolerable Alien: Roman Catholics in Alabama and Georgia, 1945-1970* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 32; "Time for Fair Play," *Baptist and Reflector*, April 7, 1960, 4.

<sup>142</sup> "Bloc Voting," *Baptist and Reflector*, May 12, 1960, 4.

<sup>143</sup> "Between Now and November," *Baptist and Reflector*, August 4, 1960, 3, 11.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

freedom,” and though he might be the victim of bigotry today, “tomorrow it may be you.”<sup>145</sup> The effect was immediate and dramatic. Some articles in the *Reflector* appeared to jump to Kennedy’s defense moving forward. When the sincerity of Kennedy’s Houston speech came under fire, the *Reflector* responded: “Is Kennedy really sincere? Of course, it should be said that nobody should question a candidate’s sincerity in an election year.”<sup>146</sup> Another article called Kennedy’s speech “the most complete, unequivocal and reassuring which could be expected of any person in his position.”<sup>147</sup> Yet each also raised questions about whether Kennedy’s position would prove acceptable to the American Catholic hierarchy. If Kennedy had caught his opponents off guard with his willingness to express independence from the hierarchy, there was still hope that the hierarchy might abandon him in return, weakening American Catholicity and halting the faith’s recent gains.

Public relations specialists within the SBC also began to worry about the long-term effects of having opposed Kennedy. They fretted that the term “bigoted Baptists” had become far too common during the campaign and might further threaten Baptist power in the decade to come.<sup>148</sup> Though a full printing of Dr. Gayle L. McGlothlen’s anti-Kennedy speech from his pulpit at Nashville’s Immanuel Baptist Church provided a final parting shot in the days leading up to election night, the groundwork had been laid for an astonishing about face should Kennedy prove successful.

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<sup>145</sup> “Address To The Greater Houston Ministerial Association,” John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed March 16, 2026, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/address-to-the-greater-houston-ministerial-association>; “Kennedy and Carlson Discuss Religious Issue,” *Baptist and Reflector*, September 1, 1960, 9.

<sup>146</sup> “The Presidency and the Roman Catholic Church,” *Baptist and Reflector*, September 9, 1960, 5, 7.

<sup>147</sup> “Catholic Church Asked for Clarifying Pronouncements,” *Baptist and Reflector*, September 22, 1960, 9.

<sup>148</sup> “Bigot Name Threatens Our Witness,” *Baptist and Register*, September 29, 1960, 9.

On the Catholic side of the election, *The Register* leapt into the political arena to an unprecedented degree. While it had frequently highlighted connections with political figures like Roosevelt and Eisenhower once they were elected, *The Register* and its Catholic press predecessors had maintained a strict prohibition on advocating for candidates during their campaigns. With pluralism of participation so tantalizingly close, however, they temporarily removed their rhetorical gloves and entered the fray. In article after article throughout 1960, *The Register* challenged nativist arguments about the Church and Kennedy while carefully maintaining the position of informing rather than commanding the voting behavior of its readers.<sup>149</sup> At times, the paper's outspokenness contradicted Kennedy's request for the Catholic press to limit discussions of religious issues.<sup>150</sup> At no point, however, were articles directly critical of Kennedy for expressing independence from the hierarchy. The general sense was that if Kennedy's defiance of the hierarchy was the price that had to be paid to break the last, highest ceiling of Catholic political participation, then the prize was worth the cost. When November 8 finally came, silence fell. In the days and weeks that followed, Kennedy's name was conspicuously absent from both *The Register* and the *Reflector*.

The *Reflector* broke the silence first. The November 24<sup>th</sup> issue featured an article by Glen Archer, president of the POAU, in which he reminded readers of Kennedy's Houston oath and offered the organization's "strong support" in helping him uphold the principle of church-

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<sup>149</sup> "Church in America Does Not Want Privileged Position," *The Register*, March 25, 1960, Section 2, 1; "Catholics in High Office Have Stood for Freedom," *The Register*, March 25, 1960, Section 2, 1; "Kennedy Asks No Votes Prejudiced by Religion, VP Candidate Trained at Jesuit University," *The Register*, July 22, 1960, Section 2, 1; "Kennedy's Career Has Won Wide Acclaim, Courage in War and Politics Noted," *The Register*, July 22, 1960, 2; "Nashville situation sized Up, Most Protestants Opposing Bigotry," *The Register*, August 19, 1960, 1; "Issue of School Aid Appears in Campaign," *The Register*, October 21, 1960, Section 2, 1; "Dictating How to Vote Is Out of Step in US," *The Register*, November 4, 1960, Section 2, 1; "No Political Action by US Hierarchy," *The Register*, November 4, 1960, Section 2, 1.

<sup>150</sup> "Kennedy Urges Editors to Keep Religion Issue Under Control," *The Register*, April 29, 1960, Section 2, 1.

state separation. “Although Kennedy’s position is not that of the bishops of his church,” he wrote, “we believe that the majority of the Catholic people of the United States agree with him and we look forward to an administration in which the new president will faithfully adhere to the pledge of church-state separation.”<sup>151</sup> While he regretted the anti-Catholic bigotry (as well as the resulting anti-bigotry bigotry from Catholics) that emerged during the campaign, Archer characterized it as “more temperate” than in previous eras like the Al Smith campaign in 1928.<sup>152</sup>

SBC leaders, meanwhile, qualified Kennedy’s victory as a reflection of Baptist power rather than its weakness. Echoing Duke McCall’s rhetorical maneuver in 1953, the paper claimed that Baptists received “unprecedented publicity” by loudly raising the church-state issue and, therefore, were owed more credit for forcing Kennedy’s hand than public media gave them.<sup>153</sup> One Oklahoma Baptist declared that “Mr. Kennedy campaigned on the Baptist doctrine of separation of Church and State” and was elected by “a combination of Catholic and Baptist votes.”<sup>154</sup> As a result, Baptists faced “an unprecedented opportunity” to “convey to the people what we believe” and “come out at the end...in the most favorable position we have been in for some time.”<sup>155</sup>

For the Tennessee Baptists Convention, John Kennedy’s election was not the only ballot of significance in November 1960. In an act of defiance to the general election’s results, the convention chose Dr. Gayle McGlothlen as president at their 86<sup>th</sup> state convention. McGlothlen

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<sup>151</sup> “Kennedy Will Get Support on Pledge on Church-State Separation,” *Baptist and Reflector*, November 24, 1960, 2.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> “Baptists in the Political Process,” *Baptist and Reflector*, November 24, 1960, 3.

<sup>154</sup> “Baptists Seen Aided by Kennedy Election,” *Baptist and Reflector*, December 8, 1960, 2.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

had given the lengthy anti-Catholic speech that the *Baptist and Reflector* printed in full just before the election. He remained defiant in his presidential address to the convention: “We have a President-elect, he is my president, but I shall continue to fear the political doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.”<sup>156</sup> Abandoning earlier warnings from the *Reflector* about bringing politics into the pulpit, McGlothlen urged Baptists to encourage their pastors to express themselves.<sup>157</sup>

If Baptist leaders hoped that Kennedy would betray his secret Catholic agenda once in office, thereby validating their earlier warnings, they were again sorely disappointed. Kennedy ultimately proved that he was a new kind of Catholic standing at the head of a new kind of Church. Kennedy surprised his opponents with his willingness to not only publicly pledge his loyalty to country over church but also stand shoulder to shoulder with them in opposition to school funding and a Vatican ambassador. Once in office, Kennedy remained firmly in favor of the separation of church and state, especially regarding federal funding for parochial schools.<sup>158</sup> His narrow election victory meant that he acted cautiously during the opening years of his term, resisting calls to pursue civil rights legislation that could cost him southern support. Though his public support for school integration, designation of Vice President Lyndon Johnson as head of the President’s Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity, and appointment of African Americans to high-ranking positions aligned with Catholic perspectives, his lack of direct

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<sup>156</sup> “President’s Address,” *Baptist and Reflector*, November 24, 1960, 5.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> “President Still Opposes U.S. Aid for Church Schools,” *The Register*, January 19, 1962, Section 2, 1.

legislative action provided an opportunity for détente with Southern Baptists and other Southern denominations opposed to federal integration policies.<sup>159</sup>

Kennedy's administration also coincided with the rise of a new Pope whose impact on Catholic practices far exceeded that of any one politician. Unlike the saintly, remote, and almost ethereal Pius XII, Pope John XXIII was as easy going and off-the-cuff pontiff who seemed custom made for a new generation of Catholics. He rejected formality and ritual, preferring impromptu public appearances, simple titles, and casual dinners with friends and associates. "There is nothing in scripture that says I have to eat alone," he joked.<sup>160</sup> *The Nashville*

*Tennessean* compared John XXIII's laid-back attitude to Kennedy's as early as 1959.<sup>161</sup>

Week after week, John Kennedy and John XXIII frustrated anti-Catholic nativists. In a world where the Pope orders his personal aids to cease kneeling when they enter a room, the old narrative that the Pope planned to force Americans to kneel before the Papal Throne seemed far less



Figure 45: President Kennedy with Editor of the Dallas Baptist Standard, Dr. E.S. James, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, [https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/jfkwhp-1963-02-11-a#?image\\_identifier=JFKWHP-ST-89-2-63](https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/jfkwhp-1963-02-11-a#?image_identifier=JFKWHP-ST-89-2-63).

<sup>159</sup> "The Modern Civil Rights Movement and the Kennedy Administration," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, revised March 31, 2026, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/civil-rights-movement>.

<sup>160</sup> "After 1<sup>st</sup> Year, John XXIII Now Soft Collar Pope," *Nashville Tennessean*, November 1, 1959, 6-B.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

plausible.<sup>162</sup> Even more damaging were images of a Catholic president sitting peacefully beside a Southern Baptist leader to discuss shared policy goals. Neither of those outcomes fit the dire warnings espoused by nativists over the preceding decades. Instead, the two Johns transformed American Catholicism into a national institution with whom even the Tennessee Baptists found common cause. For a moment, the two Vaticans enjoyed peaceful coexistence.

The peace, however, did not last. As the sixties advanced, new schisms formed not between the three faiths but within them. As early as the 1950s, articles in *The Register* indicated rising tension between liberals and conservatives within the Church.<sup>163</sup> From the mid-1960s onward, those tensions drove Catholics from divergent political poles apart. The same phenomenon was also occurring in sectarian and secular communities throughout the United States. As the nation and its leaders passed from one era to another, new cross-faith alignments redefined the nation's socio-political landscape for the remainder of the twentieth century.

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> "Good Reason for Doubt," *The Register*, March 9, 1952, 5; "As America Goes," *The Register*, June 22, 1952, 5; "The Liberal Catholic," *The Register*, December 13, 1953, 5; "Its Weak Wing," *The Register*, May 16, 1953, 5; "Just Call Him Open Mind," *The Register*, June 13, 1954, 3.

## Epilogue

### Vanishing: Kennedy, Vatican II, and Polar Ecumenism

At 10am EST on November 23, 1963, Mass was held in the White House for the first time, but it was not the joyous occasion many American Catholics had anticipated.<sup>1</sup> Lying in repose in the East Room, John F. Kennedy transitioned from president to martyr. His brief tenure had already transformed the country's religious landscape in fundamental ways, opening the door for Catholics to assume a fully participatory role within a pluralistic American society. The cost of that accomplishment, however, sparked considerable scholarly debate.<sup>2</sup>

According to John Tracey Ellis, Kennedy's election "marked a singular triumph" for Catholic Americans and his death marked the end of anti-Catholic bigotry. "On that day," Ellis insists, "nativism was finished."<sup>3</sup> Andrew Greeley and Mark Massa agree that Kennedy's inauguration brought Catholicism "full circle" in America but note that achieving the presidential "holy grail" came at a high cost.<sup>4</sup> By disavowing hierarchical authority over his presidency, Kennedy essentially created a "secularized priesthood" centered on his persona.<sup>5</sup> "By

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<sup>1</sup> "November 22, 1963: Death of a President," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed February 22, 2026, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/november-22-1963-death-of-the-president>.

<sup>2</sup> Parts of the following chapter are adapted from my previous study, "A Flame Upon the Hearthstones: *The Columbian, The Cresset*, and Tennessee Catholicity, 1915-1932," MA thesis, MTSU, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> John Tracey Ellis, *American Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 188.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew M. Greeley, *The American Experience: An Interpretation of the History of American Catholicism* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), 288; Mark S. Massa, *Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 228.

<sup>5</sup> Massa, *Catholics and American Culture*, 18.

announcing that nothing – not even religious principles – should take precedence over a president’s oath to uphold the laws of the land,” Kennedy facilitated a “breathtaking reversal” of the traditional, conservative Catholic power structures that, when combined with the liturgical changes emanating from Vatican II, invited Catholic Americans to more fully embrace secular aspects of the national culture.<sup>6</sup>

The result was a dramatic democratization of Catholic identity. Kennedy freed Catholics from bigoted arguments that Catholics could never achieve 100% Americanism because of their loyalty to the Vatican. “The era when Catholicism would be identified with the organized Church was over,” Greeley insists, “as was the day when the Catholic position would be that which was espoused by the bishops and priests of the Church.”<sup>7</sup> By giving American Catholics permission to wear their Catholicism lightly, Kennedy became the figurehead of a “new kind of active, engaged” laity whose confidence exuded comfort “with their Catholicism and their Americanness.”<sup>8</sup> Concomitantly, the socio-political influence of men like Paul Blanshard was weakened as nativist fears of a Catholic Kingdom in America appeared increasingly foolish.<sup>9</sup> William R. Hutchinson argues that attacks by Blanshard and other nativists actually aided Kennedy’s election by focusing Americans’ attention on a fears that he could easily brush aside.<sup>10</sup> As Kennedy deftly co-opted opponents’ arguments against parochial school funding and Church-state separation, he transformed nativist agitators from threats to convenient foils.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Greeley, *The American Experience*, 286-287.

<sup>8</sup> James M. O’Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 197-198.

<sup>9</sup> Massa, *Catholics and American Culture*, 226.

<sup>10</sup> William R. Hutchinson, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 207-208.

In Tennessee, Bishop Adrian's appointment as a Bishop-Assistant to the Papal Throne also represented a new era for Catholicity. When Adrian accompanied Archbishop Stritch to Rome in 1946 to meet with Pius XII, *The Register* noted that Adrian's presence alongside the native-born Stritch emphasized the deepening ties between the global Catholic hierarchy and the South. Adrian's new station, awarded on the celebration of his 78<sup>th</sup> birthday, 50<sup>th</sup> year of priesthood, and 25<sup>th</sup> year as Bishop, ranked immediately below the level of a Cardinal and placed a Tennessean beside the Pope during solemn functions. Such a high honor would have been unthinkable for a priest from Tennessee just a half century earlier, but the diligence of Bishops Byrne, Smith, and Adrian, along with the diocese's Catholic press, religious orders, and active laity, had catapulted the state into a position of prominence within American Catholicity.<sup>11</sup> Though nativists had long warned that the Pope would dominate America if a Catholic were to become president, Kennedy's victory did not herald a grand Papal invasion through the Holland Tunnel. Kennedy did not bring Rome to Tennessee. Instead, Adrian took Tennessee to Rome. Walking a path laid by patriotic soldiers, native priests, school reformers, and trailer missionaries, Adrian brought perspectives on Catholic identity forged in the wilderness of the inland South to the halls of Vatican power.

The loss of Catholic outsiderhood, however, had other effects. The decade-long process of liturgical "updating" triggered by Vatican II introduced new elements to Catholic practice that benefitted the cause of assimilation and Southernization in America. The use of vernacular languages during mass, renewed attention to written Scripture, the possibility of salvation outside the Church, acknowledgement of local traditions, and the encouragement of ecumenism at both institutional and individual levels all aided in further reducing barriers between American

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<sup>11</sup> "Bishop Named Assistant at Papal Throne," *The Tennessee Register*, April 21, 1961, 1; "Bishop to Note Triple Jubilee Next Week," *The Tennessee Register*, April 14, 1961, 1.

Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. They also weakened the “cement” that held Catholic communities together as culturally distinct.<sup>12</sup> “Since in post-Vatican theology the people are the Church,” Greeley notes, “there was no escaping the inevitable logic which said that the Catholic church in America had become Americanized.”<sup>13</sup> This Americanization process brought Catholic laymen closer to their Protestant counterparts, mirroring democratic elements that had previously been associated exclusively with Southern Baptists and other evangelical sects. It also brought the Catholic community perilously close to “admitting that the group stood for no values of its own worth preserving.”<sup>14</sup> Philip Gleason argues that charting a “middle way” between self-isolation and total absorption, which he calls the “crisis of Americanization,” remained unresolved even into the 1980s.<sup>15</sup> Taking Kennedy’s election as the most visible embodiment of change, Wilfred McClay wonders if the campaign to elect a Catholic president succeeded in achieving the noun at the expense of the adjective.<sup>16</sup> As the twentieth century advanced, the Catholics who had once looked to Kennedy for a sense of identity struggled with how to define their faith in a country where, as Reinhold Niebuhr noted in 1955, faith itself was fast becoming the “unknown God.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Lisa Zengarini, “An Overview of the Second Vatican Council,” *Vatican News*, last modified October 11, 2022, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2022-10/vatican-ii-council-60th-anniversary-video-history-background.html>; Greeley, *The American Experience*, 287.

<sup>13</sup> Greeley, *The American Experience*, 288.

<sup>14</sup> Philip Gleason, *Keeping the Faith: American Catholicism Past and Present* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 78-79.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-79, 81.

<sup>16</sup> Wilfred McClay, “The Catholic Moment in American Social Thought,” in *Catholics in the American Century: Recasting Narratives of U.S. History*, ed. Scott Appleby and Kathleen Sprows Cummings (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 139.

<sup>17</sup> Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 11; Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 259.

Navigating a crisis of identity, however, was not an exclusively Catholic issue. Marty Martin argues that Protestant distinctiveness was also vanishing.<sup>18</sup> As previously noted, Southern Baptists and their evangelical bretheren were upwardly mobile after WWII to a degree unimaginable earlier in the century. Faced with rapid national expansion, urbanization, climbing internal wealth, and growing calls for centralization, southern evangelicals actively reworked their interpretation of democratic individualism and antiestablishment militantism.<sup>19</sup> Like Catholics, Protestants began splitting internally along conservative and liberal lines.<sup>20</sup>

As old distinctions between Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism blurred, a great realignment began. Kevin Schultz notes how the most contentious points dividing the ‘three faiths of democracy’ were largely settled in courts, classrooms, and communities by the end of the 1960s. As a result, conservative Protestants, Catholics, and Jews began to see more in common with each other than with the liberals in their respective faiths. Adopting a kind of “co-belligerency,” conservatives came to feel that “there might be nothing wrong with befriending a Catholic or Jew who would march with them in anti-abortion rallies or ‘pro-family’ parades.”<sup>21</sup> Those in the left wing of each religion felt likewise. “No longer were antipathies between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews animating social change,” Schultz argues, “rather, the force behind change was the aversion between liberals of all faiths and conservatives of all faiths.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Martin, *Righteous Empire*, 259.

<sup>19</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), xv, xxiii.

<sup>20</sup> D.G. Hart, *The Politics of Faith During the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 1-11; Martin, *Righteous Empire*, 263.

<sup>21</sup> Shultz, *Tri-Faith America*, 136, 200-201.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 202.

I call this phenomenon ‘polar ecumenism,’ and it is the nexus around which modern cross-faith alliances form. In the decades that followed the rise of tri-faith civic religion, the Kennedy election, and Vatican II, polar ecumenism replaced Southernization as the driving force behind religious institution building in Tennessee. As regionalism gave way to political tribalism, a church’s position along the liberal-conservative spectrum became a more important identifier of social position than liturgy or heritage. Tension between conservatism and liberalism was well-trodden territory for all three faiths, but inter-faith alliance-building at each extreme was new. Today, such alliances make it increasingly difficult to discern a distinct ‘Catholic position,’ ‘Protestant position,’ or ‘Jewish position’ on a given topic. Modern calls by conservative Protestants, Catholics, and Jews for government aid for private religious schools offer a prime example.<sup>23</sup> Such cooperation in favor of school funding would have been unthinkable at mid-century.

### **The Echoes of Absence**

Like James Simmons Timothy forty-five years prior, Kennedy’s death also marked a rebirth. Both men were enshrined as ‘hero sons’ for their patriotic sacrifices. In death, both became bridges between Catholics and their surrounding communities. Neither, however, operated within a social vacuum. Instead, both stood on the shoulders of those that came before to lift those who came after. For Kennedy, the legacies of Al Smith, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Dwight Eisenhower loomed large. Smith had proven that a Catholic could make a legitimate run for the presidency even in a time period when social conditions were too hostile

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<sup>23</sup> Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 12.

for him to win. Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower had inadvertently cleared a path for Kennedy through their individual efforts to build tri-faith Americanism for their own political ends. In Kennedy's wake, later generations of Catholics were able to find common cause with their Protestant and Jewish counterparts on either end of the political spectrum and engage the American political machine as full participants.

James Timothy also owed much to his predecessors. The diligence of his immigrant father and uncles in building the Timothy name as one that could stand respectably among the rising merchant elite of Nashville gave him, his brother, and the entire Irish Catholic community a firm, legitimized social footing on which to stand. The work of diocesan leaders like Bishops Byrne and Smith as well as that of energetic lay societies like the Knights of Columbus and the Catholic press further cleared a path toward Americanization and, later, Southernization. In death, Timothy and his memorial provided a tangible reminder of Irish Catholic patriotism and loyalty and created greater opportunities for fraternity and interfaith cooperation. In the years that followed, his brother, cousins, nephew, and others seized those opportunities to better their own fortunes and, simultaneously, further the cause of Catholic inclusion. New newspapers rose to provide light for Catholic hearthstones and outlets for Catholic perspectives under the guidance of an increasingly energetic diocese led by Bishop Adrian. Trailer missionaries plunged into the backwoods, and Catholic churches rose from the soil where their feet trod. Tennessee Catholicity likewise rose in prominence and legitimacy until it reached the distant halls of Vatican power at the same moment that a Catholic reached the White House. With that legacy in mind, I resolved in October of 2021 to make a pilgrimage to Timothy's tree to reflect on his legacy.

The day was bright and warm when I arrived at Centennial Park to visit Timothy's tree. Parking near the rear of the historic greenspace, I strolled through the grounds on my way to the front of the Great Lawn. On my way, I passed the Parthenon, a structure originally built as a temporarily monument to Tennessee's centennial celebration in 1897, which Timothy's uncle, Oliver, oversaw as director. By 1920, however, the Parthenon became such a recognizable and potent symbol for Nashville's status as the 'Athens of the South' that it was rebuilt as a permanent fixture.<sup>24</sup> As I walked through its imposing shadow, I considered how something as alien to the Bible Belt South as a Grecian temple could, given time and the proper context, become a socio-political fixture as native as the tulip poplars that surround it.

I next passed the Tennessee Women Suffrage Monument. Large bronze statues of five leading suffragettes, including Anne Dallas Dudley, stared back at me. Dudley delivered a historic speech from that spot in May 1916 as part of the largest women's rally in Nashville's history. Dozens of automobiles had followed Dudley and her fellow marchers from the state capitol to the park as flowers rained down from office windows high above. Ironically, many of



the blooms were dropped by women who were not allowed to leave work despite the city-wide holiday declared by the city's Irish-backed mayor, Hilary Howse. Both elegant and eloquent, Dudley answered

Figure 46: "Marching Suffragists," Tennessee Virtual Archives, accessed June 11, 2022, <https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org>

<sup>24</sup> Parthenon, "About the Parthenon," About, accessed June 6, 2022, <https://www.nashvilleparthenon.com/history>.

arguments that only men should vote because they could bear arms in war by reminding her critics that “Women bear armies.”<sup>25</sup> Like Catholics, she and her allies harnessed participation in World War I to crack the barricades of male suffrage and stake their claim as rightful heirs of democracy. In fact, she was present at the Timothy memorial dedication just three years after giving her 1916 speech. As I studied the banners that she and her fellow activists held aloft as emblems of both their distinctiveness as women and sameness as Americans, I reflected on the potential for social change that exists in the grey area between insiderhood and outsiderhood.

Walking the final few hundred feet down the tree-lined boundaries of the lawn, I remembered M.T. Bryan’s prediction that future generations of Nashvillians would undoubtedly find rest, relaxation, and a sense of patriotism beneath the hackberry’s branches. After all, the tree wasn’t a cold marble monolith or abstract art piece like the other monuments in the park. It was a living reminder of a community’s sacrifice that welcomed contemplation and self-reflection. Though frisbees, footballs, and free Wi-Fi seemed to occupy the minds of park-goers more than the struggles and triumphs documented on the numerous plaques, I held out hope that Timothy’s tree might still inspire in me some of what Bryan had predicted.

In the final moments before reaching the tree’s location, I marveled at the changes around me. As a lifelong resident of Middle Tennessee, I knew Centennial Park well. I visited many times as a child and again as a student at Vanderbilt University, which sits just across West End Avenue from the park’s entrance. While the park’s reputation for safety and cleanliness had suffered toward the end of the twentieth century, it underwent major renovations in the 2010s to modernize its facilities and restore its image. According to the Centennial Master Plan Committee, the updates would retain the park’s status as Nashville’s “crown jewel” by both

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<sup>25</sup> Jessica Bliss, “Alan LeQuire's Women Suffrage Monument unveiled in Nashville's Centennial Park,” *The Tennessean*, August 26, 2016, 1H.

honoring its past and accommodating modern needs.<sup>26</sup> Wider sidewalks would beckon visitors to thoroughly explore the park grounds. New event spaces would encourage gatherings for concerts, craft fairs, and cultural celebrations. In short, the modernized park was meant to embody Bryan's vision of a sacred communal space.

When I reached the end of the lawn, however, I froze. I stood where Timothy's memorial should have been, but only blank concrete stretched in front of me. The tree was gone. Perplexed, I re-checked the coordinates and re-read my sources. The memorial was clearly listed as a contributing object in the park's 2008 National Register of Historic Places registration form. The NRHP form confirmed that the memorial should have been one thousand feet from the entrance to the park from West End Avenue.<sup>27</sup> Though old oaks and magnolias stood all around, both the hackberry and its marker were gone. I rushed back to the visitor's center to inquire about the memorial's fate. The attendant looked at me blankly and handed me a pamphlet that purported to list every memorial in the park. There was no mention of Timothy's tree. It and its marker had simply vanished.

### **What Is Lasting, What Is Gone**

In the weeks that followed, I contacted multiple park and municipal officials about the memorial's fate, but silence was the most frequent response. Official documents showed that the city had commissioned a tree study in 2019 that marked 52 of the 414 hackberries in the park in "poor" condition. Perhaps disease, defect, or merely the long passage of a century had caused

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<sup>26</sup> Gustafson Guthrie Nichol, "Centennial Park Master Plan," December 2010, accessed June 11, 2022, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6022faf9ee791718f6cf0b87/t/607899d74808ad1494b667c8/1618516455277/Master+Plan.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Katie Merzbacher, Elizabeth Moore, and Tara Mielnik, "Centennial Park," National Register of Historic Places (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2008): Section 7, page 10, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/d8af6481-8d98-40dc-ae7c-57de045d0dfa>.

Timothy's tree to be among those flagged for removal. After all, the last confirmed photograph of the tree circa 2017 revealed that some of its branches were already bare. It is impossible to tell from the park's report, however, if Timothy's tree was indeed among those targeted for removal as diseased specimens were counted without remark to location or purpose. Frustrated, I returned to the tree's former location for one last visit.



*Figure 47: Lieutenant James Simmons Timothy Monument in Graham Jack Henderson, "Remembering the Boys: First World War Monuments in Des Moines, Iowa, and Nashville, Tennessee," Master's Thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2017.*

As I stood on the flashy new sidewalk built where the hackberry should have been, I pondered what the tree's disappearance suggested about the mainstreaming of Catholicism in Tennessee. In the decades following the memorial's dedication, the Diocese of Nashville

became a potent institution that left enduring marks on Tennessee's social, political, and physical landscape. Its newspapers helped shape the contours of what it meant to be Catholic in Tennessee and contributed to a growing sense of local indigeneity that slowly eroded the divisions between Catholics and their neighbors. Its expansive parochial school system grew alongside public and Protestant counterparts, achieving a level of legitimacy that ultimately facilitated new alliances across the religious spectrum in post-Kennedy era. Its churches spread to nearly every county in the state, creating an enduring physical representation of Catholic presence. Through all that time, Timothy's tree had stood watch in Centennial Park, disappearing only once the newspapers, schools, and churches had ensured that the label Catholic no longer carried the exclusionary connotation that it once did.

A few hundred yards away from where I stood was the Gold Star Memorial at the corner of West End Avenue and 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Erected in 1922 by the Nashville Kiwanis Club, the memorial bears the names of all the soldiers from Davidson County who died in World War I. Metal plaques beneath on the eastern and western sides list the names of the fallen soldiers alongside the inscription: "I Gave My Best to Make A Better World."<sup>28</sup> Though James Simmons Timothy's name is engraved near the bottom of the western facing plaque, the memorial provides no context for Timothy's life or death. George Zolnay's sculpture of an unnamed soldier held by an allegorical figure atop the memorial implies that Timothy and his fellow soldiers were equals in their sacrifice for state and country. Timothy is not listed as the son of Irish immigrants. He is not distinguished as a Catholic. He is simply a hero son, a Tennessean, and an American.

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<sup>28</sup> United States Department of the Interior, "National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet: Supplementary Listing Record," NRIS Reference Number 08000689, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/d8af6481-8d98-40dc-ae7c-57de045d0dfa>.

When a tree is felled, its leaves, branches, and trunk are removed. The visible structures that distinguished it from the skyline disappear. The roots, however, remain. Entrenched by years of struggle against natural forces seeking to dislodge them, the roots of one tree enmesh themselves with those of its neighbors to form a scaffold for life at the surface. The connections are as imperceptible as they are indispensable. For nearly a century, Timothy's hackberry stood as an emblem for the purposeful crusade by Tennessee Catholics to enmesh themselves just as imperceptibly and indispensably into the social, political, and economic fabric of Tennessee. It bore witness to the suffrage movement, the civil rights movement, and the arrival of new waves of immigrants from parts of the world wholly unknown to Nashvillians when its roots first sank into Southern soil. As successive groups faced their own struggles for acceptance, their plight would have been familiar to Irish Catholics at the turn of the century. Yet when a new millennium dawned, Timothy's tree had grown old and the Catholic crusade it represented had slipped from public memory. As Nashville readied itself for a new era of growth and prosperity, updating and reinventing the park that had played host to the previous century's struggles for equality, the tree quietly came down. Churches, schools, and social clubs with Irish names and Catholic affiliations no longer provoked suspicion. The efforts of Irish Catholics and their diocese to Americanize, Southernize, modernize, and expand had lifted Catholicism from existing in a state of pluralism of toleration to one of inclusion and, finally, participation.

Perhaps it is time to restore Timothy's tree and marker not as a memorial to what is gone or an aspiration for what might still be but as a recognition of the enduring change that occurs when a group and its institutions steadfastly pursue their rightful place within a pluralistic society. Until that day comes, new generations of Nashvillians will pass along the wide paths of

Centennial Park unaware and unperturbed that the ground on which they stand is supported by Irish Catholic roots.

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