

A Flame Upon the Hearthstones:
The Columbian, The Cresset, and Tennessee Catholicity, 1915-1932

by

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ABSTRACT

For nearly a hundred years, a hackberry tree dedicated to the memory of an Irish Catholic soldier who perished fighting in the First World War stood in Nashville, Tennessee.

Though historians have largely overlooked its significance, the living memorial to James Simmons Timothy was symbolic of a larger struggle by Irish Catholics to integrate into Southern society. This project explores the ways in which Catholic institutions like the Knights of Columbus and Diocese of Nashville used the press to further their assimilative campaigns before, during, and after World War I. Two papers, *The Columbian* and *The Cresset*, provide a rich base of primary source material. *The Columbian* illuminates how Irish Catholic activism during the war years led to a regionally distinct form of assimilation that I call Southernization. *The Cresset* chronicles how Nashville's Irish Catholic community harnessed its assimilative successes in World War I and the beginning of the 1920s to stake a claim to indigeneity by the end of the decade.

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Introduction

James Simmons Timothy and Pre-World War I Irish America

In March 1861, President Lincoln spoke of mystic chords that stretch invisibly from battlefield to patriot grave. If touched by our better angels, these cords of memory can swell the chorus of Union and bind the variegated facets of American society into one people. Echoing down the yawning vale war, Lincoln's words were a plea for national unity in a moment when it seemed all but impossible. Divergent sectional ideologies on race and republicanism tore at the seams of government and society alike in 1861. That very year, the chords would snap beneath the weight of sectionalism and plunge the nation into the smoke and fog of war. Yet war is not always so destructive. In Lincoln's own assessment, the chords which bore the hope of our salvation were grounded in battlefields and graves. One need only perceive their presence in order to wield their potential. Fifty-three years later, Lincoln's mythic chords wound themselves around a young hackberry tree at the crossroads of the South. By linking the death of a native son on the distant battlefields of France with the plight of an entire ethnic community living in the burgeoning Southern capital of Nashville, Tennessee, the memorialization of James Simmons Timothy swelled the chorus of Union to patriotic fervor and created an avenue for Irish-American Catholics to end their long struggle for acceptance.

* * *

Memorialization Day

The heady notes of “America” drifted across the great lawn of Centennial Park on a late-spring afternoon in May 1919. 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. Prevented by foul weather from meeting the week prior, weather of exceptional quality blessed the day. “The bright sunlight of heaven poured in a golden flood upon the rich, fresh grass,” gushed an attending reporter from the *Nashville Banner*. The diverse members of this patriotic 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 patriotism and sacrifice round its purposefully exposed roots.¹

Among the attendees were figures that 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 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

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

them. Leaders from Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic organizations also comingled round the fragile sapling.²

Against the imposing figure of the Parthenon, the small hackberry must have seemed to many in attendance an odd choice to memorialize 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 and 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."³

Timothy, 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?

² "Memorial to Lieut. Timothy," *Nashville Banner*, June 1, 1919.

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

James Simmons Timothy

James Simmons Timothy was born November 18, 1892 to Patrick H. and Elenora Timothy. Patrick, a semi-literate dry goods merchant from Ireland, lived with his family at 206 Woodland St. in East Nashville's 17th Ward.⁴ This address placed the family well outside the often crowded, low-income Irish neighborhoods of the 6th Ward, commonly known as Little Ireland.⁵ Both James and his younger brother, Patrick Henry, Jr., went on to attend college at prestigious institutions like Vanderbilt University, St. Mary's College, Catholic University, Army and Navy College, and West Point.⁶

By 1916, James settled into the role of paymaster at the DuPont de Nemours plant in Wilmington, Delaware. Though he received an appointment to West Point from Democratic Congressman Horatio Claypool of Ohio, he ultimately transferred his acceptance to P.H., Jr., because he was two years older than the legal limit for entrance. As a result, he was 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



Figure 1: "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>.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, "Twelfth Census of the United States: Schedule No. 1 – Population," https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/imageviewer/collections/7602/images/4118952_00308?pid=69887189.

⁵ James Joseph Flanagan, "The Irish Element in Nashville, 1810-1890" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1951), 30.

⁶ "Timothy, James Simmons," Tennessee World War I Gold Star Records, 1918-1924, Tennessee Virtual Archive, <https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll26/id/11382/rec/1>.

Training Camp at Plattsburg, New York, in August of that same year. Commissioned as a Second Lieutenant by November, he set sail for France in January 1918. At their last meeting, his mother admonished him, “In danger and out of danger, my son, do not forget your God, your Creator.”⁷

Once in France, Timothy entered the French War College to master the newest battlefield tactics, ultimately receiving the third highest rating in his class. In March, he joined the 80th Company, 6th Marines, and set out for the front lines. Though he suffered injuries from a gas attack on May 31, he refused to leave his platoon. After returning as one of only five men to survive an ‘over the top’ charge of over 200 soldiers at the Battle of Belleau Wood, Timothy was struck by artillery shrapnel. According to his Captain, Timothy was struck while bragging about his younger brother’s wedding, which was happening that very day. Held in his captain’s arms, his final words were reportedly, “Into Thy hands, My God, I give my soul.”⁸ Even at the moment of death, the devoted Catholic son kept his promise to never forget his Creator.

Prior to his death, Timothy earned a reputation for heroics. According to members of his platoon, he would kneel and pray before leading charges into no man’s land, exclaiming “Boys let us go over the top in God’s name – let it be for God and Country!” In a letter to his mother, one of Timothy’s men said that all under his command would “go through fire and water and worse with their gallant Lieutenant.”

⁷ “Timothy, James Simmons,” Tennessee World War I Gold Star Records.

⁸ Ibid.

Even General John Pershing wrote of Timothy's "fearlessness and fortitude" following his death.⁹

A patriotic death, however, cannot account for Timothy's memorial. Such deaths 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 was the first Davidson County resident to die in the war. His ship, the *Tuscania*, was torpedoed off the coast of Ireland in February 1918. Mocker was the son of a well-known businessman, a graduate of Nashville's public school system, and a member of Second Presbyterian Church. He had also proven himself a capable worker the local lumber industry at a relatively young age.¹⁰ He was, in short, a far more likely candidate for 'hero son' status than Timothy, who was the son of an semi-literate Irish merchant, a product of the parochial school system, and a member of the Diocese of Nashville.¹¹

John Williams Overton, who was killed in just five days after Timothy while leading the same 80th Company of Marines, was the archetype Nashvillian. Handsome, athletic, and born into a bloodline of Tennessee aristocracy extending back to the state's founding, the Yale-educated track and field champion exuded the type of "moral and physical strength" that defined the growing "Muscular Christianity" movement.¹²

⁹ "Timothy, James Simmons," Tennessee World War I Gold Star Records.

¹⁰ "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>.

¹¹ "U.S. Census Bureau, "Twelfth Census of the United States: Schedule No. 1 – Population," https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/imageviewer/collections/7602/images/4118952_00308?pId=69887189; "Timothy, James Simmons," Tennessee World War I Gold Star Records.

¹² 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>.

Yet neither Overton nor Mocker drew the large crowd to Centennial Park that sunny Saturday afternoon in May. In fact, neither man ever received a dedicated memorial. The only soldier to receive such an honor was Timothy. Why? The answer to that question 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.¹³ I argue that Timothy and his tree became conduits for a deliberate effort by the Catholic press to advance the cause of assimilation via participation in World War I. The peculiarities of the Irish-American experience in the South narrowed this process to one of Southernization, which then evolved into arguments for indigeneity and ethnic pride.

Roots

Representatives from all the major organizations present at the memorial were asked to toss a spade of Southern soil over top of 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.” Judge M.T. Bryan stated in his memorial address that “such is the unity and spirit of the nation, that it 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

¹³ “Timothy, James Simmons,” Tennessee World War I Gold Star Records.

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.”¹⁴ This is not to say Irish Catholics made no previous attempts at achieving social acceptance. The Timothy memorial was just the latest in a long line of assimilative junctures for Southern Irish and by no means the first associated with warfare.

The historiography of Catholicism and the Catholic press in the United States focuses primarily on major urban hubs in the North, Midwest, and West where significant Catholic populations historically gathered. When Southern locations are considered, the focus is typically on the influx of Irish Catholic immigrants during the antebellum and Civil War eras. The potato famine, political machines, the Know Nothing Party, and the American Protective Association dominate such works. Efforts by Irish immigrants to harness participation in the Civil War on behalf of both sides is present but does not extend to connect with other wars in the twentieth century.¹⁵

Mid-twentieth century historians emphasize the use of World War I by Irish Catholics as an assimilative mechanism for displaying patriotism. Carl Wittke argues that Irish-Americans and German-Americans often worked together to harness war mobilization as a means of assimilation despite their previous opposition to war in 1914-1917. “The hyphen,” Wittke insists, “dissolved in the heat of war.”¹⁶ Joseph Edward Cuddy agrees that “Celtic patriotism” among Irish Americans was transformed by U.S.

¹⁴ Memorial to Lieut. Timothy,” *Nashville Banner*, June 1, 1919.

¹⁵ Philip Gleason, “The Historiography of American Catholicism as Reflected in ‘The Catholic Historical Review,’ 1915-2015, *The Catholic Historical Review* 101, no. 2 (Centennial Issue 2015): 156-222, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43898524>.

¹⁶ Carl Whittke, *The Irish in America* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1956), 283.

mobilization efforts “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.”¹⁷ Lynn Dumenil notes that the anticommunist rhetoric adopted by Catholic Americans during the 1920s was also part of a deliberate strategy to capitalize on war-time assimilative victories and further solidify Catholicism’s place in a pluralistic American society.¹⁸ 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. Additional scholarship focuses on Catholic declarations of patriotism to counter specific nativist entities, such as the APA, the Ku Klux Klan, and *The Menace*.¹⁹

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.²⁰ Michael P. Mulcrone agrees that Irish newspapers begrudgingly replaced expressions of

¹⁷ Joseph Edward Cuddy, *Irish-America and National Isolationism, 1914-1920* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 138-139.

¹⁸ 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>.

¹⁹ 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>.

²⁰ Joseph P. O’Grady, *How the Irish Became Americans* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1973), 125.

Anglophobia and Irish nationalism with overtly pro-American language only after the Congressional war declaration left them with few alternatives. Papers who continued to criticize Allied governments faced potential backlash from the government for anti-war activities.²¹

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 war effort.²² 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.²³ Historian Richard Gid Powers makes a similar argument regarding anti-communist impulses within the Irish Catholic community in the 1920s. He argues that Catholic anticommunism was an expression of “defiant separation” from an American mainstream against which it felt at war.²⁴

²¹ Michael P. Mulcrone, “The World War I Censorship of the Irish-American Press” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1993), 104. ProQuest Dissertations & Thesis Global.

²² 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.

²³ 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.

²⁴ 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>.

What is missing most from the historiography of Catholic assimilation in America is a consideration of place. Most of the historiographical work done on Catholic activism in the twentieth century focuses on major 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 Catholic populations that were multiplying rapidly 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 nativist, anti-Catholic sentiments that pitted significant divisions of the population against one another. 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."²⁵

While Dumenil's argument is likely true for the urban cultural battlefields of the North, I explore how circumstances differed in the South and, specifically, Tennessee. When historians have included Southern locations in their work, they focus on states like Alabama, Georgia, and Arkansas.²⁶ I argue that the tone and content of papers like *The Columbian* and *The Cresset* imply that Catholics living within the Diocese of Nashville achieved social acceptance and experienced less anti-Catholic antagonism after World War I than Catholics living in other areas.

²⁵ Dumenil, "The Tribal Twenties," 25-26.

²⁶ 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*.

Note on Terminology

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 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. Conversely, those same newcomers were included as “true Americans” by ‘native’ citizens far faster than their Catholic brethren.²⁷ 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.

Additionally, while Irish Catholics began arriving in America prior to 1840, the following section will focus on major events involving Irish-Americans between 1840 and 1917. This period coincides with the height of the Great Famine, which accelerated the immigration of Irish Catholics to the United States. Five major events lend clarity to the relationship between Irish-Americans and ‘natives’ during this period: Daniel O’Connell’s Repeal Movement, the rise of the Know Nothing Party, Irish participation in the American Civil War, and the Anti-Hyphen Campaign of 1915.²⁸

²⁷ Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish: A History* (New York: Pearson Education Inc, 2000), 1-2.

²⁸ Wittke notes that a total of five potato famines between 1817 and 1848 contributed to the increasing numbers of immigrants to America. He concludes that “the immediate effect of the potato crisis of the closing years of that decade [1840s] may have been exaggerated” (7). Given that most of the existing literature accepts the greater impact of the late 1840s famine, however, this paper will follow suit.

O'Connell's Repeal Movement

In 1840, Daniel O'Connell, a well-known Member of Parliament in Ireland, launched an all-out assault on the British Act of Union. 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. The movement quickly became trans-Atlantic. Repeal organizations formed in 1840 in the Irish enclaves of the North and then spread to the South and West by 1843.²⁹

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 one might presume that Irish-Americans, who had faced oppression at the hands of the British, might find common cause with enslaved African Americans and support abolition, the opposite was true. 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. Irish immigrants in the South were also in direct competition with

²⁹ 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; Wittke, *The Irish in America*, 127.

slaves and freemen for the most menial and dangerous jobs. Abolition would have only exacerbated that competition.³⁰

William Shannon notes that the American Irish were “the newest and least secure members of society” and, as a result, were “the most rigid and least generous in extending their sympathy to a submerged minority like the Negroes.” Noel Ignatiev points out that “while white skin made the Irish eligible for membership in the white race, it did not guarantee their admission.” The Irish had to prove their worthiness for inclusion in order to secure the advantages “whiteness” conveyed in a competitive society. Defying nativist accusations of papal influence, Irish-American opinions remained firmly anti-abolition throughout the antebellum period despite declarations from the Vatican against the slave trade. In fact, some Irish Catholics in the South managed to escape the laboring class and owned slaves themselves.³¹

As a result, Irish-Americans in the South had to navigate dueling loyalties to their old and new homes. Quinlan argues that the South was particularly irksome 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. Regardless, many Irish-Americans “still felt significant ties to their homeland” and, as a result, continued to promote the core goals of the Repeal

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ 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.

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 ever 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.³²

The Know-Nothing Movement

By the 1850s, waves of 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 were able to exert considerable political influence nationally. Capitalizing on growing tensions regarding slavery, they promoted anti-Catholicism and anti-immigration as "safer" political targets around which former Whigs and future Republicans could coalesce.³³

³² Quinlan, *Strange Kin*, 6, 148-149; Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 193; Murphy, "Slavery, Irish Nationalism, and Irish American Identity," 148-149.

³³ Kenny, *The American Irish*, 116-117; Shannon, *The American Irish*, 45-46; Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 8.

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 all immigrants remained only a "secondary and contingent" goal. Coopting 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 would learn proper "American" customs.³⁴

In the South, however, Catholic communities lacked the size and political power to fuel Know-Nothingism. W. Darrell Overdyke argues that some Southern Unionists turned to the Know-Nothing Party as a sort of social safety valve meant to defuse increasing sectional animosities among "native Americans" by redirecting resentment toward Catholics and immigrants. Many conservative Southerners were weary of the explosive tensions building around the slavery issue, and the party's anti-Catholicism offered a welcomed and, according to Overdyke, "natural" diversion. Appearing in Tennessee around 1854 as the American Party, the Know-Nothings were welcomed by the *Tennessee Baptist*. According to the paper, a "foreign element" consisting of "foreign Catholics and German infidels" sought to overthrow the Bible in public schools and

³⁴ Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 110, 135-136.

“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. It acknowledged the rights of all Christians to worship God freely without interference and opposed the “Union of Church and State.” Know-Nothings in Tennessee expressed only mild nativism compared to their Northern counterparts all the way through 1857, focusing primarily on foreign voters in the territories.³⁵

The party’s regional successes, however, were fleeting. The divisiveness of slavery proved just as fatal for the Know-Nothings as it had been for the Whigs. Northern and Southern branches of the party simply could not reach a consensus on the issue. In Tennessee’s 1857 gubernatorial campaign, Democrat Isham G. Harris successfully undermined the candidacy of Know-Nothing Robert Hatton by emphasizing the strong vein of abolitionism within Northern Know-Nothing branches.³⁶ In line with their stance on the O’Connell movement, Democratic-minded Irish Catholics doubled down in favor of the peculiar institution and their Southern homeland just as war crested on the horizon.

The American Civil War

The onset of hostilities between North and South in 1861 provided a golden opportunity for Southern Irish Catholics to prove their loyalty. It was easy for many

³⁵ W. Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Binghamton: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), v-vi, 66-67, 90.

³⁶ Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South*, 266-267.

Irishmen to draw on the similarities between the Confederacy's struggle for independence and that of their Irish homeland. The Confederacy's desire to chart its own political and social path fit well with Irish nationalism. Kenny argues that the military contributions of Irish volunteers was crucial for their assimilative campaign as violence provided an avenue through which Irish and Irish-American identity was formed. 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, five major Confederate generals came from Irish stock, including Cleburne, Finnegan, Hagan, Lane, and Moore. While economic hardship eventually eroded Irish enthusiasm for the war, many Irish Southerners remained loyal to the cause even in defeat.³⁷

For its part, the Confederate government sent envoys across the Atlantic to Ireland to "propagandize for the southern cause." The Confederates highlighted issues with the Know-Nothing Party in Northern states and insisted that Irish Catholics would feel far more "at home" in the Confederacy than in the Union. The South presented itself as a haven where Irishmen could live free from the political antagonism that characterized Northern industrial cities. Historian Hallie Wilk agrees that lower levels of nativism in the South allowed Irish immigrants to assimilate faster than in other areas.³⁸

³⁷Hallie 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.

³⁸ Wittke, *The Irish in America*, 148; Wilk, "Tennessee's Irish," 31.

While the Confederacy was wooing 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 these assaults further alienated them from mainstream Northern society and produced a wave of “sustained and virulent anti-Irish sentiment” that far exceeded anything seen in the South. Actions by 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. In what Thomas D’Archy McGee called proof that the Irish in America were still an “alien population, camped but not settled,” bands of Irish-American Fenians launched multiple attacks on Canadian towns in the spring of 1866. In a complete reversal of Fenian hopes, the British and American navies worked together to frustrate Fenian operations. The Fenians’ presumption to use “their adopted country as a base for military operations” to invade a peaceful neighbor further soured public opinion on the Irish in the North. In the end, it appears that the greatest advance managed by the Northern Irish-Americans in the Civil War was the growing myth of Irish-American courage on the battlefield. This contrasted sharply with the assimilative gains made by Irish Catholics living in Southern states in the same period. For them, the war had offered an

opportunity to prove their loyalty to their new home, and they had done so convincingly.³⁹

The American Protective Association

The post-Civil War period saw a surge in anti-Catholic movements promoted in large part by Protestant Scots-Irishmen. Viewing anti-Catholicism as an effective means of furthering their own assimilation, Scots-Irish organizations like the Loyal Orange Institution promoted the perception that impoverished Irish Catholics were incompatible with American citizenship. Established in 1867, the movement became so successful that by 1914 the Orange Order could boast 364 lodges and 30,000 members. These lodges then helped further the development of other anti-Catholic organizations. One of the most infamous in the late nineteenth century was 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 Western phenomenon, 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 and await a signal from the Pope to massacre American Protestants, drove the group's growth.⁴⁰

³⁹ 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, <https://ezproxy.mtsu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/irish-american-identity-memory-americanism-during/docview/1011473147/se-2?accountid=4886>; Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 156-157.

⁴⁰ Kenny, *The American Irish*, 158-159; Wittke, *The Irish in America*, 123-124.

In the South, however, the APA had a harder time gaining traction. Though the San Francisco based *APA Magazine* listed the *Memphis American* and *Nashville Patriotic Herald* as two “patriotic press” institutions associated with its message, neither newspaper appears to have achieved widespread readership. Additionally, an 1894 APA Congressional “Roll of Honor did not list a single Tennessean.”⁴¹ Despite the large number of Scots-Irish living in the South, the relatively small size of the Irish Catholic population made rumors of Catholic uprisings less ominous. APA leadership was also closely associated with the Republican Party. Given that Irish Catholics had already used the Civil War to demonstrate their loyalty to both the institution of slavery and the Democratic Party, they successfully painted the APA as an alien organization too closely associated with the ‘Yankee’ Republican powers. As a result, the APA never grew in the South to the degree that it did elsewhere. By 1896, the group had also lost support nationally. Issues like bimetallism, imperialism, and a recovering economy dampened the appeal of its anti-Catholic propaganda.⁴²

Anti-Hyphen Campaign of 1915

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Irish-Americans living in the South found themselves straddling two identities. Catholicism remained the primary pillar on which Irish identity stood. “To be Irish,” insists Joseph O’Grady, “was to be Catholic.”⁴³ Yet

⁴¹ Donald L. Kinzer, *An Episode of Anti-Catholicism: The American Protective Association* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), 255-260.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ O’Grady, *How the Irish Became Americans*, 107.

their Catholic faith did not align with the religious preferences of their fellow Southerners. Irish Catholics survived the anti-Catholic campaigns of the Know-Nothings and APA because they did not straddle the fence on slavery and proved fiercely loyal to the Democratic Party. Whether coerced by the machinations of an urban political machines or acting out of genuine self-interest, the overwhelming support by Irish-Americans for Democratic candidates augmented their political influence relative to their numbers and overall wealth. 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.⁴⁴

Beginning in 1915, however, Irish Catholics came under heavy fire by prominent leaders, including Democrats like Woodrow 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.⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁴ 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), 225, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 220.

Despite gains in respectability in their adopted homeland, Irish Americans were unwilling to abandon the dream of Irish Home Rule.⁴⁶

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 like the Irish.⁴⁷

The derogatory use of the term hyphen originated with Theodore Roosevelt in 1894. He argued that “some Americans need hyphens in their names because only part of them has come over.”⁴⁸ 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

⁴⁶ Mulcrone, “The World War I Censorship of the Irish-American Press,” 104.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 73, 163.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 165.

campaign “left an enduring scar upon the public image of the Irish,” especially in the North.⁴⁹

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 torturous lengths to reconcile their conflicting sentiments.”⁵⁰ 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 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 American Revolution and Civil War, the *Western Watchmen* argued that immigrants and their children were more likely to enlist than their unhyphenated brethren.⁵¹

A 24 year-old James Simmons Timothy volunteered for service in the midst of this ideological turmoil. Leaving his well-paid position at DuPont in Delaware to enlist in Plattsburg, New York, he was a living example of the idealized immigrant volunteer promoted by the Northern Irish press. In choosing Plattsburg, Timothy also became part

⁴⁹ Ibid, 165, 179.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, 184-186.

of a movement for universal military obligation known as the Plattsburg movement. Launched in 1915 by Major General Leonard Wood, the movement aimed to increase the country's military preparedness by organizing citizens' military training camps. The organizers also hoped the camps would have democratizing and Americanizing effects by allowing recruits to rise in rank on merit regardless of income level or immigrant status. General Wood insisted that the training system would "heat up the Melting Pot," and Assistant Secretary of War Henry Skillman Breckenridge hoped it would "yank the hyphen out of America." By 1917, the Plattsburg Movement spawned sixteen "ninety day" Officer Training Camps (OTC) meant to produce commissioned officers with basic military training who were ready to assume command on the battlefields of France. Two such camps were located in Plattsburg.⁵²

When Timothy arrived in Plattsburg in August 1929, he joined the second OTC class of 1917, which trained from August to November. Placed in Company 16 of the

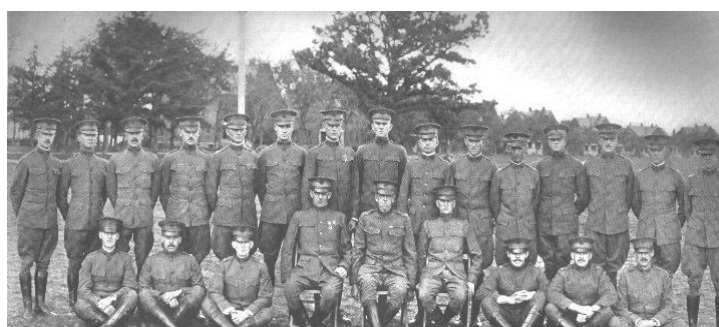


Figure 2: Selection of trainees in the 18th Provisional Training Regiment (Timothy not pictured). "Plattsburg, New York Training Camp, 1917," New River Notes, Grayson County Virginia Heritage Foundation, accessed June 21, 2022, https://www.newrivernotes.com/topical_history_ww1_trainingcamps_plattsburgnewyork.htm.

18th Provisional Training Regiment, he was surrounded with hundreds of young men from primarily New York. The town of Plattsburg proved an ideal location for their rapid education. One hundred and

fifty miles north of Albany, the city was accessible by train, car, and ferry. Rolling

⁵² John Garry Clifford, *The Citizen Soldiers: The Plattsburg Training Camp Movement, 1913-1920* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 195, 200, 228-235.

terrain, numerous streams, and nearby Lake Champlain provided a variety of landscapes for practicing military maneuvers. Stands of maple and oak enclosed the camp on three sides. Cumberland Bay, a part of Lake Champlain, composed the fourth side and provided a welcomed evening respite for the exhausted officers-in-training. While the town boasted enough modern conveniences to suit visitors and tourists, the area around the city was sparsely populated, which reduced the risk of complaint from the noise of regular artillery drills.⁵³ Timothy emerged from Plattsburg in November 1917 as a second lieutenant. On January 12, 1919, he set sail for France, never to return.⁵⁴

Timothy, however, was a small cog in the rapidly growing American war machine. The OTCs alone churned out 27,000 officers before the end of the war.⁵⁵ As a result, Timothy's enlistment garnered no specific press coverage back home by local newspapers in Nashville. Despite two mentions of his brother, P.H. Timothy, Jr., in *The Columbian* between 1915 and 1916, James's first appearance in the Nashville press came only in death and, even then, in the mainstream *Nashville Banner* instead of the Catholic *Columbian*. This lack of press in the Catholic newspapers, however, did not mean that Nashville's Irish Catholics were sitting by idly as James fought and died on the Western Front. To the contrary, they were waging a cultural struggle for acceptance through the press. The chapters that follow chronicle that story.

⁵³ "Plattsburg, New York Training Camp, 1917," New River Notes, Grayson County Virginia Heritage Foundation, accessed June 21, 2022, https://www.newrivenotes.com/topical_history_ww1_trainingcamps_plattsburgnewyork.htm; Clifford, *The Citizen Soldiers*, 70-71.

⁵⁴ "Timothy, James Simmons," Tennessee World War I Gold Star Records.

⁵⁵ Clifford, *The Citizen Soldiers*, 238.

Two primary source collections provide the basis for the project: *The Columbian* (1915-1927) and *The Cresset* (1927-1932). As a result, the primary scope of this thesis is limited to 1915-1932. As Catholic institutions in Nashville published both papers to serve predominantly local, state, and regional audiences, the geographic focus of this thesis is Nashville and the greater Tennessee area. A content analysis is employed to detect changes in the frequency that topics were covered as well as the language used to describe them.

Chapter 1 focuses on *The Columbian* from 1915 to 1923, exploring the paper's role as a mouthpiece for the Knights of Columbus in its campaign to transform service to country into concrete assimilative gains. Chapter 2 chronicles the transformation of *The Columbian* into *The Cresset* after the Diocese seized control in 1927. The chapter focuses on how the rebranded paper dealt with issues like the Election of 1928, resurgent anti-Catholic movements, and Bolshevism during its first two years. It also explores how *The Cresset* transformed arguments for assimilation into claims of Catholic indigeneity. Chapter 3 analyzes the paper's ideological shifts during its final four years of publication. In the middle period of 1929-1930, the paper experienced a distinct shift toward overt celebration of Irishness that ultimately led to the emergence of an Irish Catholic nativism that mirrored some of the characteristics of 'one hundred percent' nativists. In the final period of 1931-1932, greater exertion of Diocesan control fundamentally changed the paper's nature and led to its failure.

Chapter 1

Into Thy Hands: *The Columbian* and Southernization, 1915-1923

The late nineteenth century saw the rapid expansion of fraternal orders across the country. Whether the consequence of a lack of European-style social hierarchies or the basic need for a source of 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.¹ Irish Catholics have been largely excluded from histories of fraternal societies because of the assumption that papal edicts forbade such membership. As a result, historians have focused on the experience of middle-class Protestants.² This assumption is flawed, however, given the wide range of Catholic associations dating to the period. These organizations 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, the St. Vincent's Death Benefit League, and others.³ None of these, however, achieved the long-term impact of the Knights of Columbus, especially in the South.

¹ Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 2.

² Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood*, 4.

³ 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>.

Knights of Paper and Ink: Council 544 and *The Columbian*

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 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.⁴ 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. In this context, expressions of religious and ethnic heritage freely intermingled with aspirations for assimilation into a wider American culture.⁵

As Catholics initiated new councils across the country, corresponding Catholic newspapers spread with them. Though growth was initially confined to the Irish-heavy cities of the Northeast and Midwest, the Knights’ brand of Catholic Americanism found its way into the South in the winter of 1900. On December 30, 1900, Knights from

⁴ Koehlinger, “Let Us Live,” 461.

⁵ Ibid, 459-461; Chistopher J. Kauffman, *Columbianism and the Knights of Columbus: A Quincentenary History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 15.

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. Fatefully, two of the original initiants were P. H. Timothy and M.T. Bryan. Nashville's Council No. 544 was tasked with pioneering the expansion of Catholic Knighthood throughout the rest of the South.⁶ As a result, it assumed immense importance in making a case not just for the Americanization but, more specifically, the Southernization of Irish Americans in Tennessee and beyond. Its newspaper, *The Columbian*, ran from 1915 to 1927 with only a brief interruption in publication between 1918-1921.⁷ As the only Catholic newspaper in Nashville during the period, it offers unique insights into the themes that mattered most to Nashville's Irish Catholic community as they pursued assimilation.

Entering the Fray: 1915-1916

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 A.P.A, its articles expressed a sense of general anxiety over continued anti-Catholic activity, especially from papers like *The Menace*.⁸ The ability of "fair-minded" and "intelligent" Protestants to resist or, at least, ignore the religiously bigoted press, however, was just as frequently

⁶ "America's Greatest Lay Body," *The Columbian*, December 1921.

⁷ "Knights of Columbus – Nashville #1," Aquinas College Library, Nashville, TN.

⁸ "Religious Bigotry," *The Columbian*, April 1915, 3; "The Menace," *The Columbian*, January 1915, 7.

expressed.⁹ Additionally, the paper did not portray Catholics as dependent on the benevolence of their fellow citizens. The paper 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 also commended Nashville as particularly friendly to Catholics. The paper noted that "a city, large and educated as Nashville, naturally frowns upon bigotry." Its coverage of *The Menace* was only necessary, the paper insisted, because Nashvillians had found copies of the paper "thrown upon their porches, unsolicited and unwelcome."¹⁰ 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.¹¹ In fact, the paper advertised Tennessee as a more attractive option than Northern cities for immigrants seeking economic and social advantages.¹²

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Untitled Article, *The Columbian*, May 1915, 11.

¹² "Progress and Immigration," *The Columbian*, July 1915, 3; "Southern Prosperity," *The Columbian*, September 1916, 6; "Nashville Progress," *The Columbian*, September 1916, 7.

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 a growing Catholic population whose wealth and prominence were broadly accepted by "honest Protestants" who viewed them as "friends and neighbors."¹³

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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ In response to 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.¹⁶

¹³ "The Menace," *The Columbian*, January 1915, 7.

¹⁴ "K. of C. Commission on Anti-Catholic Movement," *The Columbian*, February 1915, 7.

¹⁵ Untitled Article, *The Columbian*, March 1915, 3.

¹⁶ "Reform and Reformers," *The Columbian*, June 1915, 5.

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.”¹⁷ “We Catholics,” the paper insisted, “lose no opportunity of affirming publicly and privately our loyalty to both State and Church.”¹⁸ 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.”¹⁹

The Cresset also introduced the ‘liberty tree’ as a recurring symbol for Catholic patriotism. In response to accusations that Catholics were an alien population that threatened 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.”²⁰ 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

¹⁷ “State Deputy’s Address to Knights,” *The Columbian*, July 1915, 4.

¹⁸ “Committee on Prejudice,” *The Columbian*, September 1915.

¹⁹ “A Human Buzzard,” *The Columbian*, August 1915, 5.

²⁰ Ibid.

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.²¹ It is possible that the idea that Catholics were the co-defenders of the tree of liberty alongside their Protestant and Jewish brethren inspired the planners for Timothy’s memorial four years later.²²

An important break with the tone of monotheistic 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 “it seems impractical for Catholics and Protestants to co-operate effectively and directly in a single organization of this kind.”²³

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

²¹ “Catholic Citizenship,” *The Columbian*, December 1915, 8.

²² “Catholic Loyalty,” *The Columbian*, November 1915, 4.

²³ “Catholic Y.M.C.A.,” *The Columbian*, July 1915, 5.

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.²⁴ Only a single mention of Irish sympathy toward German-Americans appeared in the March 1916 issue, but that was only in reference to Irish activities in New York and not Nashville.²⁵ 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 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."²⁶ Even word of the sinking of the *Lusitania* did not alter the 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,

²⁴ "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.

²⁵ "War Bulletins," *The Columbian*, March 1916, 9.

²⁶ "The European War," *The Columbian*, May 1915, 7.

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?²⁷

Another article equated England and Germany with the twin beasts of the Apocalypse in Revelations.²⁸

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.”²⁹ 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 Wilson’s anti-Catholic advisors, such as William Hale, it worried that Wilson might “leave these murders with their blood-stained hands on the throats of the Mexican people.”³⁰ Admonitions from the Knights of Columbus to deny the new Mexican regime official recognition, however, left Wilson unmoved.³¹

²⁷ “The Lusitania,” *The Columbian*, June 1915, 9.

²⁸ “Prophecy and the Present,” *The Columbian*, October 1915, 8.

²⁹ “Letter to the Columbian,” *The Columbian*, June 1915, 10.

³⁰ “Carranza,” *The Columbian*, November 1915, 1.

³¹ “K.C. and Mexico,” *The Columbian*, December 1915, 7.

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 not only in the present but also in 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.³² In an effort to weaken veins of Anglophilia, the following month's front page story claimed that Catholic Jesuits had actually written Shakespeare's works.³³ The tendency toward the rewriting history 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.³⁴

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.³⁵ Its hesitation continued to stem from issues with Britain, "the Perfidious Albion."³⁶ 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 birthrates and the changes wrought by war

³² "Washington A Descendant of St. Louis," *The Columbian*, May 1916, 8.

³³ "Shakespeare or Jesuits," *The Columbian*, June 1916, 1.

³⁴ "America," *The Columbian*, August 1916, 11.

³⁵ "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.

³⁶ "Perfidious Albion," *The Columbian*, June 1916, 6.

might turn both the United States and Britain away from Protestant and toward Catholic majorities.³⁷

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 1916.³⁸ Once Wilson called for volunteers to pursue Pancho Villa in retaliation for his attacks on 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 counterpart. *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 accosted 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!”³⁹

Anxieties over anti-Catholic publications were still present in 1916 as well, but the overall tone of the paper had shifted in light of threats from Mexico and Europe.⁴⁰

³⁷ “War Changing Many Things,” *The Columbian*, June 1916, 3.

³⁸ “Mexico,” *The Columbian*, February 1916, 10.

³⁹ “Preparedness,” *The Columbian*, August 1916, 1.

⁴⁰ “What R.R. Officials Say,” *The Columbian*, March 1916, 3; “Watson Again,” *The Columbian*, March 1916, 7.

The potential for war with Mexico provided a conduit for solidifying the ‘authentic Americanness’ of Southern Catholics. The extolment of preparedness policies in 1916, however, would pale in comparison with the full-throated calls to action that the war declaration would bring the following year.

Clarion Call: 1917-1918

During the opening months of 1917, *The Columbian* continued to build a case for Catholics’ place in American society. The March issue opened with a four page article dedicated to how chapters of the Knights of Columbus had celebrated Washington’s birthday. The printed speeches linked Catholic virtues with patriotic figures like Washington and Lincoln. “The Knights of Columbus,” said Grand Knight F. J. McCarthy, “[take] advantage of every opportunity to instill into the minds and 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.⁴¹ The same issue included articles pointing out that both Buffalo Bill and William H. Moran, President Wilson’s chief of security, were Catholics.⁴²

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

⁴¹ “Washington’s Birthday,” *The Columbian*, March 1917, 1-4.

⁴² “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,” *The New York Times*, September 11, 1946, 7.

Reverend Thomas S. Byrne, Bishop of Nashville, to the clergy and laity of his diocese in its entirety. 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.” He reminded Nashville’s Catholic community that American “greatness and glory” was “impersonated and embodied in our chief executive, the President of these States.” “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.”⁴³

Such enthusiasm was also present in the upper echelons of the Knights of Columbus. Under the leadership of Supreme Knight James A. Flaherty, the organization’s Commission on Religious Prejudices declared in June 1930 that “the war will kill bigotry.” While admitting that individual anti-Catholic sentiment would undoubtedly persist, the commission insisted that the war would quiet “the jealousies, enmities, bitterness and hate, wholesale inventions of scandal, studied falsehoods, agitated feelings of anxiety, fear and suspicion born of dark thoughts and evil rumors, all played against each other with diabolical cunning.”⁴⁴

From the war declaration onward, the language of *The Columbian* became singularly patriotic in nature, proclaiming the loyalty, obedience, and “patriotic zeal” of

⁴³ “Clarion Call to Catholics,” *The Columbian*, May 1917, 1-2.

⁴⁴ Kauffman, *Columbianism and the Knights of Columbus*, 58-59.

all Catholics to serve their “beloved country” as “instruments of God” against an “alien enemy.” This was particularly true of Irish Catholics, who were singled out for their willingness to sacrifice.⁴⁵ 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.”⁴⁶

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.”⁴⁷ Wilson and Roosevelt appeared to return the favor through support for Irish independence.⁴⁸ *The Columbian* noted that “Wilson had a golden opportunity to show a magnanimous spirit, and he has done so.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁶ “Society Goes on Record,” *The Columbian*, December 1917, 4.

⁴⁷ “The War Situation,” *The Columbian*, May 1917, 6; “American Cardinals Make Patriotic Appeals,” *The Columbian*, June 1917, 1.

⁴⁸ “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.

⁴⁹ “Catholic Patriotism,” *The Columbian*, August 1917, 6.

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. In August 1917, 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.⁵⁰ 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 \$3,000,000.⁵¹

The dramatic increase in funding was due in part to the Knights 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 its participation.⁵² 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.⁵³ The Nashville community was noted as particularly

⁵⁰ "\$1,000,000 for Soldiers' Needs," *The Columbian*, August 1917, 1.

⁵¹ "K.C. War Fund," *The Columbian*, October 1917, 1.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ "Ladies Offer President \$2,500,000," *The Columbian*, August 1917, 4.

successful in supporting the war effort, ranking higher than any other Southern city for Liberty Loan subscriptions.⁵⁴

Also evident in the 1917 editions was the degree to which the war effort was advancing the struggle against anti-Catholic publications. *The Columbian* claimed that the war proved that Catholic warnings regarding the disloyalty of bigoted publications were accurate. Their opponents were the non-Americans.⁵⁵ In a speech by Governor Brough of Arkansas to 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.⁵⁶

The Columbian printed only six issues in 1918 before suspending publication until the end of 1921 due to war-related challenges.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ Irish independence remained an important issue, though one that was now taken as a near guarantee after the war’s conclusion.⁵⁹ Toward that end, the Ancient Order of Hibernians

⁵⁴ “Nashville Praised for Liberty Loan Efforts,” *The Columbian*, August 1917, 5.

⁵⁵ “Our Warning Proven,” *The Columbian*, September 1917, 6; “He Prefers the Catholic to the Watsonian Type of Citizen,” *The Columbian*, October 1917, 12.

⁵⁶ “K.C. at Camp Pike, Arkansas,” *The Columbian*, December 1917, 1-2.

⁵⁷ “Knights of Columbus – Nashville #1,” Aquinas College Library, Nashville, TN.

⁵⁸ “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.

⁵⁹ “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 69th New York Has 200 Wounded,” *The Columbian*, July 1918, 5.

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.”⁶⁰

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.⁶¹ The Knights of Columbus, the Y.M.C.A. and the Young Men’s Hebrew Association (Y.M.H.A.) also began working more closely. The Knights of Columbus declared that they intended to work “should to shoulder” with the Y.M.C.A. and reminded readers that “an All-American war” demanded “All-American” unity.⁶²

The spirit of inter-denominational cooperation also appeared in Nashville. In April 1918, Council No. 544 announced a campaign to raise an additional \$10,000 for the war effort. According to *The Columbian*, it did so in cooperation with the city’s Protestant and Jewish communities, who worked “side by side in war welfare work.” When the Nashville Knights exceeded its goal by \$15,000, the paper credited non-Catholics who “took up a large part of the undertaking with fine generosity and success.”⁶³

⁶⁰ “Call for A.O.H. War Fund,” *The Columbian*, February 1918, 3.

⁶¹ “Soldier Boys At Mass In France,” *The Columbian*, February 1918, 4.

⁶² “Bishop Gunn Addresses 25,000 Soldiers at Camp Shelby,” *The Columbian*, February 1918, 5; “K.C. War Fund,” *The Columbian*, March 1918, 8.

⁶³ “Knights of Columbus War Campaign Fund Drive,” *The Columbian*, April 1918, 11; “Nashville K.C. Drive,” *The Columbian*, May/June 1918, 7.

Intermission: 1918-1921

During *The Columbian's* publication hiatus from July 1918 to December 1921, word of James Simmons Timothy's death reached Nashville. Unfortunately, not knowing more exactly when Catholics knew of Timothy's passing narrows opportunities to judge the local Catholic reaction. The secular *Nashville Banner* provided the only real time press perspective on Timothy's sacrifice. Its articles praised 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, it was never in an exclusionary tone. 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.⁶⁴

Lifting the Fog of War: 1921-1923

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

⁶⁴ "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.

“for God and country during the hardships of war” established “the high standard ideal [sic] of patriotism.”⁶⁵ The new mission of the Nashville Knights was to not only foster “good Catholics” but to break down barriers between Catholics and Protestants.⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷

From 1922 to 1923, anti-Catholic anxiety shifted away from the nativist press to entities like the Ku Klux Klan. While religiously bigoted papers 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.”⁶⁸ 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 people.”⁶⁹ 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

⁶⁵ “America’s Greatest Lay Body,” *The Columbian*, December 1921, 10-11.

⁶⁶ “A Loyal Knight,” *The Columbian*, December 1921, 14.

⁶⁷ “America’s Greatest Lay Body,” *The Columbian*, December 1921, 11; “Harding an Enemy of Bigotry,” *The Columbian*, September 1923, 5.

⁶⁸ “Knights Take Over Klan Lecturer’s Meeting,” *The Columbian*, May 1923, 6.

⁶⁹ “Missouri Congressman Flays Invisible Empire,” *The Columbian*, November 1922, 6.

in Nashville for “some time”.⁷⁰ 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.”⁷¹

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

⁷⁰ “Psychology of Anti-Catholic Propaganda,” *The Columbian*, October 1922, 6; “No Religious Test,” *The Columbian*, September 1922, 6.

⁷¹ “Joseph Scott on Latest Outburst by Bigoted,” *The Columbian*, November 1922, 10.

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. This is not to say that the relationship between Catholics and Protestants was completely harmonious, but evidence suggests that tensions were lower in Nashville than in the large urban centers in the North. While the Irish-American historiography suggests that the lower tension was due 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. The Timothy family was an example of this growing prominence. Patrick Henry Timothy was a founding member of Council No. 544, both James and P.H., Jr., attended prestigious universities, and the family home was located well outside the impoverished 6th Ward where the Irish traditionally lived. Nashville's Catholics had multiple available pathways to social and economic success, as evident in the accomplishments of P.H. Timothy, Sr., who had never learned to read.

The dedication of the Timothy memorial itself 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 would play a crucial role in defining Nashville's future, and each now sought the support of the city's potent Catholic community. 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. Nashville's Irish Catholics thus projected a unique vision of patriotism in which past loyalty to the Confederacy merged with present loyalty to the nation to form a basis for belonging in Southern society.

The Chords That Bind

As Judge Bryan approached the conclusion of his speech on that bright May Saturday, he paused to assess the symbolism of planting a tree as a memorial for the fallen soldier. 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 foretold 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."⁷² "Monuments are for the benefit of the living," he reminded the crowd gathered round the sapling, "not the dead."⁷³ As evidence from *The Columbian* suggests, Lincoln's mystic chords indeed wound themselves around Timothy's tree to bind up long-standing social and religious divides and advance the cause of assimilation for Irish Catholics in Nashville. Though imperfect, the binding provided a temporary respite from anti-Catholic campaigns and a surer a social footing from which to deflect later attacks by

⁷² Memorial to Lieut. Timothy," *Nashville Banner*, June 1, 1919.

⁷³ Ibid.

groups like the Ku Klux Klan. The soil shoveled onto the roots of Timothy's tree evoked in the most literal sense a claim by Irish Catholics to belonging on Southern soil. For the Nashvillians who filed out of Centennial Park that afternoon, the chorus of Union was sung, the roots of a more inclusive community were planted, and the hyphen was nowhere to be found.

Chapter 2

A Guiding Light in the Age of Extremes, 1927-1928

By the late 1920s, James Timothy's hackberry tree stood at least 13 feet tall. Given that *celtis occidentalis* is a deep rooting species, the fragile root system exposed during the memorial's dedication in 1919 was already sinking deep into the Southern soil.¹ As the living embodiment of the assimilative campaigns of World War I, its symbolism was even more important by the end of the decade. The Southern climate had undoubtedly racked the sapling with storm after storm throughout the 1920s. Yet it still stood as a pillar of Catholic pride and sacrifice in the heart of the Protestant Athens of the South, where nativist storms had also become commonplace. New waves of nativism, which threatened to once again bring Romaphobia to the foreground, had replaced the wartime abatement of anti-Catholic activity.² One source of nativist tension was the ever growing inflow of largely Catholic immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. Another was the growth of socialist and modernist theories, such as evolution, in America's urban centers. In the eyes of fundamentalist, native-born Protestants, these factors appeared to threaten the foundations of conservative American institutions.

¹ "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.

² 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>.

Largely because of their successes during the war year, Catholics became a lightning rod for Protestant anxiety. Though Catholic organizations pointed to an impressive wartime record as evidence of their patriotism and loyalty, groups like the Ku Klux Klan and Masons saw Catholicism as a menacing, alien power that also served as a convenient foil for their interpretation of 100 percent Americanism. Of all the nativist groups of the 1920s, the Klan was the most outspoken and politically potent. Revived by William Simmons at Stone Mountain, Georgia, in 1915, many of the second Klan's principles were rehashes of the earlier APA platforms. While the new Klan retained much of the symbolism and violence of the original, there were also key differences.³

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 romantic novels. Klansmen of the 1920s still relished secret rituals and masked parades, but they were increasingly willing to reveal their affiliations publicly. Many 'legitimate' Klansmen distanced themselves from the most egregious practices of the first Klan, such as lynching, but they nonetheless continued to employ both non-lethal and lethal terrorism, sometimes with active police participation. Additionally, while the Reconstruction era Klan had focused narrowly on issues of limiting African American suffrage and punishing 'scalawag' white supporters, Simmons's creation was more wide-ranging in its discriminatory habits. Race was no

³ 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.

longer the core issue as religious and cultural threats tied to immigration took center stage in a nation “already wrestling anxiously with the notion of the melting pot.”⁴

The complete entrenchment of white supremacy in the South by 1922 contributed to the shift. With Jim Crow 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 were told to discover what worried a community and offer the Klan as a solution. Such a diverse agenda of hate imbued the Klan with a re-energized level of middle-class, mainstream legitimacy and allowed it to become an “institutional mechanism” for dispersing and intensifying its core prejudices, especially anti-Catholicism. On its public face, however, the second Klan consistently denied overt prejudice against Catholics, at least to the same degree that they voiced opposition to Jews and non-whites. Drawing on stadial concepts of society, the Klan insisted that Catholics were redeemable. They need only practice their faith without Roman influence to be welcomed by Klansmen as authentic Americans. They were also, of course, welcome to convert to Protestantism. Jews and non-whites, on the other hand, were irredeemably lost to the blessings of Americanism.⁵

As the Invisible Empire took its first steps out of the shadows, Catholic Americans were also busy solidifying their wartime gains into permanent entrenchment

⁴ Fox, *Everyday Klansfolk*, 33-34.

⁵ 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.

within American society. Despite consistent antagonism by the Klan and others like them throughout the 1920s, Lynn Dumenil argues that Catholics were already too deeply rooted in urban American society to be ousted by nativist movements, especially in large Northeastern cities. Instead, nativism worked to galvanize Catholic unity and embolden Catholic Americans to articulate their vision of a pluralistic society in which Catholicism played an indispensable role.⁶ Ironically, the Klan operated in much the same way. Opposition tended to strengthen their resolve and swell their membership. For example, Klan membership swelled in Michigan after the state moved to prohibit wearing masks in public.⁷ 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.”⁸

Like their counterparts elsewhere in the world, Southern Irish 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 socio-political conditions on the ground. In

⁶ Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties,” 28.

⁷ Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK*, 14.

⁸ Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties,” 28.

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 core faith. Pope Pius XI framed Bolsheviks as servants of a modern antichrist bent on the destruction of religion in all its forms. Catholics worldwide thus took on a mantle of righteous anti-communism in an interwar “age of extremes.”⁹

As Dumenil underscores, the anticommunist rhetoric adopted by Catholic Americans during the 1920s was part of a deliberate strategy to capitalize on earlier assimilative victories and further solidify Catholicism’s place in American society. 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, however, 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 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.¹⁰

To be certain, nativism was a ubiquitous presence in 1920s America, and that included the South. The new Klan was born outside of Atlanta, Georgia, and it

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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>.

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.¹¹ In fact, Georgia had a deep vein of anti-Catholic nativism given its history as one of the few Southern stronghold of the irksome American Protective Association in the 1890s.¹² 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 twentieth century."¹³ The South, however, was not monolithic in its nativism. The Atlanta Board of Education largely dismissed the Klan's anti-Catholic conspiracy theories.¹⁴ Local 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 like Savannah, Georgia, that did not spread to others.¹⁵ 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

¹¹ 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>.

¹² 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>.

¹³ Barnes, *Anti-Catholicism in Arkansas*, 4.

¹⁴ Racline, "The Ku Klux Klan," 74.

¹⁵ Buttimer, "Turning Away from Georgia to Rome," 35.

adapted *The Columbian*'s assimilative campaign to fit the city's ever changing environment in 1927-1928.

Passing the Torch

Spring 1927 welcomed a new era of Catholicity in Nashville with the first edition of *The Cresset*. The new paper replaced *The Columbian*, the Knights of Columbus publication in print since 1915, and passed ownership responsibilities to the Diocese of Nashville. The Diocese held sway over all three grand divisions of the state, and it intended *The Cresset* to represent the activities and interests of all those parishes. Thus, its editors promised to broaden its readers' horizons by covering issues beyond the city of Nashville.

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 misunderstanding in national affairs."¹⁶ 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."¹⁷

¹⁶ "What the Cresset Stands For," *The Cresset*, May 1927, 3. The reader should note that *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.

¹⁷ "Some Things The Cresset Hopes to Do," *The Cresset*, May 1927, 7.

Although replacing the Knights of Columbus as publisher, the Diocese acknowledged and commended the Knight's past work as so substantial in growing the Catholic faith in Nashville that a magazine of regional and more general character was needed. The new editors insisted that the shift from local to regional focus indicated that "progress has been made" and a corresponding "enlargement of policies" was necessary. They were quick to reassure readers that the paper not only still served the interests of the Knights but served them better by contextualizing their local activities within the broader mission of the Diocese.¹⁸

Predating the global push toward what Pope Pius XI called 'Catholic Action' in 1929, the Diocese used its takeover of the paper in 1927 to centralize authority, propagate the faith, and counter anti-Catholic activity.¹⁹ The Diocese's proactivity is especially striking given that similar efforts at active institution building did not begin elsewhere in the South until the years after World War II. Historian Andrew Moore notes that Catholic communities in the South prior to the mid-twentieth century usually did not have the luxury of a well-provisioned, ethnically centered parish that many 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.²⁰ The Diocese of Nashville, however, began its institution building programs in the 1910s using methods

¹⁸ "The Cresset Succeeds The Columbian," *The Cresset*, May 1927, 5.

¹⁹ Kracht, "Campaigning Against Bolshevism," 551.

²⁰ Moore, "But We Were A Group Apart," 75.

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.”²¹

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.” 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.²² 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.²³ In the late 1920s and early 1930s, *The Cresset* positioned itself as the guiding light for Nashville's Irish American laymen to leverage their assimilative successes toward the exercise of Catholic Action without jeopardizing their institutional gains.

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 Catholic ceremonies.

²¹ “The Meaning of Catholic Action,” *The Cresset*, November 1931, 11, 20.

²² Ibid.

²³ Kracht, “Campaigning Against Bolshevism,” 552.

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

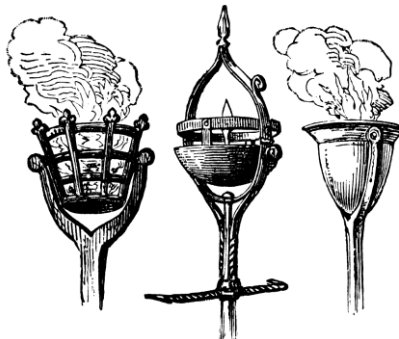


Figure 3: Sketch of Cressets, William & Robert Chambers. *Encyclopedia - A Dictionary of Universal Knowledge for the People* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co, 1881). https://etc.usf.edu/clipart/21300/21307/cresset_21307.htm.

Catholicity for the Diocese of Nashville” that harkened to earlier periods of “fervent, unquestioned” faith.²⁴ 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.²⁵ A close assessment of *The Cresset*’s tone and content, therefore, provides ‘a guiding light’ into the nature of Tennessee’s Catholic community at the end of the 1920s.

A Flame Upon the Hearthstones: The Early Years, 1927-1928

From the outset, *The Cresset* made bold claims of Catholic indigeneity. Its predecessor took patriotic support for the war effort as justification for the inclusion of Irish Catholics in Protestant Southern society. This process of ‘Southernization,’ however, operated on the assumption that Catholics were outsiders seeking unhyphenated inclusion in the dominant culture. *The Cresset* largely eschewed this outsider

²⁴ “The Cresset Succeeds The Columbian,” *The Cresset*, May 1927, 5.

²⁵ “The Cresset Succeeds The Columbian,” *The Cresset*, May 1927, 5.

mentality. Instead, it presented Catholic origin stories that framed English Protestants as interlopers who constructed their institutions atop 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.²⁶ 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.”²⁷

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, who ventured into region during his exploration of Southeastern North America, *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.²⁸ 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

²⁶ Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties,” 28.

²⁷ “Story of Catholic Church in Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, May 1927, 13-14.

²⁸ Ibid.

America's "wilderness."²⁹ 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 Catholic immigrants in their employ or in their acquaintance. "Catholicity is not an alien graft," *The Cresset* argued, "but a native growth."³⁰

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.³¹ 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

²⁹ "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-archival-archives/the-significance-of-the-frontier-in-american-history>.

³⁰ "Story of Catholic Church in Tennessee," *The Cresset*, May 1927, 13-14.

³¹ Ibid.

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 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.”³² Though some of the Irish workers had moved on, many remained. The symbolism was clear: Nashville Catholicism was native, permanent, and built with Irish hands from the outset.

Repeated references to Irish influences in the early history of the Church in Tennessee 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 remaining in the region, even if the persons to whom they belonged strayed from the straight and narrow path of Catholicism.³³

The editors of *The Cresset*, however, briefly broke with their *Columbian* predecessors by suggesting an ideological rift between Irish-Americans and Irishmen still

³² “Story of Catholic Church in Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, June 1927, 7-8.

³³ “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.

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 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.³⁴

The tension between Sinn Fein supporters and so-called Irreconcilables had quickly spilled across the Atlantic into Irish American press outlets. *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 the real trouble" and envision a peaceful, democratic solution that their trans-Atlantic counterparts could not.³⁵

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ "Assassination of O'Higgins," *The Cresset*, August 1927, 19.

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 *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."³⁶ *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 back to the Revolutionary War and rendered 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."³⁷

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 the early period directly referenced the Irish at all. 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."³⁸ The second article reversed

³⁶ "Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Wir Duetchen," *The Cresset*, June 1930, 14-15.

³⁷ "Kevin O'Higgins," *The Cresset*, September 1927, 18-19.

³⁸ "Irish Beauty Contest," *The Cresset*, November 1927, 24.

earlier allusions to physical distance creating emotional and ideological differences between Irishmen and Irish Americans. Discussing the city'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."³⁹ The only other Irish reference prior to 1929 was on the cover of the March 1928 issue, which featured the cathedral at Armagh, Ireland.⁴⁰

The speed and magnitude of *The Cresset*'s change in tone confirms that it likely received far more complaints than just Rev. O'Hanlon's. 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 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 middle period (1929-1930), they did so with a vengeance and transformed the paper into an even more distinctly Irish-American publication.

Beyond and perhaps partially because of the Irish issue, Catholic indigeneity required further reinforcement in these early issues. 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.⁴¹ Whether figurative or literal, the newspaper presented Catholicism as the foundational faith on

³⁹ "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning," *The Cresset*, March 1928, 15.

⁴⁰ Cover Image, *The Cresset*, March 1928, 1.

⁴¹ "The Spirit of America," *The Cresset*, June 1927, 19-20.

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.⁴²

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 loyalty and remain wary of those who claimed a monopoly on it.⁴³ “There never was and I doubt if there ever will be,” another article mused, “a one-hundred percent American.”⁴⁴

Much as it had been in the days of *The Columbian*, war 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

⁴² “Daughter of the Catholic Church,” *The Cresset*, December 1928, 3.

⁴³ “American Idea of Religious Freedom,” *The Cresset*, May 1927, 20.

⁴⁴ “Americanism,” *The Cresset*, November 1928, 8.

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.⁴⁵ 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 successful campaign for Democratic endorsement in the Election of 1928. Smith, a second generation Irish Catholic immigrant who grew up in the tenement districts of 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 and urban principles that were antithetical to core American

⁴⁵ “Has the Pope Political Power in United States,” *The Cresset*, October 1928, 3.

values. Worst of all, his Catholic faith provided a ready-made target for Protestant anxiety over the rapid growth of predominantly 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 1928.⁴⁶

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.⁴⁷ 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 York partisan

⁴⁶ 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>.

⁴⁷ Barnes, *Anti-Catholicism in Arkansas*, 128.

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. His social prominence and legalistic style of writing lent a credence to his arguments that necessitated an official rejoinder.⁴⁸

Reinforcing the national importance of the moment, *The Cresset* printed Smith's reply to Marshall in its entirety. The message was simple but absolute. Detailing what he called his 'American creed,' 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."⁴⁹

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

⁴⁸ Oscar Handlin, *Al Smith and His America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), 3-4; Shelley, "What the Hell Is an Encyclical?," 88.

⁴⁹ "The Press on Governor Smith's Reply," *The Cresset*, May 1927, 11-12.

contribution to the cause of 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 acknowledged the *Nashville Banner* and the *Nashville Tennessean* for their support of Smith and their condemnation of a religious test for political office.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹

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,” the process was already nearing completion in Nashville before the vote.⁵² Smith’s candidacy did not trigger widespread anti-Catholic coverage in the Nashville press.⁵³ He was the Democratic nominee, after all, and the *Nashville Tennessean* was staunchly Democratic. The unity among Nashville’s major newspapers mirrored the waning anti-Catholicism evident in post-war

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties,” 37.

⁵² Barnes, *Anti-Catholicism in Arkansas*, 127.

⁵³ John Wooley and Gerhard Peters, “The American Presidency Project,” UC Santa Barbara, accessed May 19, 2022, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/elections/1928>.

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.

A lack of significant impact, however, did not imply the complete absence of anti-Catholic activity in the state. In fact, *The Cresset* noted that religious prejudice was “rampant throughout the length and breadth of [the] diocese.” The key difference with earlier periods was that the paper’s alarmist tones did not return. 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.⁵⁴

The Cresset’s editors even displayed sympathy for non-Catholics. “The average Protestant is a pretty repressed and self-conscious individual,” the paper mused in an August 1927 article.⁵⁵ 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

⁵⁴ “Why Such Bigotry,” *The Cresset*, August 1927, 18-19.

⁵⁵ “Protestant Controversy,” *The Cresset*, August 1927, 21.

connecting Andrew Jackson and Al Smith in that article's title.⁵⁶ *The Cresset* explicitly thanked the conservative *Nashville Banner* in the fall of 1928 for its efforts in countering the anti-Catholic and anti-Knights of Columbus literature that was circulated in the wake of the presidential election.⁵⁷ The editors also cheekily expressed the "sizable debt of 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."⁵⁸

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."⁵⁹ The first order business was to imbue laymen with ecclesiastical and civil knowledge necessary answer questions from non-Catholics confidently.⁶⁰

As a result, anti-Catholic speech by the Klan and Klan affiliated politicians, such as Senator Thomas Heflin of Alabama, was deemed dangerous not because Southern

⁵⁶ "Andrew Jackson & Governor Smith," *The Cresset*, September 1927, 15, 24-25.

⁵⁷ "Intelligence Sacrificed," *The Cresset*, October 1928, 8.

⁵⁸ "The Circus Comes to Town," *The Cresset*, April 1928, 11-12.

⁵⁹ "Why Such Bigotry," *The Cresset*, August 1927, 18-19.

⁶⁰ "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.

minds were primed against Catholicism but rather because “confusion” was possible in a diverse region that had received too little proper instruction in the basic tenants of Catholicism.⁶¹ “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.”⁶² Education drives of this sort were in line with global 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.⁶³

In the American South, however, 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.⁶⁴ Religious discrimination was framed as “alien to the spirit of...the principles upon which this government was founded.”⁶⁵ 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 of

⁶¹ “Declining Liberty and Other Papers,” *The Cresset*, April 1928, 18-19.

⁶² “Plan to Banish Bigotry,” *The Cresset*, November 1928, 3.

⁶³ Kracht, “Campaigning Against Bolshevism,” 553.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ “Praise of Governor Smith,” *The Cresset*, February 1928, 3.

Americanism or Jeffersonian Democracy could give an accurate definition of the terms they use.”⁶⁶

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 read, “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.”⁶⁷ Infighting and criminality within Klan leadership became a perineal topic for *The Cresset* and was used as a foil for Catholic loyalty.⁶⁸ A 1922 bulletin 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.”⁶⁹ 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 fraternally at each other’s doors.” The editors assured readers that “history would have something to tell then, sure enough.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ “Read the Constitution,” *The Cresset*, September 1928, 3.

⁶⁷ “The Reign of Terror,” *The Cresset*, November 1927, 3.

⁶⁸ “Daughter of the Catholic Church,” *The Cresset*, December 1928, 3.

⁶⁹ “The Challenge of the Bigots,” *National Catholic Welfare Council Bulletin*, September 1922, 12, quoted in Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties,” 30.

⁷⁰ “Klan Americanism Unmasks,” *The Cresset*, May 1928, 3-4.

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.⁷¹ 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 and sense of confidence for the benefit of other groups with whom it shared common historical experiences, even the African American community against whom earlier generations of Irish Catholics had fought. 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 teens to confident and dismissive in the twenties suggests otherwise. The assimilative campaigns of *The Columbian* and *The Cresset* had already contributed to the establishment of Catholicism as a longstanding, legitimate institution in Nashville.

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 positioned 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

⁷¹ Dumenil, "The Tribal Twenties," 42.

social machinations of distant urban hubs, nativists maintained their status as guardians of a genuine Americanism in the pastoral corners of the American heartland.⁷²

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* staked a claim to Catholicism's 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."⁷³ 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 concentrated rural brethren. In cities, Catholic leaders could maximize the impact of institution building, but in the 1920s that strategy was leaving the Church vulnerable to the nativists' accusations that they embodied urban, modernist sentiments 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.⁷⁴

⁷² 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.

⁷³ "Rural America and the Village Unit," *The Cresset*, November 1927, 12-13, 30.

⁷⁴ 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.

Over its five year life span, however, *The Cresset* covered few topics more frequently than education. 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.⁷⁵ 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 bells ringing at high alert throughout the decade.⁷⁶ The creation and expansion of Catholic schools became one of the key facets of Catholic institution building in Nashville.

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.

⁷⁵ Lynn Dumenil, "'The Insatiable Maw of Bureaucracy: Antistatism and Education Reform in the 1920s,'" *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 2 (September 1990): 499-500, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2079181>.

⁷⁶ 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>.

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.”⁷⁷ 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.

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.⁷⁸ The school was a focal point for Catholic pride and a testament to the rapid growing Catholic community in Nashville. Opening on West

⁷⁷ “Why Catholic School,” *The Cresset*, March 1929, 7.

⁷⁸ “New and Modern Catholic High School,” *The Cresset*, January 1928, 7, 12.

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.⁷⁹

The Cresset officially announced the school’s name change in April 1928 and then worked diligently to connect Father Abram Ryan, a Catholic priest, poet, and Confederate apologist, to Nashville.⁸⁰ 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.⁸¹ Portraying the North as an aggressive outsider seeking to subjugate the virtuous Southland, he touted Southerners as the true heirs of the foundational American principles of republicanism, individual liberty, and states’ rights.⁸²

⁷⁹ “Father Ryan Timeline,” Father Ryan Highschool, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://www.fatherryan.org/about-us/history>.

⁸⁰ “Nashville Catholic Boys’ High School Named for Famous Priest,” *The Cresset*, April 1928, 3.

⁸¹ James M. Woods, *A History of the Catholic Church in the American South, 1513-1900* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 335-336.

⁸² 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>.

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 yet patriotic poems followed. Historians James Woods and Kiernan Quinlan argue that Ryan's work provided a salve for Southerners whose hearts still clung to the 'Lost Cause' despite reintegration into the Union.⁸³

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 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."⁸⁴ The

⁸³ Woods, *A History of the Catholic Church in the American South*, 337; Quinlan, *Strange Kin*, 108.

⁸⁴ "Nashville Catholic Boys' High School Named for Famous Priest," *The Cresset*, April 1928, 3.

reconciliation was credited to the yellow fever outbreaks of the 1870s. *The Cresset* frequently cited the same 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].”⁸⁵ 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.

The school itself 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.”⁸⁶ In the most literal sense, Father Ryan High School was Tennessee from the ground up. Emphasizing the modernity of Catholic education, *The Cresset* proudly noted the school’s final “half million dollar” price tag.⁸⁷ The speed with which the first \$300,000 of that half million was raised pointed the financial strength that the Nashville Catholic community achieved in the postwar period.

⁸⁵ “The History of the Church in Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, October 1928, 5-6.

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

⁸⁷ “Nashville Catholic Boys’ High School Named for Famous Priest,” *The Cresset*, April 1928, 3.

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 Bolshevism. Historian Erica Ryan argues that Bolshevism came to “embody all that was challenging the American status quo” in the 1920s. For both conservatives and Catholics, feminism, modernism, socialism, and radicalism fell comfortably within Bolshevism’s hazy margins. As such, Bolshevism was hailed as the binary opposite of Americanism, a term that itself was still loosely defined. Social conservatives, economic elites, and ‘super’ patriots congealed into what Ryan terms “a conservative consensus.”⁸⁸ 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.’ Though nativists attempted to frame Catholicism as the urban, modernist antithesis of conservative, rural America, 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 immediate 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 moral,

⁸⁸ Erica J. Ryan, *Red War on the Family: Sex, Gender, and Americanism in the First Red Scare* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), 18, 25.

political, and social deficiencies resulting from Bolshevism garnered a subhuman status for their radical adherents. “The beasts of the forest are tame,” the editors wrote, “compared to these lecherous vultures who stalk in the guise of human beings.” Even Britain, the ancient enemy of Irish Catholics at home and abroad, was commended by *The Cresset*’s editors for turning away from the Bolshevik threat.⁸⁹

Another facet of the anti-communist campaign carried out by Catholics was the vehement defense of home values. Manifesting in both 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 prepared to stand firm against modernist forces and position itself as the legitimate defender of conservative American values. Deploing the growing influence of apartment living, the paper 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 “he [the citizen] is free because his bit of ground has made him free.”⁹⁰ *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-inspired American values.

Rapidly changing gender roles provided *The Cresset* with another avenue to promote Catholicism’s role in defending traditional values. Erica Ryan argues that general American anxiety about the status of the family and traditional gender roles after

⁸⁹ “Great Britain Breaks With Russia,” *The Cresset*, July 1927, 4.

⁹⁰ “Driftwood Gathered AS Tide Came In,” *The Cresset*, March 1928, 3.

the war spilled over into the hazily defined realm of Bolshevism during the Red Scare. The binary between Americanism and Bolshevism could then provide a cohesive outlet for the expression of fears related to destabilized sexual and gender roles. A broad socio-political coalition opposed to change was the result.⁹¹ Beginning a trend that would carry into its middle and later years, *The Cresset* attempted to integrate Catholics into that coalition by presenting an idealized vision of the female homemaker wholly in line with both Catholic dogma and American conceptions of ‘republican motherhood.’

As early as December 1927, the paper challenged the wisdom of women working outside the home in an edition whose cover uncoincidentally featured the image of Mary and an infant Christ. The male editors patronizingly questioned whether women took the obligations of joining the workforce seriously. They argued that a woman’s “business-life-cycle” 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 women independently chose to leave their homes in pursuit of “little luxuries” that their husbands couldn’t provide, this decision did not exonerate them from the Red Scare paranoia.⁹² 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

⁹¹ Ryan, *Red War on the Family*, 45.

⁹² “Forty Years, Then What?,” *The Cresset*, December 1927, 7-8.

revolutionaries,” abetting the work socialist radicals intent on transforming the United States into a “Bolshevik-style dystopia.”⁹³ By mirroring mainstream, masculine preoccupations with shifting gender roles at home, Catholic press outlets like *The Cresset* co-opted the mantle of conservatism claimed by their nativist adversaries and made it their own. Catholic attention, however, was not limited to domestic issues.

Anti-communist stories in *The Cresset* also looked outward to America’s neighbors. Atrocities perpetrated by the Calles government against Mexican Catholics during the Cristero War frequented the front pages. As historian Gid Powers notes, Catholic Americans tended to frame their understanding of Bolshevism through a “Mexican lens” as a direct assault on religion itself.⁹⁴ While not explicitly communist, Calles’s left-leaning political agenda and his government’s anticlerical cultural programs made him a prime target for the Catholic press. Calles’s use of the Mexican education system to foment anti-Catholic sentiments was particularly irksome.⁹⁵ Calles’s actions heightened pre-existing Catholic anxiety about the threats to religious education in America.

While Catholic institutions in the United States understood the threat their Mexican brethren faced, they also understood the opportunity it offered. Labeling threats to religious education as communist and anti-American helped Catholic Americans

⁹³ Kirsten Marie Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolshevik: The Origins of Female Conservatism in the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 21.

⁹⁴ Powers, “American Catholics and Catholic Americans,” 18.

⁹⁵ Julia G. Young, “The Calles Government and Catholic Dissidents: Mexico’s Transnational Projects of Repression, 1926-1929,” *The Americas* 70, no. 1 (July 2013): 63, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26361022>.

marshal residual anxieties from the Red Scare to their defense. By pointing an accusing finger at ‘foreign’ threats like ‘Mexican Bolshevism,’ Catholics could shelter behind the protective wall of patriotic national defense and sidestep nativist attempts to label them as outsiders. Building on their success in World War I, the Knights of Columbus launched into a \$1,000,000 fundraising campaign meant to proactively educate Americans on the dangers of Mexican Bolshevism posed to democratic freedoms. They actively encouraged the Catholic press to air Mexican atrocities in order to drive additional donations and move public opinion against the Calles government.⁹⁶

Anti-Catholic leaders like Senator Thomas Helfin of Alabama openly opposed the Knight’s actions on the floor of Congress. Nativist press outlets also printed anti-Knight propaganda that suggested the Knights were co-conspirators in a conspiracy to help Mexican Catholics overthrow the Mexican government in the same way that American Catholics hoped to do in America.⁹⁷ Since the Knights refused to risk connection to unsavory acts by sending funds directly to Cristero rebels, they once again turned to the Catholic press as the primary agent of mobilization. *The Cresset* responded by positioning American Catholics as loyal compatriots ready to jump to the defense of democratic ideals at home or abroad.⁹⁸ This was only possible, however, in places where Catholic institution building had already laid a foundation for social inclusion.

⁹⁶ Matthew Redinger, “To Arouse and Inform: The Knights of Columbus and United States-Mexican Relations, 1924-1937,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 88, no. 3 (July 2002): 498-501, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25026205>.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ “Revolution in Mexico,” *The Cresset*, November 1927, 3; “Poisoned Wells of Prejudice,” *The Cresset*, January 1928, 3; “Mexican Situation,” *The Cresset*, February 1928, 17.

The assimilative framework constructed by Nashville Catholics during the war years thus allowed them to claim rank among the masses as part of a broader campaign against the evils of Bolshevism.

The Cresset's tone of patriotic devotion held firm even in instances where official U.S. policy failed to align with official Church rhetoric about Mexico. Only one article leveled criticism directly against the U.S. government. At issue was the sale of warplanes to Mexico by the U.S. government that were subsequently used to “hunt down and bomb Catholics wherever they could be located.” The paper wryly quipped that the government must have never considered such an eventuality or the sale would not have taken place. “The perfectly innocent purpose of opening a new market to the manufacturers,” wrote the editors, “was the only factor in deciding that airplanes could be exported to that commercially progressive country.”⁹⁹ By 1929, additional articles concerning Mexico ceased. The last appeared in July following Rome’s acceptance of a peace proposal by Mexico’s new president, Portes Gil.¹⁰⁰ The paper declared in a front page article that “the long-standing religious controversy between Mexico and the Catholic Church has been reached.”¹⁰¹ From that point forward, fears of international Bolshevism were aimed at Russia despite continued sporadic violence against Mexican Catholics.

⁹⁹ “Airplanes for Mexico,” *The Cresset*, March 1928, 15.

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin C. Montoya, *Risking Immeasurable Harm: Immigration Restriction and U.S. Mexico Diplomatic Relations, 1924-1932* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020), 32.

¹⁰¹ “Mexican Religious Question Settled,” *The Cresset*, July 1929, 3.

While Gid Powers argues that anti-communism was a “badge of difference” employed by a Catholic community under siege, *The Cresset*’s tempered, tongue-in-cheek criticisms do not reflect that sentiment.¹⁰² Far from searing indictments by a socially ostracized group, the paper’s critiques feel instead like the chiding that occurs among relatives who disagree yet are secure in the strength of their familial bonds. *The Cresset*’s tone conveyed frustration but not panic. Rather than a sense of estrangement, the paper displayed confidence in its ability to criticize and correct government policies as a participant in the political process. *The Cresset*’s anti-Communism was therefore a ‘badge of inclusion’ employed by Catholic communities who were actively securing their position in a progressive, pluralistic society.

* * *

As 1928 closed, *The Cresset* looked out on a modified social and political landscape. Al Smith’s run for the presidency was over. While his candidacy provided Catholics with an unprecedented national platform from which to make their case for ‘true Americanism,’ it had also provided fuel for prejudiced groups like the Klan to frame Catholic successes as a threat to the established Anglo order. Bigoted attacks, however, did not go unanswered. The final issue of *The Cresset* for 1928 included an article detailing the arrest of J. Harold Hunter, a printer and anti-Catholic mouthpiece in Flint, Michigan, who had blanketed Nashville and the surrounding region with anti-Catholic pamphlets during the 1928 campaign. Thanks to the diligence of the Knights of Columbus and a detective agency in their employ, Hunter was charged with criminal libel

¹⁰² Powers, “American Catholics and Catholic Americans,” 34.

and placed under a \$200 bond. “The final outcome of Hunter’s arrest,” the paper noted, “will be watched with hopes he will get what he deserves.”¹⁰³

American Catholicism had indeed come of age. Far from relegation to the outskirts of society, Catholic Americans leveraged their structural integration into Nashville’s society and took the offensive in the late 1920s to defend the decade’s gains against domestic Klansmen and foreign Bolsheviks alike. Moving beyond simple assimilation, Irish Catholics asserted their regional indigeneity, which in turn led to a sense of confidence in their ethnic identity. In the period 1929-1930, *The Cresset* reflected that growing Irish pride in dramatic ways.

¹⁰³ “Arrest for Printing Bogus Oath,” *The Cresset*, December 1928, 4.

Chapter 3

***The Cresset* and Irish Catholic Institution Building, 1929-1932**

The years following Al Smith's run for the presidency were a time of dramatic change for *The Cresset*. While Irish pride was restrained in the paper's early years, it burst forth in the middle years 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. The paper 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.”¹ Part of the strategy for maintaining that trajectory was an all-out appeal to Irishness.

Shamrocks and Shillalahs: The Middle Years, 1929-1930

The middle years shed any pretense that *The Cresset* or the Catholic community it served were anything but Irish at their core. The June 1929 issue introduced a series written by associate editor Mickey McGuire entitled “Shamrocks and Shillalahs.”² Named for two emblems of Irish culture, the series spanned 18 issues from June 1929 to December 1930.³ 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.⁴ Originally used in Irish stick fighting, the shillalah became an emblem for Irish self-determination in song lyrics, cartoons, and other cultural media. Even academic journals of the time referred to Ireland as “the land of the shamrock and



Figure 4: 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>.

¹ “The Cards Are on the Table Again,” *The Cresset*, April 1929, 10.

² “Shamrocks and Shillalahs,” *The Cresset*, June 1929, 10.

³ Only the July 1929 edition did not contain a “Shamrocks and Shillalahs” during its 18 issue run.

⁴ John W. Hurley, *Shillelagh: The Irish Fighting Stick* (Pipersville: Caravat Press, 2007), 15.

the shillalah.”⁵ 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.

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, husbands, wives, and fellow Catholics all felt 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.⁶ He praised women as the heart of Catholic households yet jokingly wondered if men might ever actually civilize them.⁷ Another Shillalah credited the Irish with carrying the faith to America but deplored the level to which they “beggared themselves spiritually” once here.⁸

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,

⁵ Charles Keith Uren, “The Succession of the Irish Free State,” *Michigan Law Review* 28, no. 2 (December 1929): 153.

⁶ “Shamrocks and Shillalahs,” *The Cresset*, June 1929, 10.

⁷ “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Woman,” *The Cresset*, April 1929, 7.

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

than such a Roman [as O'Malley]."⁹ On one hand, O'Malley was taking a more moderate stance toward Irish Home Rule that was similar to *The Cresset's* own arguments during August and September of 1927. On the other hand, he was directing criticism directly against Irish Americans rather than their Irish kin. As a result, McGuire's quote from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* portrayed O'Malley as a traitor to his people despite the similarities in their rhetorical styles as reporters. Both deployed what *Time Magazine* called "Irish humor and sensitivity to pathos" to speak to their Catholic and non-Catholic readers.¹⁰ The key difference was location. Irish Catholics in Nashville were secure in their social standing and Irish heritage, and *The Cresset* was aware of its responsibility to defend both against outsiders.

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 seemed to have disappeared by 1930. His image graced the cover of *The Cresset* in March 1930, 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

⁹ "Shamrocks and Shillalahs: A Shillalah," *The Cresset*, November 1929, 18-19.

¹⁰ "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>.

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.¹¹

Large portions of *The Cresset* in 1929 and 1930 were also devoted to espousing the virtues of Catholicism 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.¹² When Smith was ordained as Bishop in 1924, he found only a handful of native Tennesseans serving as priests and seminarians. In his effort to remedy that problem, Smith became one of the state's most prolific Catholic institution builders of the twentieth century. As he worked to grow the Diocese, however, he was careful to avoid the anti-Catholic backlash experienced in cities like Savannah, Georgia, following their Bishop's decision to appoint mostly European clergy. Bishop Smith was determined to build Tennessee Catholicity from the grass roots up.¹³

By 1926, he had 60 seminarians preparing for service in the Diocese. In his 11 year tenure, he also 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, Monastery of Poor Clares, and the Catholic

¹¹ "Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Daniel O'Connell, Emancipator of Ireland," *The Cresset*, March 1930, 7-8.

¹² "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.

¹³ "Former Bishops," Diocese of Nashville, accessed May 5, 2022, <https://dioceseofnashville.com/former-bishops/>; Buttimer, "Turning Away from Georgia toward Rome," 35.

Club. Knoxville gained St. Mary's Hospital, Knoxville Catholic High School, and Holy Ghost Church. Chattanooga built Notre Dame School. Johnson City founded St. Mary's Church. Additional chapels were added in Gallatin, Murfreesboro, Elizabethtown, South Pittsburg, and Paris.¹⁴ Smith became so well-known for his tireless work that he even appeared in a "Who's Who" list alongside other prominent Nashvillians.¹⁵

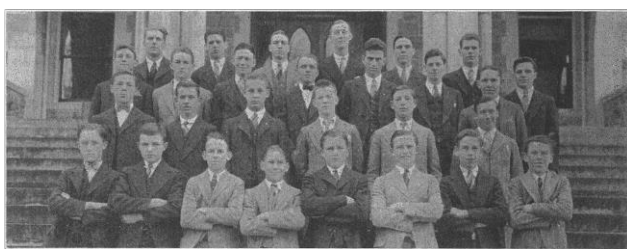
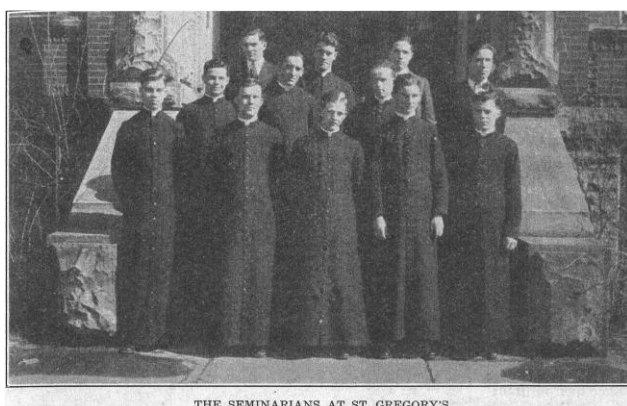


Figure 5: The Bishops Boys in "The Nashville Diocese Looks Toward a Native Clergy," *The Cresset*, March 1929, 4-5.

By March 1929, *The Cresset* counted 51 "Bishop's Boys" still studying in Alabama, Ohio, Maryland, New York, Arkansas, and Rome. They were the fulfillment of the 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."¹⁶

¹⁴ "Former Bishops," Diocese of Nashville, accessed May 5, 2022, <https://dioceseofnashville.com/former-bishops/>.

¹⁵ "Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Who's Who," *The Cresset*, October 1930, 13.

¹⁶ "The Nashville Diocese Looks Toward a Native Clergy," *The Cresset*, March 1929, 4-5.

The Cresset also frequently covered other Catholic leaders who had helped build the faith the century prior. 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 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* consistently promoted in the face of religiously bigoted attacks. Regional, national, and religious loyalty were not oppositional concepts but rather multiple facets of the type of good citizenship fostered by Catholic faith and religious education.

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,” Union 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.¹⁷ 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.

¹⁷ “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: White, Tigers, Rosecrans, Semmes, Barry,” *The Cresset*, February 1930, 7-8.

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 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.¹⁸

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-suffer narrative to highlight the especially aggrieved status of Irishmen. “The hardships experienced by my people,”

¹⁸ “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/>.

McGuire wrote, “were only an example of the hardships experienced by every Irish family coming to this country during the 18th century.”¹⁹

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 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.”²⁰

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.”²¹ 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.²² *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

¹⁹ “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: My Granddad,” *The Cresset*, March 1930, 7-8.

²⁰ “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.

²¹ “Mr. Hull’s Position on Education Bill,” *The Cresset*, August 1930, 3-4.

²² “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Canned Education,” *The Cresset*, August 1930, 9.

Catholics who questioned his 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 Catholic support for him, “Mr. Hull got the support of eighty to ninety percent of the Catholics in Tennessee.”²³

Another prominent feature of Nashville Catholicism was its willingness to find common league with groups that might elsewhere be considered antagonists. 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 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.²⁴ Catholic support for minority activism, however, did not end with their own religious community. Richard Powers argues that Jewish communities often rebuffed Catholic appeals for aid, but he cites evidence exclusively from the Northeast.

In Tennessee, however, 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

²³ “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Hon. Cordell Hull,” *The Cresset*, September 1930, 12-13.

²⁴ “Political Parties Defined by Governor Smith,” *The Cresset*, January 1929, 13.

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.”²⁵ 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.²⁶

Praise for supportive Protestants, historical and contemporary, was also employed to emphasize a common national brotherhood, though always with the caveat of including only ‘real’ Protestants.²⁷ 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, one of the most bigoted institutions in America. 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

²⁵ “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: A Holy Hater Harangues,” *The Cresset*, August 1929, 12-13.

²⁶ “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.

²⁷ “Protestants Save a Catholic Church,” *The Cresset*, October 1929, 25; “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Jasper Taylor,” *The Cresset*, November 1929, 19.

salvation, but to hold them bound in sin and to hurl them into eternal damnation."²⁸

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 it 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.²⁹

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 chided, “leads the cities of the world in the percent of cold-blooded murders.”³⁰ Agnosticism and atheism were also excluded from the family, but against them, Catholics and Protestants could find common cause.³¹

²⁸ “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>.

²⁹ “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: A Holy Hater Harangues,” *The Cresset*, August 1929, 12-13.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ “The Mass Is The Thing,” *The Cresset*, February 1929, 3.

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.³² 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.

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Highlighting 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.”³⁴ Constant reassurance that Catholic allegiance rested with the United States government rather than the Vatican remained an important part of

³² “Proselytizing In Its Worst Form,” *The Cresset*, May 1929, 3.

³³ “Will the Methodist Church Split,” *The Cresset*, July 1929, 3.

³⁴ “What Our Contemporaries Are Saying,” *The Cresset*, January 1930, 19-20.

establishing Catholic patriotism. Increasing Protestant involvement in fundamentalist, 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 radical for a core 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* argued 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.’³⁵

Racial inclusivity, however, also had limits. Since Confederate heritage was still an important component to Irish Catholic indigeneity, the Church’s welcoming arms could only extend so far.³⁶ Ethnic groups in direct competition with Irishmen for employment were frequently excluded from the “one family” concept espoused elsewhere.³⁷ 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?”³⁸ As W. Darrell Overdyke notes, nativism does not

³⁵ “Draws the Color Line,” *The Cresset*, October 1929, 6.

³⁶ “Shamrocks and Shillalahs,” *The Cresset*, February 1930, 7-8.

³⁷ “Intolerance – Great Disturbing Evil of Our Day,” *The Cresset*, December 1929, 9.

³⁸ “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Don’t Laugh At a Chinaman,” *The Cresset*, December 1929, 19-20.

necessarily imply religious rivalry or intolerance. “Many nativists have been anti-Catholic,” he argues, “but many have been faithful members of the Catholic Church.”³⁹ Catholics, then, were capable of prejudice against fellow Catholics on par with their nativist antagonizes if those fellow Catholics were from a rival group. Historians like Andrew Moore argue that Southern parishes were not large enough in the early 1900s to develop ethnic identities that were cohesive enough to spark intra-Catholic conflict. Moore insists that Southern Catholics’ besieged position within a “sea of Protestants” caused them to coalesce around their shared faith rather than their ethnicities.⁴⁰

In Nashville, however, intra-Catholic rivalry manifested dramatically between Irish and German neighborhoods. In a June 1930 edition of *Shillalahs*, McGuire highlighted the success of Nashville’s Irish Catholics in overcoming their fellow German Catholics in Assumption parish, a part of the city still known as Germantown. Though he credited Germans in North Nashville with aiding in Catholic institution building by opening the second Catholic organization in the city, McGuire asked “Oh where, oh where, is my little Dutch gone? Oh where, oh where, can he be?” He bragged:

...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

³⁹ Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South*, 13.

⁴⁰ Moore, “But We Were A Group Apart,” 75.

Deever” in their castles on West End, and attend the Cathedral on Sundays.⁴¹

The overt air of ethnic and cultural superiority is striking. Following Moore’s logic, such ethnic competition implies that Nashville’s Irish Catholics were as tight-knit and well served by their local Catholic institutions as their Northern and Midwestern counterparts. Had they not been well served, Irish and German Catholics would have displayed a greater sense of common cause against their Protestant neighbors.

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 still 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.⁴²

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.

⁴¹ “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Wir Deutchen,” *The Cresset*, June 1930, 14-15.

⁴² “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Real Folks,” *The Cresset*, October 1930, 12-13, 20.

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 Deutschen" 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 civilizing mission as they labored on the rails. *The Cresset* included Germans, Swedes, and "a mixture of Americans" with Irishmen as the key examples of whiteness.⁴³ Supporting Moore's assertions on cooperation in areas where Catholicism was weak, it appears that the Irish and Germans could coexist in the historic West as Catholic brethren 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.

Watching *The Cresset* closely from Memphis, Father Patrick O'Hanlon, the founder of *The Columbian*, guarded that Irishness. Following the March 1930 article where McGuire criticized early Irish Catholics for beggaring themselves in the name of acceptance, O'Hanlon reminded him that the original Irish immigrants had in fact kept

⁴³ "Catholic Life in the Early Days in the Far West," *The Cresset*, June 1930, 9.

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.”⁴⁴ 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.”⁴⁵

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 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.⁴⁶ 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

⁴⁴ “How Much Freedom Does Ireland Enjoy,” *The Cresset*, April 1930, 3, 14.

⁴⁵ “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Wir Deutchen,” *The Cresset*, June 1930, 14-15.

⁴⁶ “The Question of Irish Freedom Again,” *The Cresset*, May 1930, 3.

Keelan, Irish issues were carefully presented in terms that Southern readers of *The Cresset* could understand and find a sense of regional comradery.

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."⁴⁷ 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 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 community, however, continued to draw the attention of groups like the KKK. Despite the decline of Klan power nationally during the second half of the 1920s, its presence continued to linger and inspire anti-Catholic activity throughout the South. In Tennessee, Klan organizations were strongest in the eastern and western divisions, especially Chattanooga and Memphis, but major political defeats in the municipal elections of 1923 had greatly reduced their influence in

⁴⁷ "More About Irish Freedom," *The Cresset*, July 1930, 13.

those areas as well.⁴⁸ *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 “most ridiculous,” “trash,” and “genuinely amazing and amusing.” “Such statements need no comment,” the paper insisted. Catholics, however, were still charged with learning more about their own faith in order to educate non-Catholics and reduce the “public gullibility” on which the remaining religious bigots fed. No surprisingly, the editors billed readership of *The Cresset* as a primary avenue for obtaining such knowledge.⁴⁹ By presenting Catholicism as an “open book” devoid of the secret plots and devious rituals, *The Cresset* continued to position itself as the ‘flame upon the hearthstones’ of Catholic homes that drove nativism from its shadowy hiding places..⁵⁰

McGuire openly mocked the Klan and its agenda as self-destructive and ultimately 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

⁴⁸ 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.

⁴⁹ “Somebody Send them a Catechism?,” *The Cresset*, January 1929, 3.

⁵⁰ “The Secrets of the Catholic Church,” *The Cresset*, February 1929, 5.

good and welfare of the Catholic Church in these United States.”⁵¹ Rather than weaken the Church, McGuire insisted that Klan activity in the 1920s advanced Church unity.

The Cresset also continued to use humor and anti-Bolshevism as primary 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.”⁵² 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.⁵³ 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 at Omaha” 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.”⁵⁴

By fall 1930, however, 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

⁵¹ “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Our Dictionary,” *The Cresset*, June 1930, 14-15.

⁵² “Menaced by Madness of Intolerance,” *The Cresset*, March 1929, 3.

⁵³ “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Dr. John Moore,” *The Cresset*, August 1929, 12-13.

⁵⁴ “What Our Contemporaries Are Saying,” *The Cresset*, March 1930, 13-14.

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.⁵⁵

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.⁵⁶ 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 damyou's as compensation."⁵⁷ Another article in November also highlighted how little compensation editors received for their long hours of work. Editors, the paper insisted, could "do better selling popcorn at baseball games."⁵⁸ Finances may have been an issue not only for Lord but *The Cresset* as a whole. The October edition included a full list of the paper's advertisers. While ostensibly an act of gratitude for their financial support, the article was doubtless also meant to shame non-contributing Catholic businesses into joining the ranks of regular *Cresset* advertisers.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ "Shamrocks and Shillalahs: The Catholic Hour," *The Cresset*, August 1930, 9-10.

⁵⁶ "Defends the Catholic Press," *The Cresset*, October 1930, 11.

⁵⁷ "Shamrocks and Shillalahs: Thanks, Father Hardeman," *The Cresset*, September 1930, 12-13.

⁵⁸ "The Difficulties Faced by Publishers of Catholic Papers," *The Cresset*, November 1930, 36.

⁵⁹ "The Cresset's Advertisers," *The Cresset*, October 1930, 11.

The sudden concern for finances may have been the result of growing anxiety over worsening economic conditions related to the Great Depression. Despite the dramatic crash of economies in Northern cities in late 1929, the unparalleled growth of Southern cities earlier in the decade caused conditions in places like Nashville to deteriorate more slowly. 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 also played a significant role in buoying a 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 a steady decline with many cities not reaching their lowest ebbs until late in 1932. Smith argues that such optimism is evidence that the South retained a strong regional identity into the 1930s in which Southerners viewed themselves as uniquely isolated from national and international events.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Douglas L. Smith, *The New Deal in the Urban South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 12-16.

The Cresset saw itself as 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 panic.”⁶¹ 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.⁶² 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

⁶¹ “Shamrocks and Shillalahs: The Lamb Is Shorn,” *The Cresset*, December 1929, 19.

⁶² Wheeler, Burton K. 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.

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.⁶³

The story implied that despite Republican fear mongering in 1928, a different selection of president might have prevented the worst of the Depression. 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 audience.⁶⁴ High hopes, however, did not prevent the Depression from eventually catching up to Nashville as well.

In the last edition of 1930, the editors focused on the Diocese's acquisition of what they believed to be Tennessee's first Catholic newspaper, the *Catholic Herald*. Published from April 1898 to July 1899, the *Herald* was distributed by the Catholic Herald Publishing Company located at 329 Church Street in Nashville. *The Cresset's* editors praised its 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

⁶³ "Ought to Get His Papers," *The Cresset*, February 1930, 3.

⁶⁴ "Capt. Patrick H. Rice, Layman's League Head, Visits Nashville," *The Cresset*, February 1930, 4.

Catholicity” and “strong doctrinal and instructive articles,” the editors perhaps saw a blueprint for their own future.⁶⁵ *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. Change was coming for *The Cresset*, but not necessarily for its betterment.

A Flickering Flame: The Final Years, 1931-1932

As the Great Depression continued to worsen around it, *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 readers.⁶⁶ Whether the change represented an authentic desire on the part of the editors for Bishop Smith’s help or was simply a dictate from the Diocesan hierarchy is unclear. The overarching goal, however, remained the education of Catholic readers so that they could confidently and competently answer questions regarding the Church and weaken anti-Catholic rhetoric in the process. An accompanying article concerning the history and meaning of the word cresset replicated

⁶⁵ “The First Catholic Paper of Tennessee,” *The Cresset*, December 1930, 15-16.

⁶⁶ “The Cresset’s Editor Looks Ahead,” *The Cresset*, January 1931, 5-6.

elements from *The Cresset*'s original editions.⁶⁷ Most strikingly, however, 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 December 1930 edition contained a "Shillalahs" section with no mention from McGuire of an intent to halt its run, it is likely that the order to remove the section came from above.

The absence of "Shamrocks and Shillalahs" fit within a larger tonal shift for the paper. Humorous and frivolous aspects were stripped in favor of cerebral lessons on Catholic doctrine. References to local anti-Catholic antagonism also vanished in favor of global threats to the Church. 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.⁶⁸ Reflecting ever increasing Diocesan control, *The Cresset* towed the Vatican line closely, including when Rome's perspective on events proved unpalatable for American audiences. For example, the paper endorsed the rise of strongmen like Mussolini as the cure for communist threats. The paper cited Soviet plots to "[arouse] our colored population" and deceive the American press as evidence that the United States was "part of the plot" and, consequently, in need of strongman leadership as well.⁶⁹ Unlike earlier years, the paper did not attempt to frame anti-communism as

⁶⁷ "What the Word Cresset Means," *The Cresset*, January 1931, 13.

⁶⁸ "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.

⁶⁹ "Attacks on Church in Spain Soviet Plot," *The Cresset*, June 1931, 5-6.

evidence of its Americanism. Instead, America was presented as one of many global vessels that contained Catholics yet of which Catholics were not wholly part. Even when contrasted against an old nemesis like Bolshevism, such pro-authoritarian suggestions risked backlash by an American public that undoubtedly found them incompatible with patriotism.

In a dramatic shift from earlier precedents, only one article from 1931-1932 mentioned “true Americanism.” Even then, the article cited Americanism only in relation to the need for Catholics to study George Washington’s moral virtues as a patriot.⁷⁰ Gone also was the insistence that U.S. law was supreme to all else, including to the Vatican. Submission to secular law had long been a core feature of Catholic claims to patriotic loyalty. In these later years, however, *The Cresset* ordered Catholics to subject U.S. laws to a moral test to determine their suitability. In 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.”⁷¹

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

⁷⁰ “George Washington,” *The Cresset*, February 1932, 13.

⁷¹ “Liberty of Conscience,” *The Cresset*, February 1932, 13.

names and events.⁷² The same was true for references to Irishness. A 1931 reprinting of Rev. George Flanigen's St. 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.⁷³ The other came in February 1932 and chronicled plans for representatives from Tennessee to attend the Eucharistic Congress in Dublin.⁷⁴ Elsewhere, the Irish were entirely omitted from lists of races composing the "great Unity" of the Church.⁷⁵

Many of the most dramatic changes occurred after October 1931. That month's edition announced that priests from the Diocese were taking over management and editorial duties for the paper. The new managing editor and author of the October article was Reverend George J. Flanigen. Flanigen promised to raise the paper's editorial standards in order to make it more readable, interesting, instructive, and profitable. He made it clear that the Diocese was not satisfied with the paper's former management. "The Cresset has its defects," he said, "in content, in circulation and advertising." Despite the "good deal of criticism" that the paper had produced, he promised that the previous staff would remain "for the most part." The paper's financial goals would also shift to paying the remaining debt owed for Father Ryan High School, presumably

⁷² "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.

⁷³ "St. Patrick and the Faith of the Irish," *The Cresset*, April 1931, 9-10.

⁷⁴ "Tennessee Pilgrimage to Dublin," *The Cresset*, February 1932, 9.

⁷⁵ "The Spirit of Catholicism," *The Cresset*, August 1931, 7-8.

because of decreased funds related to the ongoing Depression. Stressing the importance of Diocesan authority, Flanigen reminded readers that *The Cresset* was the only periodical in the diocese “published under the approbation of the Bishop.”⁷⁶ His comment suggests that *The Cresset* may have faced competition by other non-Diocesan Catholic papers by this point.

Under Flanigen’s leadership, Catholic Action became the primary talking point. In three articles from November 1931 to February 1932, he contrasted Catholic Action 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. His perspective explains the heavier hand the Diocese of Nashville took with *The Cresset* in 1931-1932.⁷⁷

A final mention of the deepening Depression reflected the growing importance of Catholic Action as manifested in service to the poor. In a December 1931 article titled “Depression Relief Begun by the Diocese,” Reverend Flanigen recounted the dramatic

⁷⁶ “The Cresset Announcing New Management,” October 1931, 5.

⁷⁷ “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.

effect of a Vatican call for Bishops worldwide 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 Nashville’s various parishes. In the article, 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 Society’s work as “splendid,” he must have simultaneously wished for additional revenue streams for his own struggling paper.⁷⁸ 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 21,887,606.⁷⁹ Another article noted with pride that the Diocese of Nashville had contributed to the

⁷⁸ “Depression Relief Begun by Diocese,” *The Cresset*, December 1931, 6.

⁷⁹ “Some Statistics,” *The Cresset*, March 1932, 6; “The Catholic Press,” *The Cresset*, March 1932, 6.

annual collection for the Catholic University of America “far in excess of any previous collection.”⁸⁰ These expressions of Catholic success, however, were accompanied by a worrying sign for *The Cresset*. 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.⁸¹ The sudden appearance of the coupon suggests that the paper was experiencing issues with maintaining its readership. Perhaps the multi-year discount was meant to induce cash-strapped readers straining under ever-increasing economic pressures related to the Depression. Alternatively, the paper’s new mission to fund Father Ryan High School’s debts may have drained too much capital and forced the paper to seek a rapid increase in revenue to offset those losses. Regardless, the paper intended to use the coupon as a remedy for its financial woes. It did not get that chance.

* * *

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 *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.’

⁸⁰ “Previous Catholic University Collections Greatly Exceeded,” *The Cresset*, March 1932, 8.

⁸¹ “Subscription Blank,” *The Cresset*, March 1932, 9.

In reality, *The Cresset* likely failed as a result of a confluence of factors. First, it is clear that the paper's core readership declined in 1931-1932. If the middle years are

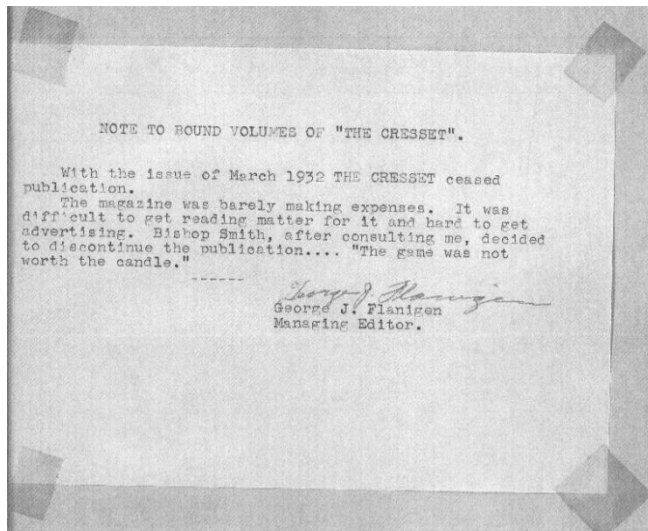


Figure 6: Final page of *The Cresset* in the bound volumes housed at Aquinas College in Nashville, Tennessee.

any indication, that core readership was composed primarily of Irish Catholics. They were likely displeased with the doctrinaire tone and complete lack of Irishness that Diocesan control brought in 1931-1932. 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 the purchase of necessities. If they were unhappy with the paper's content, the effect would only have been magnified. The delay of the Depression's arrival 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.⁸² 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 educate and rally the masses. In fact, a nearly half-page add 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 developing printed 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.”⁸³ 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 thus hopelessly outdated and

⁸² “Some Pertinent Reminders,” *The Cresset*, March 1932, 11-12.

⁸³ “K. of C. On the Air,” *The Cresset*, March 1932, 13.

outmatched in fulfilling the core educational goals on which they had built their relevance.

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. The last of *The Cresset*'s nine published goals in 1927 was "the elimination of bigotry, intolerance and misunderstanding in national affairs."⁸⁴ If acceptance of Irish Catholics had indeed reached a critical inflection point, 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.

⁸⁴ "What the Cresset Stands For," *The Cresset*, May 1927, 3.

Conclusion

The Columbian and *The Cresset* operated as the voice for Tennessee's Catholic community for a collective 16 years from 1915 to 1932. In that time, the social and political landscape changed in dramatic ways. At times, those changes were external, forcing the papers to react to maximize their advantage. *The Columbian* did not instigate World War I, but it utilized every possible means to harness war participation as a vehicle for assimilation. At other times, the changes were the product of intentional Catholic efforts. As evident from McGuire's articles, Irish Catholics in Nashville sought to dominate the local Catholic community and steer its course using *The Cresset* as their mouthpiece. The effort to convince 'native' Nashvillians that Catholicism and Irish culture were as native to Tennessee as the prolific hackberry tree wasn't a passive act. It was an intentional program that unfolded over the course of almost two decades.

An Eye to the Future

The limitations of this project are numerous, but they offer tantalizing pathways for future research. First, I focus heavily on accounts of events as portrayed in *The Columbian* and *The Cresset*. While I acknowledge the press rarely presents unbiased fact, I am less concerned in this project with the objective 'what' of events. Instead, I am more interested in how the Catholic press portrayed those events and, as a result, how

Irish Catholic readers 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.¹ By tracking “the selection, gathering, writing, editing, and display” of news articles from 1915 to 1932, I draw conclusions about what Catholic institutions and, by extension, their paying readers found important. As a working class community with limited education and even more limited leisure time in which to write as individuals, Nashville’s Irish Catholics represent the type of population for which the press offers the greatest possible insight. Future research, however, should integrate perspectives from non-Catholic papers both in and out of the South to provide a more objective view of events. A detailed analysis of nativist papers like *The Menace* could also illuminate the nature of the accusations to which Catholic papers frequently responded. The journals, letters, and other private documents of literate Irish Catholics living in Nashville during the period could also help contextualize events and reveal how they were actually perceived in the wake of press coverage.

Another limiting factor is the level of access I had to the primary sources. Physical copies of *The Columbian* and *The Cresset* are only available at the archives of Aquinas College in Nashville. The archive is open for a limited number of hours each week, which makes it difficult to spend copious amounts of time with the originals. No digital copies exist, and microfilm versions are available only at the University of Notre Dame. In addition, renovation projects and limited summer functionality at Aquinas

¹ 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>.

College meant I only had access to the 1915-1923 editions of *The Columbian*, which restricts a full analysis of Catholic activity in Nashville in the mid-twenties. I attempt to supplement my discussion with secondary materials, but future research should include these missing years to more accurately depict conditions on the ground.

A final important route for future research concerns additional Catholic newspapers in the area. Throughout the research process, I was aware that both a previous Catholic paper, *The Herald*, and a subsequent paper, *The Register*, existed within the Diocese. Due to limitations on time and resources, however, I did not extend my analysis to those publications. Future research should explore both papers for continuities and differences that could illuminate changing conditions for Nashville Catholics over time. 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. Working with the same Reverend George J. Flanigen who assumed leadership of *The Cresset* in 1931, Willging and Hatzfeld documented each paper's years of publication, leadership team, and general tone. Most were relatively short lived and highly local, originating exclusively from Memphis, Chattanooga, and Nashville. These papers could still benefit future researchers, however, by substantiating the histories put forward by the twentieth century Catholic papers. Willging and Hatzfeld specifically note that three of the papers

were “Irish in tone,” making them potentially invaluable in validating the Irish experience in nineteenth century Tennessee.²

Pilgrimage

On October 24, 2021, I made my pilgrimage to 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 monument near the front of the Great Lawn. On my way, I passed the Parthenon, a structure that was originally meant to be a temporary monument to Tennessee’s centennial celebration in 1897. By 1920, however, Nashvillians had become so enamored with the structure as a potent symbol for their city’s status as the ‘Athens of the South’ that they rebuilt it as a permanent fixture.³ From that point onward, the park surrounding the Parthenon became a favorite venue for groups seeking inclusion in Nashville society.

I next passed the Tennessee Women Suffrage Monument. The large bronze statues of five leading suffragettes, including Timothy memorial attendee Anne Dallas Dudley, stared back at me from the spot where Dudley delivered a historic speech on May 1, 1916. The speech was the climax of the largest women’s rally in Nashville up to that point. Dozens of automobiles followed Dudley and her fellow marchers from the

² 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>.

³ The Parthenon, “About the Parthenon,” About, accessed June 6, 2022, <https://www.nashvilleparthenon.com/history>.

state capitol to Centennial park. Flowers rained down on the marchers from office windows high above as they made their way through downtown. Ironically, many of the



Figure 7: "Marching Suffragists," Tennessee Virtual Archives, accessed June 11, 2022, <https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll27/id/67/rec/8>.

blooms were dropped by women who were not allowed to leave work despite the city-wide holiday declared by Mayor Hilary Howse. Both elegant and eloquent, Dudley answered critics who claimed only men should vote because they bear arms by reminding them that

"Women bear armies."⁴ Over the next four years, 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. Through it all, their literal banners of white flew side by side with figurative banners of green as Irish Catholics walked the same path. They too staked their claim to inclusion on the war effort. The press rather than parades, however, would pave the way for their acceptance.

As I walked the final few hundred feet down the tree-lined boundaries of the lawn, I remembered M.T. Bryan's prediction that future Nashvillians would find not only rest and relaxation beneath the hackberry's branches but also a quickening sense of patriotism in the story the tree represented. Throughout the park, memorial after

⁴ Jessica Bliss, "Alan LeQuire's Women Suffrage Monument unveiled in Nashville's Centennial Park," *The Tennessean*, August 26, 2016, accessed June 11, 2022, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2016/08/24/alan-lequires-women-suffrage-monument-unveiled-centennial-park/87150580/>.

memorial competed for the attention of leisure seekers. Frisbees, footballs, and free Wi-Fi, however, occupied more minds than the struggles and triumphs documented on the numerous plaques. The hackberry, however, was different. It wasn't a cold marble monolith or abstract art piece. It was a living reminder of a people's sacrifice that welcomed contemplation and reflection beneath its wide canopy. Like May 31, 1919, the day was warm and sunny, and I found myself looking forward to standing in the shade of Timothy's tree.

Approaching 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 the city's "crown jewel" by honoring its past, accommodating modern needs, and reestablishing it as a showpiece for the city and region.⁵ Wider sidewalks now beckon visitors to thoroughly explore the park grounds. Well maintained memorials invite curiosity and contemplation. New event spaces encourage large gatherings of Nashvillians for concerts, craft fairs, cultural celebrations, and an annual performance of Shakespeare. Improved access by both foot and car make the whole experience more enjoyable. In

⁵ 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>.

short, the modernized park embodied Bryan's vision of a sacred communal space. When I finally reached the end of the lawn, however, I froze. I had arrived where Timothy's memorial should have been, but only blank concrete stretched in front of me. The tree was gone.

Perplexed, I checked the coordinates on my phone and re-read the description of the tree's location in my sources. I was standing exactly where the tree and marker were set in 1919. Old oaks and magnolias stood all around, but the hackberry was gone. There was no trace of the three-foot marker. 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 she said contained every memorial in the park. There was no mention of Timothy's tree.

In the coming weeks I reached out to multiple park and municipal officials about the memorial's fate, but the responses were much the same as the visitor center attendant: silence. Official documents show that the city commissioned a tree study in 2019. The researchers listed 414 hackberries in the park, 52 of which were in "poor" condition. Perhaps Timothy's tree was among those flagged from removal because of disease or defect. The last photograph of the tree from 2017 shows some of its branches were indeed bare. It is impossible to tell from the official report, however, if



Figure 8: 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.

Timothy's tree was targeted as tree species were cataloged without remark to location or purpose. In the moment, I resigned to return to the tree's former location.

As I stood on the flashy new sidewalk built atop the hackberry's roots, I wondered if this might not be the ultimate incarnation of the campaign Timothy and his tree embodied. A few hundred yards away stood the Gold Star Memorial at the corner of West End and 25th 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. Beneath George Zolnay's sculpture of a soldier held by an allegorical figure, metal plaques on the eastern and western sides list the names and ranks of the fallen soldiers along with the inscription: "I Gave My Best to Make A Better World."⁶ The name James Simmons Timothy is engraved near the bottom of the western facing plaque. The plaque provides no context for Timothy's life or death. He 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.

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 that sought to dislodge them, the roots of one tree enmesh themselves with those of others to form the scaffold on which life at the surface thrives. They are imperceptible. They are indispensable. For nearly a century, Timothy's hackberry stood watch over Nashville, a silent sentinel of the crusade

⁶ 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>.

for inclusiveness. 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 in 1919. Each group faced its own struggle for acceptance. Each fought a battle that would have been familiar to Irish Catholics at the turn of the century. Many used Centennial Park as a forum for their cause.

Yet as a new millennium dawned, Timothy's tree had grown old. The struggle it represented slipped from public memory. Churches, schools, and social clubs with Irish names and Catholic affiliations no longer provoked suspicion. 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.

Whether the result of a physical wasting from disease or merely a loss of symbolic value, the tree and its marker passed from public view, their memory preserved only within the few records that reference them. The roots, however, remain.

Over the course of nearly two decades, *The Columbian* and *The Cresset* worked to cement Irish Catholic claims not only to belonging in Southern society but also to having provided the literal and ideological foundations on which it was built. Like the soldier it was planted to honor, the hackberry's death may come to symbolize the final step toward full, undifferentiated inclusion for the Irish. 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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