

Evolution and Voices of Progressive Catholicism in the Age of the Scopes Trial

Alexander Pavuk

Introduction

When America's few nationally known Catholic intellectuals of the 1920s were asked by conservative Protestants such as William Jennings Bryan to add their voices to the anti-evolution cause, they proffered only stony silence in return. Bryan had touted political backing and friendship from Catholics as far back as 1908, but in the case of the Scopes trial, even Alfred McCann—no intellectual but probably the best-known Catholic to denounce prevailing views of evolution (in the dubious 1922 book *God or Gorilla*)—refused all requests for help from Bryan. The *New York Times* reported Bryan asked McCann to testify at the Scopes trial, to which the latter replied: "I disapprove of the entire procedure from beginning to end."¹ Protestants like Bryan thought the need to save the country's soul from agnostic scions of scientific technocracy would trump Protestant-Catholic rivalries and spur a united front in their crusade against teaching human evolution. A myth long fed to Americans—that Catholicism had conducted a warfare against science spanning the centuries—likely fueled such hopes.² So, too, might have pronouncements like conservative Jesuit Francis LeBuffe's repudiation of human evolution in the *New York Times* in March 1922.³ But the dynamics within American Catholicism were complex, and LeBuffe represented its conservative bloc whose voice was dismissed by both non-Catholic intellectual elites and many liberal Catholics. By contrast, Fr. John A. Ryan and Michael Williams expressed their openness to the science of human evolution. They were part of a small, but disproportionately influential, liberal-progressive Catholic cadre whose voices actually resonated to some extent with non-Catholic scientists and public intellectuals of the age. It was liberal-progressive Catholics who successfully entered into the discourse that was constructing the symbolic

Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation, Vol. 26, Issue 1, pp. 101–137, ISSN: 1052-1151, electronic ISSN: 1533-8568. © 2016 by The Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals.php?p=reprints>. DOI: 10.1525/rac.2016.26.1.101.

image of evolution, and the Scopes trial, in U.S. culture in the 1920s. Those Catholics crafted their rhetoric—especially when aimed at non-Catholics—almost exclusively in social and biological science categories to the exclusion of religion or religious authority. In supporting evolution and the Scopes trial, they carved what historical geographer David Livingstone has termed a public “speech space” while tied to “the cultural politics of [their] interpretive community” in his study of Calvinists’ varied reception of Darwinism in multiple nineteenth-century locations.⁴

Liberal-progressive Catholic thinkers had already embraced contemporary models of social and biological science rhetoric since the early twentieth century. Having “progressive . . . eyes firmly fixed on science’s metropolitan horizon,” they sought to ally themselves with those scientists and science-minded experts who possessed the cultural capital to assign meaning evolution in the years surrounding the Scopes trial.⁵ Approval by such figures would open a doorway to broader intellectual respectability in American public culture.

But Ryan and Williams may have unintentionally fostered elements of scientism in American cultural discourse by excluding religion from rhetoric they aimed at non-Catholics. Even as they argued in naturalistic frameworks about human origins and development, some of evolution’s most visible scientist-popularizers, like Henry Fairfield Osborn, habitually intertwined evolution with religion—specifically Protestant modernist concepts such as divine immanence—in their widely resonant public rhetoric.⁶ Thus, when presented as friendly to religion, evolution was almost inevitably paired with modernist Protestantism. It is true, of course, that not all scientists tied evolution to philosophical or religious ideas in their popularization. The renowned Thomas H. Morgan, an acknowledged atheist, for example, generally kept overt philosophy out of his publicizing of genetics and evolution. But by the mid-1920s, straight naturalistic science featured much less commonly in scientists’ popular portrayals of evolution than did science mixed with quasi-theological notions like vitalism. Teleology figured particularly prominently in scientists’ portrayal of evolution in this period, as Edward Davis has shown.⁷

On the one hand, liberal Catholics sought alliances with scientists who avoided tying evolution to straight materialism. On the other hand, as Catholics, they also wanted to distance themselves from the claim that science had (or even could, methodologically speaking) demonstrated the human spirit or soul had arisen through an exclusively evolutionary process. Since mainline teleological evolutionists almost invariably argued that it had, even the most liberal

Catholics had to tread carefully if they wanted to avoid slipping out of Catholic theological orthodoxy.⁸ It was less dangerous to focus on critiquing conservative Protestant anti-evolutionists and their political moves than risk offering a developed form of teleological-theistic evolution distinct from the constructs proffered by Protestant modernist scientists like Osborn, Robert Millikan, Kirtley Mather, and others in the early-mid 1920s. But even in doing so, they contributed a Catholic voice that has yet to be properly accounted for in the cultural history of that period.

The history of science-religion relationships has benefited in recent decades from scholars reimagining the webs of relationships and crosscurrents that complicate claims about so-called science-religion sides, though the reductionist *creationist* vs. *evolutionist* paradigm dies hard for the interwar period. In weaving forgotten yarns back into the broader cultural tapestry, the liberal Catholic strand has to be accounted for as a sort of *via media* highlighting the fluidity of such so-called sides. In showing this complexity, the present article focuses on how Michael Williams, particularly in his role as editor of *Commonweal* magazine, and John A. Ryan—as the only Catholic priest on the National Board of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)—influenced the nature and presence of religion in public discussions about human origins and development in that time of heightened cultural focus on evolution.

Setting the Stage

In recent decades, historians of science have shown how assumptions about Catholicism's presumed hostility to science are largely distortions. Such ideas, going at least as far back as Voltaire's characterization of the church in the Galileo trial, were augmented by the aforementioned conflict/warfare model of the science-religion relationship originating in the nineteenth century. Now discredited by historians, this model enjoyed wide credence in the first half of the twentieth century.⁹ It should be noted, too, that Pope Leo XIII (r. 1878–1903) was not attempting to distance the Catholic church from modern science but rather reconcile the two with his 1879 decree *Aeterni Patris* (On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy).¹⁰ In practice, however, this document had the unintended effect of creating more dissonance since Leo proposed the philosophy of thirteenth-century harmonizer of theology and natural history, Thomas Aquinas, as the basis of new bridge building between Catholic theology and current natural science. Aquinas's system and the neoscholasticism derived from it were equated with backward

medievalism by contemporary intellectuals outside the church.¹¹ It was the liberal Catholics—rejecting the idea of using neoscholastic philosophy to communicate with non-Catholics about the sciences—who actually started building such bridges.

By the 1920s, one of the most important such liberals was Michael Williams, a journalist who founded *Commonweal* magazine in 1924 specifically to participate in the intellectual exchanges taking place in middlebrow-highbrow journals of opinion like the *New Republic*, *The Nation*, and *Literary Digest*. From its inception, Williams frequently employed his magazine to engage broader discussions of science and religion and their relationship to broader culture. The inaugural issue featured several articles dealing positively with the sciences in contemporary life. At the same time, they distinguished between legitimate professional science and its distortion in the hands of polemicists.¹² From its early years, *Commonweal*, of all Catholic-run magazines, reached the largest non-Catholic audience and became the most widely quoted source of Catholic views in magazines and major news venues like the *New York Times*.¹³ So, too, was John Ryan widely quoted as one of the most prominent, and most liberal, Catholic voices of social science in interwar American intellectual and political life.¹⁴

The terms *liberal* or *progressive* Catholic and *conservative* Catholic referred to genuine differences acknowledged at the time in the press (though the terms did not correspond to their more general political usage). Williams and Ryan must be distinguished from their conservative co-religionists in that same era. Conservative Catholics—recognizable by their overt use of neo-Thomism even in discourse aimed at secular and other non-Catholic audiences—were generally no more enthusiastic about the Scopes trial than Catholic liberals. However, even as some occasionally tried to proclaim the acceptability of certain forms of theistic animal evolution, their overall support of evolution was tepid at best (with some simply rejecting it as an unproven hypothesis). Even the support came with the proviso that such evolution had to be understood in neo-Thomistic framings.¹⁵ Often finding voice in the Jesuit-run *America* magazine and the neoscholastic journal *Thought*, non-Catholic Americans generally dismissed these figures and such fora as the products of casuistry when they took any notice at all.

The liberals, by contrast, were identifiable by their endorsement of significant elements of the broader Progressive reform movement.¹⁶ Most had also imbibed aspects of what historians like R. Scott Appleby have called the “Americanist-Modernist continuum.”¹⁷ Liberal Catholics did not accept all modern intellectual trends, such as

pragmatism, but Robert Cross's classic characterization holds up: they approached the church and society with an enthusiasm for modernity and the newest scientific approaches to social problems, politics, and human history. In his words, they wished "to compete with the new [science-centered] learning on its own ground" and were "unanimously anxious for rapprochement with the leaders of the intellectual world . . . [and with] secular culture."¹⁸

Although an abundant literature with many references to the 1925 trial characterize the American debate over evolution's place in twentieth-century public culture, the majority of that literature says little about either conservative and liberal Catholics' public voice around that time, much of it concentrating on Protestant creationists when attempting to account for religious believers.¹⁹ Although historians of science and the Scopes trial now write with much greater nuance, older norms continue to inform the views of many. Thus structured, this schema marginalizes voices that cannot be fit into the reductionist model.²⁰ Since the ascent of the creationist cousin, so-called intelligent design, in recent years, this skewed perspective of matters surrounding the Scopes debate tends to tip even farther in the direction whereby fundamentalist Protestantism is reified as *the* 'Christian' view" in the debate over evolution.²¹ Protestantism was not the only show in town, but liberal Catholics faced challenges in creating their own speech space.

The Catholic population had greatly multiplied by the 1920s, mostly through immigration but partly through native birth, at a rate that alarmed many Americans. This helped renew anti-Catholicism both at the popular level and among elites, the latter exemplified in the pages of *The Atlantic Monthly* and other journals of opinion.²² The widespread claim that new Catholic immigrants—along with Jews, Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and those bearing Eastern religions—brought along undemocratic beliefs and uneducated allegiances to old world political and cultural norms helped mold Anglo-American elite and middle-class attitudes toward them and, for our focus, to Catholics in general. Few of the immigrant Catholics arriving from the 1900s to 1920s were highly educated, but they represented an ethno-religious cohort nativists considered increasingly influential, if only through their sheer numbers.²³ Williams, Ryan, and other heirs to the progressive Americanist Catholic nexus were anxious to distance themselves rhetorically from the unwashed image of those many new Catholic arrivals. Such distance would probably be necessary if these intellectuals were to be considered modern, fully American thinkers who had something worthwhile to contribute in the broader republic of letters.

When participating in highbrow intellectual debate, American Catholics thinkers also wanted to distance themselves from the potentially KKK-connected Protestant conservatives—both urban and rural—of the proliferating anti-evolution movement connected with Bryan.²⁴ Though Bryan was seen as the figurehead of Protestant fundamentalism, he had no involvement in the sordid, virulent anti-Catholic nativism that had sullied many political movements, so he would not have necessarily assumed a call to Catholics for help in the Scopes trial would go unanswered.

In reality, Catholics' nonresponse—even by the neo-Thomist conservatives—is unsurprising for at least two reasons beyond the concerns just mentioned. First, the Catholic church's teachings on biblical interpretation were more sophisticated than the literalist approach employed by Protestants opposing evolution.²⁵ In 1909, the Pontifical Biblical Commission had published a decree on the first several chapters of Genesis. For the conservative Jesuit LeBuffe, the decree implied Genesis ran counter to an evolutionary explanation for humans and offered, as he put it, "at least a disciplinary prohibition regarding the teaching of the evolution of even Adam's body."²⁶ But most other Catholic authorities of note argued the decree's wording was crafted so as purposely to *protect* the possibility of evolution for all physical forms. Fr. Ernest Messenger, student popularizer of French evolutionist-entomologist Henri Dorlodot, contended that the commission's wording was carefully selected so as not to rule out evolution.²⁷ Catholics' primary concern was the divine infusion of the spiritual soul. Barring arguments for a purely material soul, attacks on evolution *writ large*, no matter the venue, would not have been appealing.

Second, Bryan, a Protestant in a country with longstanding Protestant cultural hegemony, did not have to fight for the chance to discuss evolution or religion publicly and get a hearing. By the 1920s, Catholic thinkers were only recently, and haltingly, achieving credible visibility in the public sphere, in part from their endorsement of scientific causes. But even this did not protect them from the new wave of anti-Catholicism emerging in the 1920s. Therefore, even had they wanted to do so, supporting a fight that could have painted them as antiscientific would have been a poor way to gain credibility with the very intellectual elite they courted.²⁸

Liberal Catholics courted the elites even as they expressed fear of more popular Protestant leaders using debates surrounding the Scopes trial to legislate a Protestant interpretation of the Bible into the public schools. This was an ironic plot turn in that Catholics had long suffered from accusations of wanting to quash the proper separation of

church and state. Many American Catholics had already decided they favored a secular public school rather than a Protestantizing system.

Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Depictions of Catholics and Science

On December 13, 1884, the *New York Times* published an editorial that summed up the assumptions of many Americans regarding Catholicism, modern science, and evolution common from the late nineteenth century through several decades of the twentieth. It contended that the Catholic hierarchy's proposal to create a comprehensive Catholic University of America in the nation's capital would fulfill no practical purpose. Catholic opposition to scientific progress, its author argued, had always been normative, so the university's chances of operating as a legitimate institution of higher education were very doubtful. Revealing a distorted understanding of Catholic history and teachings reminiscent of Draper's work, the author argued, "As a scientific school a Roman Catholic university would hardly be successful. The Church of Rome is generally regarded as hostile to modern science. . . . [T]he church has repeatedly shown that it regards science as dangerous. The Roman Church is bound to uphold the infallibility of the Bible . . . [while not absolute literalists] all Roman theologians would earnestly oppose any scientific teaching which would tend to overthrow the chronology of Moses."²⁹ Moving from the general to the specific, the editorialist went on, "[t]he hypothesis of evolution would find no countenance in a Roman Catholic university, and its pupils would feel that in many fields they must practically ignore much of the work of the most eminent scientific men of the century."³⁰

Several decades later, one of America's most prominent biologists and popularizers of evolution, Edwin Grant Conklin of Princeton University, used the same forum to espouse a similar sense of Catholics' relation to science. In a *New York Times* article from 1922, Conklin presented Catholicism's opposition to science as so obvious—symbolized by the twisted popular memory of Galileo and the Roman Inquisition—that it was simply a given: "All the world knows the story of 'Starry Galileo and His Woes' at the hands of the Inquisition."³¹ Shortly thereafter, Conklin attacked the Catholic church in article appearing in *Science* magazine. There he again sensationalized the Galileo incident, characterized the present-day church as stuck in the Middle Ages, and analogized William Jennings Bryan to "Dark Age" Catholicism.³² The Galileo affair as a popular synecdoche for the eternal symbol of Catholicism's supposed conflict with modern

science and philosophy showed no sign of abating in the 1920s, even in the hands of America's most known and trusted scientists. Catholics both in America and abroad were aware of this connection and wanted distance from it.³³

The John Zahm Affair and Later Trans-Atlantic Catholic Science

The late nineteenth-century case of Catholic priest John Zahm illustrates how both internal church dynamics and debates over philosophy of science played a role in Catholics' attempt to engage science in American culture at the time. Zahm was a popular instructor of physics and chemistry at the University of Notre Dame who, in the 1890s, published several books drawing together Catholicism, the Bible, and evolution. His volume *Bible, Science and Faith* (1894) and especially his influential, internationally best-selling book *Evolution and Dogma* (1896) were criticized by conservative Italian Jesuits for containing theological "modernism" and Americanism, ideas they tied to his defense of evolution on scientific and theological pillars. Influenced by the Jesuits but not wanting to be accused of repeating the church's behavior during the Galileo episode, the Congregation of the Index of Forbidden Books did not issue a public condemnation of Zahm's later book after it had been denounced (Pope Leo XIII personally forbade publishing anything against it), though it did send a private decree telling Fr. Zahm to withdraw the book without ever publicly stating its reason for doing so.³⁴

The late nineteenth-century context of this episode in America also encompassed non-Catholic intellectuals and certain journals dedicated to spreading scientific positivism. These hoped to employ arguments made by Americans Catholics that could seem to support their claims. Such claims centered on the idea that science was inherently tied to the uniformity of nature philosophy, a viewpoint that essentially underpinned scientism. In this case, *Evolution and Dogma* had been given a very positive review in *Popular Science Monthly*, the journal largely responsible for popularizing the works of Herbert Spencer and famed agnostic Thomas Huxley in America. The journal was edited by William Yeomans, an architect of tying the philosophies of positivism and uniformity of nature to the sciences. In the Zahm review, Yeomans co-opted this Catholic's work to make it seem it was supporting his broader philosophical agenda.³⁵ Such a perception could not be countenanced by Catholic officials. However, by the 1920s, several intervening developments changed the ground rules for American Catholics popularizing evolution. The most important came from the pens of European Catholic scientists.

By the second and third decades of the twentieth century, several notable priest-scientists in Europe had written both technical and popular tomes supporting evolution. Their scientific acumen had accorded Catholicism significant prestige and, of them, two contemporaries (along with the writings of a deceased third) substantially influenced American Catholic discourse by the 1920s. They were: Frenchman Henri de Dorlodot (1855–1929); Austrian Erich Wasmann, S.J. (1859–1931); and the late St. George Jackson Mivart (1827–1900) of Britain. Canon Dorlodot, a geology professor at the University of Louvain and avowed Darwinist, had been the Catholic representative at Cambridge University's celebration of Darwin's birth centennial in 1909. In his address there, Dorlodot pronounced, "Darwin was the interpreter of the organic world; just as Newton was the voice from heaven come to tell us of the glory of the Creator."³⁶ Beyond arguing the clear compatibility of evolution and Catholicism, Dorlodot's book *Darwinism and Catholic Thought* (1921) interpreted early Christian writers like St. Augustine through the lens of evolution, claiming Augustine "was the firmest believer in absolute natural evolution... as Darwin understood it."³⁷ This anachronistic claim would be repeated by American Catholics in the 1920s. Bertram Windle, *Commonweal's* de-facto science editor that decade, said it was the work of Dorlodot (and Mivart) that most influenced his view of evolution and Catholicism.³⁸

American progressive Catholics also gained substantial ballast from the work of Jesuit entomologist Henri Wasmann.³⁹ Conservative Catholics, who derided what they saw as their liberal brethren's excessive enthusiasm for the evolution bandwagon, accused the liberals of making "Wasmannism" seem to be *the* Catholic position.⁴⁰ Wasmann had authored significant portions of the first *Catholic Encyclopedia's* article on evolution, a series that found its way into almost every Catholic parish rectory in the early decades of the twentieth century.⁴¹ Known on the Continent as a prolific opponent of Ernst Haeckel's monism, Wasmann had published highly respected technical work on ants and beetles that, as Robert J. Richards has pointed out, convinced him of the reality of "descent with modification."⁴² Richards's assessment was that Wasmann's arguments showed "no necessary antagonism had to exist between evolutionary theory and a liberal, philosophically acute brand of theology."⁴³

St. George Jackson Mivart (1827–1900), excommunicated late in life for theological modernism, had published several books in the late nineteenth century endorsing evolution. While he did oppose Darwin's thesis that evolution operated primarily by gradual, natural selection, so did numerous other scientists in the years before the

recovery and use of Mendelism. Mivart's *Genesis of Species* (1871) had laid out a case in favor of evolution by discontinuous steps.⁴⁴ With the work of these European Catholics in place by the 1920s, different Catholic precedents had been established for our actors beyond what had existed in Zahm's era, though broader openness to Catholic intellectual creativity was tempered by the papacy's condemnation of theological modernism in 1907.⁴⁵

John A. Ryan in American Public Life and on the Scopes Trial

By the 1920s, John Ryan was professor of both moral theology and political science at the Catholic University of America. On the one hand, as Robert Preston argued, he was akin to a Progressive-era technocrat whose social prescriptions reflected the scientism associated with professional sociology in the early twentieth century.⁴⁶ On the other hand, he was a respected professor and stand-out Catholic social activist. By the late 1910s, he was also well known for his co-directorship of the American Catholic Social Action Department in the liberal National Catholic Welfare Conference, the primary Catholic organization established to interface with American public life.

Although Ryan toed a neoscholastic philosophical line when writing for Catholics, his rhetoric directed at non-Catholics eschewed that philosophy in favor of the hallmarks of the Catholic Americanist and modernist movements, especially when discussing the social fractures created by industrialization. He argued it was not the standard religious fields of scripture or dogmatics that would lead people to salvation, but economic opportunity.⁴⁷ Ryan tended to express a social scientific view of religion's role in the industrialized world; his biographer, Francis Broderick, argued that Ryan did not realize "how closely he approached secular reformers by adopting their vocabulary and symbols."⁴⁸ Historian David O'Brien has said of Ryan's discourse that in his tendency to "frame his arguments in pragmatic terms... he always sounded like a typical American progressive."⁴⁹ For example, Ryan was a member of the American Eugenics Society (AES) and its Committee on Cooperation with Clergymen from 1924 to 1930. This was a group that as a whole worked against new immigrants. Ryan harshly criticized its "Nordicism" and other excesses that de facto targeted many Catholic immigrants, trying to change the organization from within, but to no avail. By the time he resigned, his complaint was not that the AES's support of immigration restriction or even contraception was immoral but rather that such support was "unscientific."⁵⁰

At the dawn of the 1920s, Ryan was already a progressive force to be reckoned with in American public life, cultivating connections with many public intellectuals. His papers revealed widespread professional correspondence with secular liberals and progressives, with those in non-Catholic religions, and with other Catholics in whom he sensed his own liberal-progressive spirit. His private and published correspondence spanned figures like Lewis Gannett of *The Nation*, Bruce Bliven of the *New Republic*, H. L. Mencken of *The American Mercury*, John Dewey, Walter Lippmann, and other such figures in the republic of letters.⁵¹ He also carried on a wide-ranging correspondence with Paul Hutchinson, longtime editor of the premier liberal Protestant journal, the *Christian Century*.⁵²

Ryan's response to the Scopes trial was consistent with the progressive, social science-oriented tenor of his broader public engagement. It reflected a distrust of the majoritarian strand in the American political tradition represented by Bryan. Further, it revealed characteristic assumptions of the liberal Catholic contingent on secular public education and on science and expert authority. His predominant concern was with protecting Catholic minorities in public schools from what he defined as a creeping Protestant plan to use the power of the state both to influence how science was being taught and to inculcate Protestant denominationalism into the schools. Ryan's rhetoric on Scopes, science, and legislative prerogatives was also noteworthy for the care taken to distance his church from perceived intolerance in the public sphere.

To the delight of its radical and liberal members, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sponsoring the Scopes defense included Ryan in its ranks. He had joined the organization in 1921, at that time the only Catholic priest ever to serve on the ACLU's national board, a fact of significant symbolic importance. As Broderick observed, "Non-Catholic reformers were happy to invoke, even in this oblique form, the favor of American Catholic opinion."⁵³ The day after John T. Scopes was indicted for violating Tennessee's Butler Act, the ACLU board assembled in New York City with Ryan in attendance.⁵⁴ He offered no dissent when the board accepted the aggressively agnostic (and anti-Catholic) Clarence Darrow's offer to assume the lead in defending Scopes against the State of Tennessee.⁵⁵ According to ACLU president Roger Baldwin, his personal friend Ryan privately told him, "I can't object to your going into a case like this. I don't care where the body comes from as long as the soul is recognized as the creation of God."⁵⁶ Ryan's focus was on combating the dangers of democratic majoritarianism, not scientism. The ACLU, founded in 1920, had grown out of the Civil Liberties Bureau of 1917.

The latter's hazy focus on general civil liberties during World War I shifted into strong opposition to majoritarianism when it became the ACLU. The ACLU believed rights should be both self-determined and scientifically informed. Edward Larson has argued that this turn "profoundly influenced" the ACLU's response to the anti-evolution movement.⁵⁷

In 1925, the *New York Times* christened the Scopes trial "the greatest debate on science and religion in recent years."⁵⁸ Within this problematic binary framework, Ryan would have to be placed on the science "side," if judged by his public actions. In a June 1925 letter to the editor of *New York's World*, Ryan outlined his approach to the anti-evolution question, claiming the most important ramification of the Scopes trial—and the broader attempt to legislate against the teaching of evolution—was a violation "of the neutrality of the public schools in matters of religion."⁵⁹ Fearing Protestant sectarian influence, he insisted upon the need for the secularization of the public schools. Ryan's suspicion of Protestant motives was clear: "Let me say that I detest quite as heartily as you do the spirit of intolerance which is at least in part responsible for the Tennessee Anti-Evolution law [*sic*]."⁶⁰ Ryan was not afraid to be seen agreeing with Darrow and those of post-social gospel, science-centered progressivism whereby religion was best left a private affair for groups and individuals.

As scholarship over the last several decades has shown, the Scopes trial was not the end of the anti-evolution movement but rather a harbinger of its ascent.⁶¹ In the period following Scopes, Ryan worked to further the positions he articulated during the trial. For example, his comments appeared alongside a broad array of non-Catholic public figures in the 1927 ACLU pamphlet, *Anti-Evolution Laws*. Those other figures included famous eugenicist-zoologist David Starr Jordan, Protestant modernists like Ralph Sockman and Shailer Mathews, liberal Rabbi Louis Mann, and *Christian Century* editor Paul Hutchinson. The pamphlet's stated purpose was to fight the "attack upon the freedom of teaching."⁶² Ryan's essay echoed many of his previous arguments, including his concern that conservative Protestants would attempt to insert denominationalism into the public schools: "indeed there are many indications that precisely this is among the ulterior objects of those groups that are urging the enactment of anti-evolutionary legislation."⁶³

Ryan expressed only one concern about the teaching of evolution: individual teachers adding overtly "materialist" commentary in an ad hoc manner in the classroom. He viewed this as the real cause for the extreme responses of anti-evolutionists. Consonant with progressives' trust in the authority of professional experts, Ryan argued

that “the only competent authorities” to decide what was to be taught were state boards of education. These boards were not elected; rather, they were appointed experts. In his eyes, this was precisely their advantage. Possessing expertise through training in education theory, they would naturally seek, and comprehend, the best technical solution to a given problem. By contrast, he said, “The average state legislature is [not] competent” to judge between various evolutionary theories, just as it would not be able “to choose between conflicting economic theories or . . . any other technical question of the curriculum.”⁶⁴

Ryan further contended that absent expertise, denominational Protestants in legislatures would “be tempted to go further and prescribe the positive teaching of religious and even denominational tenets in the public schools.”⁶⁵ On this topic, Catholics, both liberal and conservative, echoed the suspicion frequently expressed in the highbrow press around the Scopes trial; to wit, Tennessee was scheming to pass a law whereby a literal interpretation of the Book of Genesis would be taught in public schools.⁶⁶

Although, as noted above, Ryan worked against the “negative eugenics” aspect of the eugenics movement, he did not write against the way that contemporary textbooks, including especially Tennessee’s *A Civic Biology* (1914), blended natural science with mechanistic philosophies and social visions revolving around race hierarchies and even eugenics. This was notable since back in 1915 the book’s author, George Hunter, had dismissed what he was sure was the Boston Catholic hierarchy’s opposition both to certain phrasing and to content in the parts of his book discussing eugenics and elements of human sexuality.⁶⁷ But for Ryan, as long as unqualified teachers or writers did not add materialist commentary in the classroom, “all that is certainly known about evolution can be set forth without denying or endangering the religious faith of any pupil.”⁶⁸

Michael Williams and the Commonwealth of American Public Culture

Unlike the highly educated priest John Ryan, journalist Michael Williams was a high school dropout and a layperson. He was also a former socialist and one-time vocal opponent of organized religion. But he was one of the most significant figures in the country for disseminating Catholic intellectuals’ ideas in interwar America. His unconventional background probably gave him a kind of credibility with non-Catholic thinkers who often greeted priest-editors

with suspicion.⁶⁹ Returning to the Catholic faith of his childhood following a period of quixotic physical, intellectual, and spiritual wanderings, Williams created, in 1924, what was arguably the most important venue for Catholic dialogue with the broader intellectual life in American public culture, *Commonweal* magazine. That was his intent from the start, as he averred when quoted in places like the *New York Times*.⁷⁰

Williams's close engagement with mainline intellectuals persisted throughout his return to Catholicism. Not only did he make a point to advertise his preservation of close personal friendships with some of the "liberals, radicals, [and] socialists" of his past, but he continued to engage with popular topics of the day, writing numerous articles inviting Catholic–non-Catholic dialogue in publications like *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Forum*, *Harper's*, and other such journals, including his own. A glance at Williams's bibliography confirms his place in the discursive mainstream.⁷¹ He claimed to have started the "serious discussion" about Catholicism that was carried on in mid-late 1920s America through its 1926 series of exchanges with Henry Goddard Leach in the pages of the *Forum*.⁷²

Both in his *Forum* exchanges and in his 1928 book *Catholicism and the Modern Mind*, Williams suggested that while there was a good deal of mindless, bigoted, anti-Catholic sentiment in America, intellectuals who opposed the church would actually do a service both to it and to American culture by crafting well thought-out criticisms. This, he claimed, would drive a dispassionate examination of the issues. By inviting this critical process, Williams showed himself willing to engage in real dialogue with vocal opponents. His public disputation with an anonymous lapsed priest in the pages of *The Atlantic Monthly* was one such example.⁷³ When Williams began to publish his own magazine, he favored articles on the interplay of science, religion, and society.

By the early 1920s, the intellectual magazine field—where *Commonweal* would try to carve a place for itself—was dominated by avowedly liberal offerings like *The Nation*, the *New Republic*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*. Either by direct connection or through adoption, these journals of opinion were heirs to both the nineteenth-century liberal tradition and the old muckraking social reform magazines.⁷⁴ According to historians of journalism, each was "one of those low-circulation publications with a trickle-down influence on large numbers of people."⁷⁵ Martin Marty has argued that the national reach and authority of such intellectual publications was not only much greater than it had been prior to the twentieth century, but also vastly different from what it would become by the latter twentieth century:

"In an era when . . . specialized magazines and journals prosper[ed]," there was a "common universe of discourse that had a wide reach and broad influence. . . . Those who live in . . . [the digital age] have difficulty imagining the extent of cultural [influence and even] homogenization that could occur in the earlier period."⁷⁶

Soon after returning to the Catholic church, Williams began writing for the National Catholic Welfare Conference as part of its Press Association during World War I. He pored over work produced by Catholics, but when he compared it to the writing in broader intellectual periodicals, he found himself ruing the quality of Catholic media. Williams was especially concerned that there was no lay-run magazine for Catholic intellectual opinion in 1920s America.⁷⁷ From the beginning, the new magazine he envisioned was to have a specifically intellectual character. He believed that non-Catholics would only entertain Catholics' arguments if presented in a scholarly and dispassionate tone, a tone that invited response.⁷⁸

Williams and his associates were sure that their best chance of success was a journal neither edited by clergymen nor produced as any kind of official church organ. Their hope was to mute non-Catholics' accusations of the church censoring or controlling Catholic media. Comparing reactions to *Commonweal* with *America* (the latter's editorial staff being composed of Jesuit priests like LeBuffe), Martin Bredeck pointed out, "this [Jesuit control] was suspect and [thus the magazine was largely] ignored by non-Catholics."⁷⁹ By contrast, Williams's magazine proudly advertised itself as exclusively lay controlled. The announced editorial policy was that quality work was sought, irrespective of origin. Editorials critical of certain Catholic trends as well as articles by non-Catholics would be no stranger to the journal's pages.⁸⁰

The chief goals of *Commonweal*, according to Robert Clements's study, were "to break down sectarian opposition and stimulate interfaith cooperation in all cultural activities"; to use the forum as a vehicle for Catholics to enter mainstream intellectual culture; to help solve social problems; and to show that one could be fully Catholic and fully American at the same time.⁸¹ Given the anti-Catholicism of the 1920s, this last goal was particularly challenging.

The *New York Times* greeted *Commonweal's* arrival with an editorial calling the magazine intelligent and moderate, possessing "a command of facts that usually are lacking from the journalistic and other outgivings of contemporaneous enemies of the old church. . . . Suavity, not ferocity, marks *Commonweal's* style of exposition and argument, and it refrains sedulously from insult or denunciation of those disagreeing with its ideas."⁸² Thus did Williams's magazine

entered the heretofore exclusively non-Catholic pantheon of American intellectual journals of opinion. But how influential was the magazine in influencing broader discourse in the public square?⁸³

Among non-Catholic intellectuals, the magazine did exert influence. Its ideas achieved widespread exposure through means other than direct subscriptions.⁸⁴ It did not take long to find it cited in prestigious newspapers and magazines as the standard-bearer of intellectual Catholicism. According to its managing editor in the late 1920s, "Daily, the office received confirmation from the clipping bureau that the journal was being widely quoted in the general press. . . . No other Catholic journal is quoted so regularly and so widely."⁸⁵ *Commonweal's* business manager reported by 1929 that "we succeeded to a far greater extent than our circulation warranted in placing Catholic thought before intelligent Catholics and non-Catholics."⁸⁶

Williams contended that "editorials and articles from *Commonweal* were widely quoted and discussed in the press, both secular and religious," while famous journalist Walter Lippmann endorsed the *Commonweal* as the best source for the American Catholic perspective.⁸⁷ Congratulatory letters were published in the magazine's tenth anniversary edition in 1934. Although outside the time-frame of this article, they attested to the magazine's influence from its origin in 1924. The renowned H. L. Mencken's letter, for example, began by declaring, "I have read THE COMMONWEAL [sic] from its first issue, and with constant profit. . . . I only wish the Protestant and agnostic camps had spokesmen of equal effectiveness."⁸⁸

The magazine's associate editor, literature professor George Schuster, contended in the 1930s that *Commonweal* received more letters to the editor "than all the other high brow [sic] journals of New York combined."⁸⁹ One scholar later argued that the magazine went beyond influencing individual readers: "The articles and editorials in *Commonweal* not only mirrored the events and happenings of the time but gave the weekly an active role in shaping public opinion and attitudes [both toward educated Catholics and the world-at-large]." Continuing, he added, "One can only surmise that from time to time *Commonweal* even influenced the events themselves."⁹⁰ Whether that was the case or not, the *Commonweal* was undeniably a noticeable participant in the intellectual discourse of the interwar period, and one seen articulating a liberal viewpoint. Indeed, in the late 1930s, Jesuit John Wynne (*America* editor in 1909–1910) complained that *Commonweal* was too liberal and too non-Catholic.⁹¹

The Commonweal and the Scopes Trial

True to form, *The Literary Digest*, the *New York Times*, and other respected print media frequently turned to *Commonweal* for Catholic perspectives on evolution in general and the Scopes trial in particular, and then quoted from what appeared there.⁹² For the Scopes trial, they could first of all turn to Michael Williams himself. Williams, present in Dayton for the length of the trial, characterized the motley bunch of alliances he found there as “Protestant fundamentalists [versus] . . . a most bizarre and incongruous aggregation of ‘liberal’ Protestants, ‘modernists,’ ‘scientists’ (some of them genuinely deserving the title and heaps of them mere dabblers and pretenders) and of free speech champions, agnostics, cranks, and ‘nuts.’”⁹³ Looking back, one might well add “Catholics” to this list.

One finds in *Commonweal* an extensive set of articles on the Scopes trial and related issues. The majority of these articles presented pictures of Catholicism that obviated accusations of scientific obscurantism or conservatism. Williams’s own pieces contained certain recurring, identifiable motifs. For one, Williams attempted to distance Catholics as far as possible from Galileo-inflected accusations of antiscientific bias. Two, he expressed concern about putative plots by conservative Protestants to use the state to manipulate school curricula and to legislate so-called Protestant interpretations of scripture in public schools. He cast Bryan as committing the kind of same mistake the church itself had committed three hundred years earlier in the case of Galileo. By pouring scorn on him, the church was clearing its name. Three, he expressed fears that Tennessee’s Protestants sought to quash the broader separation of church and state (another trope hitherto used against Catholics). Finally, his articles endorsed science broadly and evolution specifically, urging that all thinking Catholics should follow suit by emphasizing freedom of inquiry.

Less than two months before the Scopes trial commenced, Williams published an editorial on the anti-evolution movement, asserting “freedom in scientific teaching is not merely in danger but actually under attack.”⁹⁴ He brought up the singular example of an Illinois (Protestant-run) town that allegedly required teachers to instruct students that the earth is flat. The myth of the widespread belief in a flat earth in the Middle (or “Dark”) Ages was a longstanding red herring. Critics of the Catholic church cited it to contrast alleged Catholic obscurantism with modern Enlightenment.⁹⁵ Here, Williams turned the tables and accused Bryan of operating like an obscurantist of the Dark Ages. At the same time, he rhetorically placed the Catholic church far away from Bryan—and obscurantism. Contrasts to Bryan

and his brand of Protestantism became a vehicle for advancing the openness of liberal Catholicism.⁹⁶ For Tennessee, Williams argued, the Scopes case was one “against . . . the expanse of modern learning . . . bidding science to remain outside its boundaries . . . defying the modern world . . . and seeking to ban the modern intellectual world from their hills.”⁹⁷ Williams’s contrast with Protestantism tied Catholicism both to modernity and to modernity’s prime achievement, science.

On the eve of the Scopes trial, Williams editorialized that said trial would “in no way” be about “the truth or falsity of the hypothesis of evolution”; rather, it was “an attempt to set up an established Protestant church in America.”⁹⁸ Williams, the progressive New Yorker, viewed William Jennings Bryan not as an heir to a legitimate nineteenth-century majoritarian, states-rights political position, but as a “menace to liberty.”⁹⁹ He did, however, admit that Catholics were entitled to disagree with those who proposed to teach evolution as a proven fact *if* such people proceeded to preach “philosophies and methods of thought which are socially dangerous,” but gave neither specifics nor suggestions of how such Catholics were to combat such a threat.¹⁰⁰

Williams did not attempt to silence Catholics who disagreed with him, staying true to his goals of making *Commonweal* an open forum for varied perspectives. But he did reserve the right to rebut such views and was not hesitant to exercise that right. In one case, he published an article written by Louisville Catholic attorney Benedict Elder, a member of the Catholic Press Association. In it, Elder tried to demonstrate the similarities between Williams’s arguments and those of liberal non-Catholics. Williams published the article, but with a strong disclaimer noting that it appeared only in the interest of fairness to dissenters. Elder laid out his points from a strict legal perspective to argue that the proposed Tennessee law did not, in fact, violate individual liberty. He then divorced the case from the symbolism of scientific modernity being attached to it, arguing, “to call the act an anti-evolution law is a trick of modern propaganda—it is nothing of the kind . . . the act is a public school regulation. . . . There is no inhibition in the act as to teaching in private schools, through newspapers and magazines, in the forum, on the streets, or in the fields.”¹⁰¹ Elder then refuted the common Catholic claim that the Butler Act was a disguised attempt at establishing Protestant religion in public schools.¹⁰² He instead framed the law as an instance of legislative power asserting authority over public instruction.¹⁰³ As Elder viewed such authority, it necessarily trumped any claims to school teachers’ right to instruct as *experts* in a professional sense.¹⁰⁴

Elder's piece concluded by refuting claims to authority by professional experts, particularly scientists, when they tried to employ that authority to control how their conclusions would be propagated. Reflecting his own southern origins, Elder argued that states had the right to decide how to implement educational norms. In his words, "state-supported schools must be controlled by the state—not by any professional group—however learned."¹⁰⁵ Nearly all the progressive Catholics writing about the Scopes trial rejected this claim; in so doing, they were asserting their own authority as science-minded endorsers of professional expertise. As American progressives, they were inheritors to the Progressive Era's high confidence in expertise. Political scientist John Morrison reported in the early 1950s that Elder had told him "he was astounded at the unanimity of Catholic opposition to the Tennessee law. . . . [T]he most notable characteristic of the whole affair was the oneness of viewpoint among Catholic editors, and between them and the secular press."¹⁰⁶ Concurrence with the liberal press was a charge Williams was not likely to rue.

If any Catholic indicated sympathy with Bryan in the Scopes trial, Williams chastised him. In the July 22, 1925, *Commonweal* issue, Williams wrung his hands over the embarrassing fact that "a large part of the press" reported the presence of a Catholic private citizen named Colonel P. H. Callahan at the trial, seemingly supporting Bryan. Since Callahan was Catholic, some newspapers asked whether he, in any way, represented "official Catholic support of Mr. Bryan." This, lamented Williams, "was deplorable." His concern was of sensational headlines about this scenario implying that "American Catholicism was taking its place with the Protestant Fundamentalists in the opening stages of a great struggle to capture the mechanism of state government for the propagation of religion." He assured readers that by no means had any Catholics responded to Bryan's call to assist him in the embarrassing trial, adding, "Surely, intelligent Catholics should concur in thinking that cold water of the chilliest sort should be thrown upon any such disastrous movement."¹⁰⁷

Williams also framed his arguments in *Commonweal* around the concept of pluralism, constructing the trial as part of a broader Protestant attempt to gain control of the public school system. His voice on this issue was augmented when the *New York Times* published an article centered on Williams as *Commonweal* editor during the Scopes trial, "Bryan Aim Assailed by Catholic Editor."¹⁰⁸ And in Williams's *Commonweal* pieces, he duplicated the somewhat ironic nature of fellow Catholic John Ryan's pleas to the effect that in a religiously pluralistic society the school must offer a purely secular education. This idea

challenged some other articles appearing in *Commonweal* on education, as well as the premise of numerous Catholic bishops and priests who believed that a young person's education could not properly be decoupled from a religious worldview. Though Williams himself did not go so far as opposing Catholic parochial schools, he argued that since Protestants did not have such schools, they should form them if they wished. That way, he said, each religious group could offer sectarian education suitable for its own communicants while the public school system could achieve the desired result of being completely nonreligious.¹⁰⁹

Unlike Ryan, Williams expressed concern that science textbooks themselves sometimes presented material in what he called a "slipshod" manner, even Tennessee's official biology text, George Hunter's *A Civic Biology*. But while Williams in other contexts decried the eugenic Nordicism touted widely in the 1920s, he did not comment on how *A Civic Biology* tied eugenic racial rhetoric to evolution in various places throughout the book.¹¹⁰ Williams's failure to highlight this connection was also apparent when *Commonweal* reported without critique that Major Leonard Darwin, president of the British Eugenics Education Society, had written to John Scopes in order to send a "word of warm encouragement" in his endeavors.¹¹¹ The implication of the notice was not the problematic intertwining of eugenics with evolution but rather the international unanimity of scientists' support for the defense.¹¹²

At the conclusion of the trial, Williams congratulated Catholics for being so "cautious in extending the hand of fellowship to the chief actors in the drama at Dayton, Tennessee," again suggesting ties between the defense and the KKK: "Given the mental caliber and temper of the leading fundamentalists . . . the Klan, as might have been guessed . . . offers itself as a fighting phalanx and Thundering Legion of Fundamentalism."¹¹³ To the end, Williams emphasized a relationship between the Klan and Tennessee Protestantism, one echoed in the other major journals of opinion.

Other Voices in Commonweal

Williams published other Catholic authors in *Commonweal* on issues concerning Scopes and evolution. These articles, which continued to appear in the wake of the trial, fell into two main streams: One was the attack on Catholics—and non-Catholics—who dared criticize evolution or interfered with the purview of expert science; the other bolstered the authority of non-Catholic scientists who commented on the positive religious implications of evolution, even if their

theological visions were antithetical to Catholicism. Curiously, Catholics had long complained that the trouble with perceptions of the science-religion conflict was that too many theologians left their field of competence to make embarrassingly false scientific contentions, and vice versa. Morrison contended that the small liberal Catholic community had expressed significant embarrassment in the first few decades of the twentieth century about nineteenth-century Catholics untrained in the sciences making critical statements about evolution. These Catholic evolutionists "became their own worst critics, censuring those of their number" who ostensibly brought ridicule on Catholicism by offering untrained criticism.¹¹⁴

Some *Commonweal* authors took advantage of rare opportunities to criticize liberal Protestants for seeming insufficiently committed to science. D. W. Fisher's "In Defense of Science," published in January 1926, attempted to score points for Catholic enlightenment by chastising the liberal Protestant Harry Emerson Fosdick for his comment that scientists take numerous facts on faith. Fisher lectured against this position, defending science by referring both Newton's and Darwin's unassailable mathematical arguments. He contended that for Fosdick to write such things was "a serious indictment to bring against science and great men of science. And I am led to suggest here some defense, not of reason in religion, but of reason in science."¹¹⁵

If a Catholic author published an article in *Commonweal* expressing any reservations about evolution, a firestorm of responses appeared criticizing Catholics who dissented from the enthusiastic party line. It was somewhat acceptable to disagree on the mechanism of evolution; it was unacceptable to question enthusiasm over evolution.¹¹⁶ Doing so interfered with the goals advancing Catholic prestige in America. In the flow of the Scopes trial, Bertram Windle, science popularizer on *Commonweal*'s editorial board, even-handedly reviewed Fr. Barry O'Toole's *The Case against Evolution*.¹¹⁷ O'Toole, a conservative with scientific inclinations, predicated his critique on the American Association for the Advancement of Science's 1924 decree that the proof for evolution should be compelling enough to convince all the world's scientists. O'Toole said it was not.¹¹⁸ Though Windle sharply disagreed with O'Toole's conclusions, he admitted that they were presented cogently and reasonably (albeit with poor science). Windle was concerned that if a priest questioned evolution, anti-Catholic forces would argue that Catholics were being discouraged from thinking for themselves.

Immediately after *Commonweal* published Windle's review, liberal Catholics thrashed O'Toole, "vigorously," in Morrison's words. Priest-scientist Stephen Richarz accused O'Toole of "repeating

the idiotic assertions of [so-called flood geologist George McCready] Price." Further, "A Jesuit priest, Fr. A. F. Frumvellar . . . joined in the chorus of liberal vituperation against Fr. O'Toole. [He] was shocked that a priest [O'Toole] dared attack Fr. Wasmann and Canon Dorlodot." Morrison quoted Frumvellar as saying Fr. O'Toole's ideas were "unworthy of serious scientific consideration."¹¹⁹ Despite Richarz having lumped O'Toole with the infamous Protestant flood geologist, liberal Catholics seemed to suggest not that O'Toole's book was an ignorant diatribe but rather that he deserved condemnation for having dared to dissent from their obeisance to evolution as gateway to the science-minded American intellectual mainstream.

Both Windle and Michael Williams employed claims about evolution's ability to be reconciled with religion from legitimate scientists who nonetheless espoused extremely unorthodox religious views tied to evolution. These opinion leaders included physicist Oliver Lodge, who concurrently argued that the *ether* through which radio waves traveled was a discernible substance inhabited by floating ghosts, and paleontologist Henry Fairfield Osborn, whose immanentist vision of God and Christianity was inconsistent with Catholicism, a religion he had publicly attacked.¹²⁰ *Commonweal* still seized on the opportunity to invoke the opinions on evolution of any prestigious scientist provided he eschewed overt materialism.¹²¹ The sometime irony of progressive Catholic involvement in the public discourse was demonstrated in Osborn's *Forum* magazine article of 1925. There he quoted a progressive Catholic to attack William Jennings Bryan and religion-centered questions about the way evolution was framed during the trial.¹²²

Conclusion

Catholic participation in public debates about evolution and the Scopes trial influenced public discourse on the trial, evolution, and American scientific authority in ways that reached beyond Catholic audiences. Moreover, this Catholic contribution was not monolithic. The materials above suggest that one must look beyond more obvious blocs of religious fundamentalists and secular thinkers, including scientists, to discern the full range of voices that helped shape intellectual forums aimed at wide public consumption.

Liberal Catholics' training and experiences in the science-centered, Progressive Era paired up with hopes to engage the broader intellectual community by using science-centered discourse in the 1920s, led liberal Catholic figures like John Ryan, Michael Williams, and others in *Commonweal* to blur supposed boundaries between

science supporters and religious figures. They endorsed contemporary ideas of scientific evolution about plants, animals, and humans and actively participated in the opposition to legislate against evolution in the Scopes trial. Yet, by embedding their public rhetoric on evolution and other questions surrounding the Scopes trial almost exclusively in naturalistic social and biological science categories, *Commonweal* and Ryan ended up reinforcing the elite northern print media's interpretation of what the trial meant for American culture. By extension, this obscured the reality that the evolutionary science ostensibly at stake in the trial carried subtexts of eugenics that figured largely—but almost invisibly—in the shaping of evolution's symbolic cultural meaning between the wars (this despite Catholic efforts elsewhere to combat negative eugenics).

Liberal Catholics' role in this particular public discourse also indirectly fostered the lionization of expertise and elements of scientism in American culture in interwar America; any caveats they offered against tying evolution to particular philosophies antithetical to Catholicism in the early-mid 1920s were both rare and often drowned out in the larger debates. Ryan and Williams rarely acknowledged that some of the very non-Catholic scientific elites they courted, like Henry Fairfield Osborn, were engaged in their own *de facto* anti-Catholic attack on working-class immigrants by classifying them as undesirable in biological-racial terms along with Jews, blacks, and others.

Taking a more comprehensive view, it could be said that just as American Protestantism was experiencing its most thorough fragmentation into modernist and fundamentalist blocs in the 1920s, it was vacating a hitherto hegemonic place it had held at the center of the American public life. This was precisely the time when a small cadre of Catholic, Jewish, and other thinkers achieved both middle-class status and a voice in public intellectual debates. Catholics like Williams and Ryan, who made their way into that fractured cultural space, showed respectable intellectuals that they were attuned to the science-centered cultural norms of the day and worthy participants in its intellectual discourse. In some ways, they may have abetted elements of scientism in that discourse rather than bringing to it scientifically informed Catholic perspectives. These were some of the unintended consequences of their joining the chorus of criticisms against Protestant anti-evolutionists.

Notes

I thank the editors and peer reviewers at *Religion and American Culture* for their sound suggestions. My appreciation also goes to

Christine Leigh Heyrman of the University of Delaware for reading earlier drafts of the article and for recommendations on a related project. I also thank David M. Suisman and Jon H. Roberts, Lily M. Santoro and John D. Hosler. The staff of the American Catholic Research Center and university archives at the Catholic University of America helped me identify and access key sources. Brett A. Berliner kindly edited a later draft. My earlier ideas on this topic were refined by responses to my related paper at the conference "Religious Responses to Darwinism on the 150th Anniversary of Darwin's Origin of Species" held at St. Anne's College, Oxford University.

1. See "Bryan and the Catholics," *New York Times*, August 29, 1908. On McCann, see "Declines Bryan's Request," *New York Times*, July 3, 1925. For Bryan-McCann correspondence, see Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 73, 89.

2. John William Draper's 1874 book, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*, was a keystone of this myth and reinforced a Catholic antiscience narrative.

3. Francis P. LeBuffe, S.J., "No Non-Man Ancestry," *New York Times*, March 19, 1922, A2. The article's prominent subtitle added, "Catholic Answer to Evolutionists—Jesuit Counters Darwin Doctrine with Scientific Data—Characterizes It as One of Ranking Hoaxes of All Time."

4. David M. Livingstone, *Dealing with Darwin: Place, Politics, and Rhetoric in Religious Engagements with Evolution* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), ix, 11.

5. This expression is borrowed from Livingstone (*ibid.*, 18).

6. See Henry Fairfield Osborn, "Evolution and Religion," *New York Times*, March 5, 1922, 2, 5, 14, 91. See also Osborn, "Credo of a Naturalist," *Forum* 73 (January 1925): 486–94. For Osborn's use of liberal Catholic voices in both Europe and America to rebuke conservative Protestant criticisms of him, see quotations in Raymond W. Murray, *Man's Unknown Origins* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1948), 255. For an explanation of Protestant modernism and ways its proponents connected it to evolution and evolutionary morality around the turn of the twentieth century, see Bruce Kuklick, *Churchmen and Philosophers: From Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey* (New Haven, 1985), 219. See also Jon H. Roberts, *Darwinism and the Divine in America: Protestant Intellectuals and Organic Evolution, 1859–1900* (Madison: 1988), 136–40.

7. See Edward B. Davis, "Robert Millikan: Religion, Science, and Modernity," in *Eminent Lives in Twentieth-Century Science and Religion*, 2nd rev. ed., ed. Nicholas A. Rupke (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Long, 2009), 268. On evolutionary ideas and their framing through the interwar years, see Peter Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, 25th anniversary ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

8. On the philosophical/theological debates in the late nineteenth century subtly underpinning this disagreement, see Jacob W. Gruber, *A Conscience in Conflict: The Life of St. George Jackson Miart* (New York: Columbia University Press for Temple University, 1960), 60–92.

9. Short, readable essays by historians demonstrating the falsity of the conflict/warfare thesis for Catholicism and for other areas are found in Ronald L. Numbers, ed., *Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths about Science and Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

10. For the encyclical's text, see http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris.html.

11. On varieties of Catholic neoscholasticism, see Gerald McCool, S.J., *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994).

12. The inaugural issue featured an article by G. K. Chesterton on the scientific and ethical aspects of contraception. See G. K. Chesterton, "Religion and Sex," *Commonweal* 1 (November 12, 1924): 9. Another article dealt broadly with science and religion, Bertram Windle's "Science Sees the Light." On the magazine's first anniversary, Williams's editorial stated: "We feel . . . that we have initiated the general reading public into a sphere generally unknown to it [progressive Catholic thought]. In that sense, our journal has existed for the benefit of our critics and adversaries." Williams, "Our Second Year," *Commonweal* 3 (November 11, 1925): 1. On the magazine's tenth anniversary, H. L. Mencken wrote, "I have read THE COMMONWEAL from its first issue, and with constant profit. . . . I only wish the Protestant and agnostic camps had spokesmen of equal effectiveness." H. L. Mencken to the editor, *Commonweal* 21 (November 2, 1934): 35.

13. Martin J. Bredeck, S.J., "The Role of the Catholic Layman in the Church and American Society as Seen in the Editorials of *Commonweal Magazine*" (Ph.D. diss. Catholic University of America, 1977), 4.

14. For Ryan as self-professed liberal, see his autobiography, *Questions of the Day* (Boston: Stratford Co., 1931), 255.

15. See, for example, Francis P. LeBuffe, "Evolution and Religion," *America* 30 (October 27, 1923): 29.

16. For distinctions between Catholics and others who embraced the Progressive movement, see Thomas F. Woods, Jr., *The Church Confronts Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

17. For an explanation of these internal Catholic distinctions, see R. Scott Appleby, *Church and Age Unite!* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993) and Margaret Rehrer, "Americanism and Modernism—Continuity or Discontinuity?" *U.S. Catholic Historian* 1 (Summer 1981): 87–103. One of the first scholarly works to identify and systematically characterize late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Catholic liberals as a coherent group was historian Robert Cross, *The Emergence of Liberal Catholicism in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958).

18. Cross, *The Emergence of Liberal Catholicism*, 13–14.

19. Even Edward Larson's *Summer for the Gods* (New York, 1997), the recent classic, does not address the imbalance where Catholics are involved. Although offering a penetrating critique of the simple creationist-evolutionist paradigm, it virtually ignores the role of the Catholic intellectual response to Scopes. Larson does mention the Catholic Press Association's presence at Dayton, Tennessee, but he cites only a single contemporary Catholic source in his footnotes (127). Michael Williams was personally present for the entire proceedings. His impressions of the trial appeared in his book *Catholicism and the Modern Mind* (New York: Dial Press, 1928). The best brief historical overview of the creationist movement is Numbers, *The Creationists*.

20. See, for example, the allusions to the trial in mano Singham, "The New War between Science and Religion," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (*The Chronicle Review*), May 9, 2010, <http://chronicle.com/article/The-New-War-Between-Science/65400/>.

21. An unpublished master's thesis by a law student at the University of Virginia discussed some American Catholic rhetoric on the Scopes trial as part of its commentary on a 2005 "intelligent design" trial but mostly fails to distinguish between liberal/progressive and conservative Catholics. Since many of its citations come from *America* magazine and other more conservative Catholic forums, the author overestimates the importance of neoscholastic frameworks in Catholic public discourse. See Christopher M. Hammer, "Reconciling Faith, Reason, and Freedom: Catholicism and Evolution from Scopes to Dover," (M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 2008).

22. The 1917 *Official Catholic Directory* indicated 17.5 million Catholics in the United States; the U.S. government census published in 1916 listed 16 million Catholics out of a total of just under 42 million total “church members” in America. Statistics quoted in Michael Williams, *American Catholics in the War: The National Catholic War Council, 1917–1921* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 84–85. As to the *Atlantic*, while it was technically nonsectarian, it leaned toward Unitarianism and maintained “an undercurrent of distrust toward Roman Catholicism.” John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Walker-Zuckerman, *The Magazine in America, 1741–1991* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 201. Anti-Catholic sentiments in other major magazines were also ubiquitous in the 1920s. By 1928, *The Nation* editor Walter Lippmann wrote to Fr. John Ryan saying he was “shocked there is so much [anti-Catholicism] that comes to this desk that I feel almost at a loss how wisely to deal with it.” Walter Lippmann to John A. Ryan (October 22, 1928), John A. Ryan Papers, box 22, folder 3, American Catholic Research Center, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. (henceforth ACRCUA).

23. According to the 1902 Census Abstract of the United States, the number of New Immigrants from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a heavily Catholic region, increased from 1880 to 1900 by an average of more than 300 percent, while Catholic Polish numbers rose by 203 percent. See *Statistical Abstract of the U.S.*, 25th number (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903).

24. A Klan handbill popular in early 1920s Indiana read: “Remember, every criminal, every gambler, every thug, every libertine, every girl ruiner, every home wrecker, every wife beater . . . every crooked politician, every pagan Papist priest, every shyster lawyer, every K. of C. [Knight of Columbus] . . . every Rome-controlled newspaper . . . is fighting the Klan.” Quoted in Martin Marty, *The Noise of Conflict: 1919–1941*, vol. 2 of *Modern American Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 95.

25. In 1893, Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (PD) and then, in 1902, created the official Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC) as a standing department to deal with further issues of biblical hermeneutics. Don O’Leary, *Roman Catholicism and Modern Science* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 68–71.

26. Francis P. LeBuffe, S.J., “To the Editor,” *Commonweal* 2 (June 17, 1925): 163.

27. See John L. Morrison, “A History of American Catholic Opinion on the Theory of Evolution, 1859–1950” (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1951), 281.

28. For Ryan's explanation of this approach—and its application—see John A. Ryan, D.D., "The Method of Teleology in Ethics," *New York Review* 2 (January-February 1907): 409–28.

29. Quoted in John Tracy Ellis, *The Formative Years of the Catholic University of America* (Washington D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 1946), 118–19.

30. Quoted in *ibid.*, 119. Interestingly, New York's *The Sun* printed a complimentary piece on December 11, 1884, saying that the proposed Catholic institution should be welcomed by Americans because it would lead to a more educated and informed Catholic clergy. (Ellis, *The Formative Years*, 117). A written appeal to Catholics for financial support of the soon-to-be-built university by Bishop John Lancaster Spalding in September 1885 listed one of the school's prime goals as reconciling science and religion (*ibid.*, 158).

31. Edwin Grant Conklin, "Bryan and Evolution" *New York Times*, March 5, 1922.

32. Edwin Grant Conklin, "Quotations: The Proposed Suppression of the Teaching of Evolution," *Science* 55 (March 10, 1922): 266.

33. See, for example, Mariano Artigas et al., *Negotiating Darwin: The Vatican Confronts Evolution, 1877–1902* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 281–83.

34. For a full explication of the Zahm affair, see Artigas et al., *Negotiating Darwinism*, 125–202. Years after the controversy over his book, Zahm told an interviewer that he believed it was the stigma of the church's perceived overreaction to Galileo that prevented *Evolution and Dogma* from ever being condemned openly; he thought he was targeted in the first place for his association with the church's liberal Americanist wing (282, 178–79). After a careful study of newly available records, Artigas concluded that at no time was there an official Catholic church policy on evolution (279, 283).

35. O'Leary, *Roman Catholicism*, 99. On Yeomans and the lengths he went to create a hegemony of positivism/uniformity of nature in framing scientific data, see R. Clinton Ohlers, "The End of Miracles: Naturalism's Rise in American Science, 1830–1931" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2007).

36. Quoted in O'Leary, *Roman Catholicism*, 126.

37. Francis J. Wenninger, review of Canon Dorlodot, *Darwinism and Catholic Thought*, trans. Ernest Messenger, *American Midland Naturalist* 8/9 (March–May 1923): 213.

38. For Windle on Augustine and evolution, see Morrison, "A History," 359.

39. At one point, Windle said, "[T]he great lesson which Fr. Wasmann taught . . . was the virtue of accepting, without question, whatever science had to offer." Quoted in Morrison, "A History," 313–14.

40. See, for example, Simon Fitzsimons (letter to the editor), "Wasmann and Evolution," *Commonweal* 2 (July 8, 1925): 228–29.

41. See E. Wasmann, "Evolution," in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles G. Herbermann et al., vol. 5 (New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1907), 656.

42. Robert J. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 366–67. Richards argues Wasmann's views on evolution's mechanism approximated an amalgamation of the ideas of Hugo DeVries and Hans Driesch.

43. *Ibid.*, 371.

44. See Gruber, *A Conscience in Conflict*, 59.

45. For Pope Pius X's *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (On the Doctrines of the Modernists), see http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html. For the aftereffects and the requirement that priests and theologians take an oath against modernism, see Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 111–14.

46. On Ryan as technocrat, see Robert M. Preston, "The Christian Moralizer as Scientific Reformer," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society* 81 (March–December 1970): 27–41. Ryan's Ph.D. from Catholic University was technically in moral theology. However, his mentors, Frs. William Kerby and Joseph Bouquillon, were both focused on progressive social science. Kerby had created Catholic University's sociology department. Under the tutelage of these figures, Ryan's mind was centered on practical economic and sociological ideas, not theological abstractions, as he himself attested. See John A. Ryan, *Social Doctrine in Action: A Personal History* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1941), 63–64, 128. See also Francis L. Broderick, Right Reverend New Dealer: John A. Ryan (London: Macmillan, 1963), 33.

47. Ryan, *Social Doctrine*, 59. Patrick Carey, ed. argues: "A quasi-immanentist understanding of the relationship of the sacred to the

secular lay behind the Americanist call for Catholics to identify themselves with American ideals and institutions." Patrick W. Carey, ed. *American Catholic*, Religious Thought: The Shaping of a Theological and Social Tradition (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2004), 51.

48. Broderick, Right Reverend, 153.

49. David J. O'Brien, *American Catholics and Social Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 124–25.

50. In his resignation letter, Ryan claimed he had forgotten that he was an official part of the AES since he was a member of many organizations and had lost track of the fact that his name still appeared on its clergy cooperation masthead. In it, he also stated that upon joining the AES he had been reassured that it would operate "scientifically," but that it did not, hence his withdrawal (quoted in *Catholic Bulletin* newspaper [n.d], John A. Ryan Papers, box 51, folder 4, ACRCUA). See also Sharon M. Leon, "'Hopelessly Entangled in Nordic Presuppositions': Catholic Participation in the American Eugenics Society in the 1920s," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Applied Sciences* 59 (2004): 3–49; and *An Image of God: The Catholic Struggle with Eugenics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), chap. 2.

51. Ryan wrote to Dewey on January 21, 1930, to congratulate him on an article the latter wrote in the current issue of the *New Republic*; Dewey replied on January 27 (letters in John Ryan Papers, box 10, folder 4, ACRCUA).

52. See, for example, John Ryan to Paul Hutchinson, September 2, 1926, and October 26, 1926; and Lewis Gannett to John Ryan, September [?], 1928 (John Ryan Papers, box 17, folder 7, ACRCUA). See also John Ryan to Walter Lippmann, October 17, 1928; Lippmann to Ryan, October 22, 1928 (box 22, folder 3); H. L. Mencken to John Ryan, June 8, 1929, (box 25 folder 40). This exchange with Mencken was a continuation of a previous one that found Mencken commending Ryan for authoring an article he had read in *Commonweal*. See H. L. Mencken to John Ryan, June 3, 1929 (?), (box 25, folder 40), ACRCUA.

53. Broderick, Right Reverend, 115.

54. The Butler Act (Tenn. HB 185, 1925) was the term used colloquially to refer to the Tennessee legislation introduced by John Butler prohibiting state schools from teaching versions of human origins that contradicted the Book of Genesis. It did not say precisely how Genesis was to be interpreted.

55. An article on Darrow in *Commonweal* printed during summer of the Scopes trial quoted him impugning the Catholic church with the claim that “the Pope issued a bull against a comet once upon a time. But the comet kept on coming just the same. Apparently it had not heard anything of the bull. . . . Does not every schoolboy know that Catholicism is the religion of the dark ages?” G. R. Garrett, “A Pope, a Comet, and Mr. Darrow,” *Commonweal* 2 (June 24, 1925): 181.

56. Interview with Roger Baldwin, May 8, 1958, quoted in Broderick, *Right Reverend*, 141. If Ryan had missed the fact that Darrow argued there was such thing as a “soul” to protect, he would be able to read about it in 1928 when *Commonweal* published M.W. Weston’s article, “Is the Soul a Myth?” surveying Darrow’s recent piece in *Forum* magazine that called belief in a soul or immortality “a delusion” since science had not proved the existence of souls. M.W. Weston, “Is the Soul a Myth?” *Commonweal* 8 (December 26, 1928): 230–33.

57. Samuel Walker, quoted in Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 63.

58. Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 180. The *Times* reinforced that framing in its July 3, 1925, issue by covering Maynard Shipley’s Science League of America contest for the best essays on “The Superiority of Evolution over Genesis,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1925, 6.

59. John A. Ryan, “The Anti-Evolution Trial,” *The (New York) World*, June 5, 1925. John A. Ryan Papers, box 51, folder 6, ACRCUA.

60. *Ibid.*

61. See, for example, Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 231–32; and Ronald L. Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America* (Cambridge: 1998), 59, 87.

62. Employing constitutional and legal lenses, Ryan indicated that he did not agree with the idea that a public teacher could teach absolutely anything he or she wished, but problems in this respect needed to be dealt with “administratively.” Rev. Father John A. Ryan, D.D., *Anti-Evolution Laws* (New York: American Civil Liberties Union, 1927), 28. John A. Ryan Papers, box 51, folder 7, ACRCUA.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*

65. *Ibid.*

66. See, for example, a 1925 article in *The Nation*, “side by side with the effort to prohibit the teaching of evolution goes the parallel movement to teach the creation story of the Book of Genesis.” Quoted

in "The War against Evolution," *The Nation* 120 (May 20, 1925): 566. On Catholic conservatives, see John L. Morrison, "American Catholics and the Crusade against Evolution," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 64 (1953): 57–71 at 67.

67. On the Boston scenario, see Adam R. Shapiro, *Trying Biology: The Scopes Trial, Textbooks, and the Antievolution Movement in American Schools* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 62. In truth, even a brief glance at *A Civic Biology* would have afforded all the evidence Ryan needed (and in more than just the sections centered on evolution). See George William Hunter, *A Civic Biology, Presented in Problems* (New York: American Book Company, 1914) 195–96, 261–63, 405. For more on the holistic vision presented in textbooks of that era, see Shapiro, "Civic Biology and the Origin of the School Antievolution Movement," *Journal of the History of Biology* 41 (2008): 409–33, esp. 416–23, 427–30 and Shapiro, *Trying Biology*, 65–80.

68. Ryan, *Anti-Evolution Laws*, 27.

69. Despite his significance, there is no known collection of Michael Williams papers extant. This has truncated his place in the literature on American Catholicism. However, the magazine he founded and, until 1938, edited, has received some scholarly attention. See Robert Brooke Clements, "The Commonwealth: The Williams-Schuster Years, 1924–1938" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1972) and Rodger Van Allen, *The Commonwealth and American Catholicism: The Magazine, the Movement, the Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974).

70. In a summer 1925 article referring to Bryan, Williams said, "As editor of *The Commonwealth*, the leading intellectual organ of lay Catholics in the country, I am closely in touch with Catholic opinion." Quoted in "Bryan Aim Assailed by Catholic Editor," *New York Times*, July 13, 1925, 17.

71. See the bibliography of Williams in the appendix of Clements, "Commonwealth."

72. See Williams, *The Book of the High Romance: A Spiritual Autobiography* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918), chap. 2, 24–end.

73. Williams, *Catholicism and the Modern Mind*, chap. 3, 29–35.

74. Tebbel and Walker-Zuckerman, *The Magazine in America*, 120.

75. *Ibid.*, 122.

76. Martin E. Marty, *Under God, Indivisible, 1941–1960*, vol. 3 of *Modern American Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 7.

Marty's brief discussion of the nature of public *rhetoric*, which he addressed in light of Celeste M. Condit's arguments on public culture, is also useful for the present article (9–11).

77. Williams also deplored the fact that in 1921 only two million of the total twenty million American Catholics subscribed to the Catholic press (Clements, "*Commonweal*," 35).

78. *Commonweal* was conceived by intellectuals and for intellectuals. Clements said that ever since World War I, "small groups of laymen, many of them professors, or graduates of prominent Catholic and secular universities, began discussing ideas for the establishment of a new publication to serve in the application of Catholic principles to contemporary social problems" (Clements, "*Commonweal*," 7).

79. Bredeck, "The Role of the Catholic Layman," 6.

80. Williams published a piece on the magazine's policies in the NCWC *Editorial Sheet* of November 1, 1924. In it, he said, "[*Commonweal*'s] pages will be open to writers holding different forms of Christian belief, and in some cases, to authors who do not profess any form of Christian faith." (quoted in Clements, "*Commonweal*," 66). See also Van Allen, *Commonweal*, 17. According to Bredeck, the decision specifically to reach out to non-Catholics did affect the framing of the articles (Bredeck, "*The Role of the Catholic Layman*," 5–6).

81. Clements, "*Commonweal*," 60, 69.

82. "A Defender Who Doesn't Attack," *New York Times*, November 21, 1924, quoted in Clements, "*Commonweal*," 68.

83. Williams was optimistic that the magazine was achieving its mission from the earliest. See Williams, "Our Second Year" 3 (November 11, 1925): 1.

84. The editors frequently lamented that only a relatively small percentage of the nation's Catholic priests held subscriptions. In one year, it was reported that out of 28,000 priests, only 3,200 subscribed (Clements, "*Commonweal*," 178).

85. "Memorandum for Contributions to the Guarantee Fund of *The Commonweal*" (Nov. 15, 1929), quoted in Clements, "*Commonweal*," 118. Martin Bredeck contended that *Commonweal* offered "published opinion on the part of the better-educated, liberal-minded American Catholic laity" that had somewhat broad influence (Bredeck, "*The Role of the Catholic Layman*," 4).

86. John McKormick to John Raskob, January 17, 1929, quoted in Clements, "Commonweal," 118. *Commonweal's* beginning circulation in 1925 was about three thousand (Van Allen, "Commonweal," 27).

87. Quoted in Van Allen, *Commonweal*, 27.

88. H. L. Mencken to the editor, *Commonweal* 21 (November 2, 1934): 35. Other letters came from high-powered figures such as *The Atlantic Monthly* editor Ellery Sedgwick and Felix Frankfurter. In essence, the people who ran the intellectual forums Williams had set out to reach demonstrated that they had been reached.

89. Schuster quoted in Clements, "Commonweal," 204.

90. Bredeck, "The Role of the Catholic Layman," 4.

91. John Wynne, S.J. to Francis Talbot, S.J., June 12, 1936. John Wynne Papers, box 63, folder 16, Georgetown University Special Collections, Washington, D.C. Heinz Eulau, writing in the *Public Opinion Quarterly*, compared the Catholic weekly opinion journal *Commonweal* with the Jesuit-run *America* over the years since the former's conception, concluding that *Commonweal's* influence has been "more influential than certain figures suggest," and also remarked that it was very "liberal." Heinz Eulau, "Proselytizing in the Catholic Press," *the Public Opinion Quarterly* 11 (Summer 1947): 191.

92. See, for example, "The Catholic View of Evolution," *Literary Digest* 86 (July 4, 1925): 34. In this article, not only were excerpts from *Commonweal* extensively quoted, but the *New York Times* was excerpted, citing the views of John Wynne, S.J., a co-editor of the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, as saying (during the Scopes trial) that he "upholds the principle of teaching evolution as a scientific theory of human origin and disapproves of attempts to legislate against it" (ibid.) An example of the *New York Times* quoting Williams during the trial was cited earlier.

93. Michael Williams, "At Dayton, Tennessee," *Commonweal* 2 (July 22, 1925): 262.

94. Michael Williams (unsigned), "On Teaching Evolution," *Commonweal* 1 (April 22, 1925): 647.

95. Ibid. For more on the Illinois episode to which Williams referred, see Christine Garwood, *Flat Earth: The History of an Infamous Idea* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), chap. 6, esp. 210–12.

96. For more on the apocryphal character of the flat-earth myth in Catholic Christendom and its use as a straw man against Catholics

starting in the Enlightenment, see Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Inventing the Flat Earth: Columbus and Modern Historians* (New York: Praeger, 1997).

97. Williams, "Concerning the Scopes Case," *Commonweal* 2 (June 3, 1925): 85.

98. *Ibid.*

99. *Ibid.*, 86

100. *Ibid.*, 85

101. Benedict Elder, "A Law That Is Not a Law," *Commonweal* 2 (July 15, 1925): 246.

102. For a version of this claim presented in a conservative Catholic context, see "From Dayton to Chaos," *America* 33 (August 1, 1925): 371.

103. *Ibid.*

104. *Ibid.*

105. *Ibid.* Before reversing course when learning of Bryan's role in the defense, H. L. Mencken argued in much the same vein as Elder in "In Tennessee," *The Nation* 121 (July 1, 1925): 30–31.

106. Morrison, "A History of American Catholic" 349–50. One presumes he meant the secular press in the northern United States. See also Morrison, "American Catholics," 67.

107. Williams, "At Dayton, Tennessee," 265. Anti-Catholics had often claimed that Catholic Americans secretly hoped to introduce the papal model of Catholic government; this probably encouraged Williams's vehement desire to separate all Catholics from even the slightest appearance of support for Bryan.

108. See "Bryan Aim Assailed by Catholic Editor," *New York Times*, July 13, 1925, 17.

109. "The Scopes Dilemma," *Commonweal* 2 (July 15, 1925): 241–42.

110. Michael Williams (unsigned), "On the Freedom of the Teacher," *Commonweal* 2 (June 24, 1925): 169–70. See, for example, Hunter, *A Civic Biology*, esp. 195–96, 261–63, 405.

111. "Dayton and Great Britain," *Commonweal* 2 (August 5, 1925): 301.

112. Williams's own editorials and articles over the years that specifically focused on evolution supported science but not scientism or

naïve scientific utopianism. See the following unsigned Williams editorials: "Soundings in Mystery," *Commonweal* 7 (November 16, 1927): 379–80; [untitled], *Commonweal* 7 (March 7, 1928): 1139; and "The Conquering Cockroach," *Commonweal* 10 (September 11, 1929).

113. Untitled, *Commonweal* 2 (September 9, 1925): 411.

114. Morrison, "A History," 295. He went on to say specifically of the 1920s, "Catholic writers have been at each other's throats over questions like human evolution, spontaneous generation and St. Augustine's theory of Genesis" (323).

115. D. W. Fisher, "In Defense of Science," *Commonweal* 3 (January 20, 1926): 290.

116. During the 1920s, the scientific community was itself disputing the extent to which natural selection drove evolution. See Peter J. Bowler, "Revisiting the Eclipse of Darwinism," *Journal of the History of Biology* 38 (2005): 19–32. Some non-Darwinian evolutionary theories (i.e., not assigning primacy to natural selection, per se) were popular in the first few decades of the twentieth century. These included theories based in orthogenesis and saltationism (24).

117. Barry O'Toole, *The Case against Evolution* (New York: MacMillan, 1925).

118. Bertram Windle, "The Case against Evolution," *Commonweal* 2 (June 10, 1925): 124. Windle's articles and reviews dealing with aspects of science and religion appeared frequently in *Commonweal*. Morrison argued of Windle, "The *New York Times* considered Windle the spokesman of the [Catholic] Church in North America" (Morrison, "A History," 338). A few months after the Scopes trial, Windle made another Galileo-trial-centered plea designed to distance modern Catholicism from previous Catholicisms: "Our way today is not the way of those days." Bertram Windle, "The Roman Catholic View of Evolution," *Current History* 23 (December 1925): 336.

119. Morrison, 336.

120. In an unsigned Williams article from February 1926, "Osborn on Religion," Henry Fairfield Osborn is given "the fullest sympathy" for expressing the need for "certain aspects of eternity" to be given attention in schools for the purposes of inculcating morals. Williams, while arguing the need for current public education to remain totally secular, uses Osborn's utterances as a springboard to advocate revamping the school system into subcategories of public schools that offer specific "denominational education." See "Osborn on Religion," *Commonweal* 3 (February 2, 1926): 343. See

also "Sir Oliver and Evolution," *Commonweal* 3 (February 10, 1926): 370–71; Windle, review of *Ether and Reality* by Sir Oliver Lodge, *Commonweal* 3 (February 17, 1926): 415–16; Windle, review of *Evolution and Creation* by Sir Oliver Lodge, *Commonweal* 4 (September 29, 1926): 508–9; and Windle, review of *Modern Scientific Ideas* by Sir Oliver Lodge, *Commonweal* 6 (July 6, 1927): 244–45. On Osborn's religious views, see Brian Regal, *Henry Fairfield Osborn: Race and the Search for the Origins of Man* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), 31–47; on his anti-Catholicism, see *ibid.*, 46.

121. On Osborn's immense public scientific prestige in the 1920s, see *ibid.*, xii.

122. The quote was from Henri Dorlodot. Henry Fairfield Osborn, "The Earth Speaks to Bryan," *Forum* 73 (June 1925): 797. Later in the article he invoked the Jesuit paleontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, to do more of the same.

ABSTRACT Belying assumptions about Catholics and science grounded in the old science-religion warfare model in the 1920s, two liberal Catholic intellectuals contributed in some important but overlooked ways to the discourse where prominent scientist-popularizers and other intellectuals constructed the public understanding of evolution and the Scopes Trial in the mid-1920s US. This article explores publicly-disseminated articles and archival correspondence between Catholics and non-Catholics on these topics, concluding that the manner in which the former supported evolution and opposed the Scopes prosecution may have unintentionally fostered scientism and religious modernism, rather than Catholicism, in the public square. Conditioned by their own Progressive-Era experiences and intellectual training, renowned liberal Catholics Fr. John A. Ryan, board member of the American Civil Liberties Union, and Michael Williams, editor of *Commonweal* magazine, framed their arguments directed at non-Catholic intellectual elites almost exclusively in social and biological science to the exclusion of religion. They did so even as public intellectuals and prominent scientists of modernist faith, like Henry Fairfield Osborn of the Museum of Natural History, constructed a public image of evolution that blended religion, philosophy and science when assigning meaning to the Scopes Trial. This study broadens the view of science-religion conversations surrounding evolution in the 1920s by integrating voices usually omitted from the story while further complicating the still-resonant 'creationist'-'evolutionist' paradigm.

Keywords: Evolution, Liberal [,] Catholic, Science, Scopes