

Florida Historical Quarterly

Volume 50
Number 4 *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol 50,
Number 4

Article 4

1971

Anti-Catholicism and the Florida Legislature, 1911-1919

Robert B. Rackleff



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Rackleff, Robert B. (1971) "Anti-Catholicism and the Florida Legislature, 1911-1919," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 50: No. 4, Article 4.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol50/iss4/4>

ANTI-CATHOLICISM AND THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE, 1911-1919

by ROBERT B. RACKLEFF*

Swep^t into office five months earlier by an unprecedented wave of religious prejudice, Florida Governor Sidney Johnston Catts asked the 1917 legislature to help him fulfill the promises of his campaign of fear of Roman Catholic power:

I carefully call your attention to the fact that there are some churches in the State holding great quantities of land in their possession without taxation. Whole city blocks are free from taxation, being rented out as stores, and I would urge upon your body that you carefully investigate the matter of taxing all church property, Catholic and Protestant, in the State, except the church building itself and the pastor's or parochial's home, and the land upon which they stand. . . .

The time seems to be right for us to stand out on the broad basis of American liberty and declare that there shall be no closed institutions of any kind in our State, whether they be scholastic, eleemosynary or church institutions, and we would suggest that the Legislature pass a law throwing open all school property, House of Good Shepherd, convents, parochial schools or any other institutions now closed to our laws. Georgia has lately passed such a law and put the matter of investigation into the hands of the grand jury of the counties wherein these institutions are located. It would be better put in the hands of a commissioner. . . .

I would suggest that the teachers in private and denominational schools, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, be required to stand the same examination that our public school teachers are forced to stand before they can teach school. It is not right to allow one class of American citizens to have men and women who are qualified to teach them and other schools not having these examinations to be taught by people who we do not know whether they are qualified or not.¹

* Mr. Rackleff is a doctoral student in history at Florida State University.

1. *Florida House Journal* (1917), 22-28.

To the contemporary reader these proposals may seem to have been reasonable attempts of a state government to ensure the best conditions for its citizens. But behind the polite language were causes for alarm for defenders of religious freedom in Florida. The object of Catts's proposals was to strike back at the imaginary threat of Roman Catholic activities in the state.

A serious level of anti-Catholic feeling was reached in the 1910s which spilled into the legislative halls in Tallahassee beginning in the 1913 session, reached its peak in the next two biennial sessions, then quietly disappeared by the time the lawmakers met in 1919. Legislators, heeding many of their constituents, proposed such anti-Catholic measures as a convent inspection bill to investigate suspected wrongdoings in "closed" convents and parochial schools, prohibition laws depriving churches of sacramental wine, "garb" bills to prohibit priests and nuns from wearing religious clothing or insignia while teaching in public schools, taxation of church property, and required Bible readings in public schools.

The small Catholic population in Florida and the South had become accustomed to anti-Catholic feeling in their communities. A Catholic missionary, Father Patrick J. Bresnahan, reported on these conditions as he traveled throughout Florida from 1904 to 1926 seeking converts to the faith. Instances of religious bigotry he encountered ranged from intimidation of Catholics to keep them from attending services to "lock-outs" at meeting halls scheduled for services.² In some communities, the only places he could obtain for religious activities were in private homes. On numerous occasions Father Bresnahan found that he was the object of much innocent curiosity of Florida backwoodsmen, many of who had never seen a garbed priest. He and other observers confirmed the record of anti-Catholic prejudice prior to 1910.

The uniqueness of this religious prejudice in the period 1910-1920 was its greater intensity at the local level and its intrusions into state and national forums. A widely publicized local incident occurred in Fort Lauderdale in 1915 when a young, Catholic grade school teacher was removed from her job by the local public school trustees who objected to her faith. The community, which could have rectified this injustice, voted instead

2. Patrick J. Bresnahan, *Seeing Florida With a Priest* (Zephyrhills, 1937), 52.

at a public meeting by a vote of 181 to seven to uphold the trustees' decision.³ At the state level, anti-Catholic sentiment became a serious legislative problem which had to be faced by fair-minded lawmakers.

Basic to anti-Catholic sentiment was that many rural white Floridians saw the Roman Catholic hierarchy, if not the average churchgoer, as a great threat to their freedom (even though the Catholic population of Florida was less than three per cent of the state's population). Florida was not unique in this attitude; it was typical of many southern states at the time. To combat the imaginary Catholic threat in Alabama, the state legislature considered, but did not pass, a convent inspection bill. The legislators later adopted a requirement for compulsory Bible reading in public schools, much to the chagrin of Alabama Catholics. In Birmingham a nativist organization was voted into the city administration, and it purged the staff of all Catholic employees.⁴ Georgia enacted a convent inspection bill. There is a long list of other rural-dominated legislatures in the South and nation which debated anti-Catholic measures during this decade.

Florida was vulnerable to this movement since it was part of the stronghold of the populist and progressive movements. The conditions of deprivation and discontent which led to the frustrated political efforts against big business also had led to more emotional movements such as prohibition and anti-Catholic and anti-foreign nativism. Many of the same people who had fought railroads and land barons at the turn of the century were fighting the Catholic hierarchy a few years later. The most prominent example of this shifting focus of attention was Tom Watson of Georgia, chief instigator of southern anti-Catholicism. Watson, disillusioned national leader of the People's Party in the 1890s, was still a powerful Georgia politician and editor of *Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine*, a weekly journal mostly containing his editorial prejudices. After several years of attacking big business, he began a deliberate anti-Catholic campaign in August 1910, which lasted for seven years. It started with a series of articles, "The Roman Catholic Hierarchy: The Deadliest Menace to Our Liberties and Our Civilization." It was

3. *Miami Herald*, August 25, 1915.

4. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns in American Nativism* (New Brunswick, 1955), 292.

followed by another series, "The History of the Papacy and the Popes." A national magazine, *The Menace*, sprang up in response to Watson's success and devoted its issues to anti-Catholic propaganda. By 1915, *The Menace* had a weekly circulation of 1,500,000 copies.⁵

National organizations such as the Guardians of Liberty and the Patriotic Sons of America grew to significant strength. The Guardians started in upstate New York in 1911 as a nativist organization opposed to foreign immigration, but the following year it was predominantly anti-Catholic, largely at the urging of Tom Watson. It did not take long for these organizations to move into Florida. Prominent Guardian lecturer Billy Parker helped form a chapter in Jacksonville in 1914. The Patriotic Sons of America were in part responsible for the defeat in 1910 of Lewis W. Zim, a St. Augustine Catholic, in his congressional race against a Protestant.⁶

These national movements warned that Protestant America was in danger of a Papist takeover by elected and appointed Catholic government officials whose first loyalty was to the Pope, not to America. President Wilson's private secretary was Catholic, and this created much anti-Catholic dismay. In the vanguard of the takeover would be the Knights of Columbus who received military training, it was claimed, in church basements. Fourth degree Knights took an oath which included a pledge to wage "a war of extermination and mutilation of all heretics," according to *The Menace*.⁷ Other contentions were that convents were the scenes of adult slavery and murders of nuns' illegitimate infants; that confessionals were used by lecherous priests to seduce young Catholic girls; and that priests visited convents for sadistic and sexual adventures. Many Protestant clergymen supported the movement. According to one minister, "If red blood flows in your veins the Pope's ambition to rule our beloved country and reduce it to the level of Italy and Spain will set your nerves a-tingle and cause you to engage in the great fight that is on."⁸

5. David P. Page, "Bishop Michael J. Curley and Anti-Catholic Nativism in Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLV (October 1966), 103.

6. John R. Deal, Jr., "Sidney Johnston Catts, Stormy Petrel of Florida Politics" (MA thesis, University of Florida, 1949), 31.

7. Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 180.

8. Washington Gladden, "The Anti-Papal Panic," in *Harper's Weekly*, July 18, 1914, 55.

Falling under the influence of anti-Catholic forces, Floridians rallied in small towns and city meeting halls to hear prominent lecturers denounce Papism. The rousing tenor of the 1916 gubernatorial candidate, Sidney Catts, brought this feeling to its peak, and Floridians elected him over some of the most powerful politicians in the state. Indirectly quoting Catts, the Tallahassee *Daily Democrat* reported the main plank of his platform:

The suppression of the political usurpation of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy. He would not interfere with a single right of the Catholic church— either its creeds, right of existence, or equality before the law. But when that church, receiving its orders from Rome, attempted to destroy our public schools, the freedom of the press and free speech, and to usurp the rights of all our free institutions, and place the yoke of Rome upon the necks of this great free people, he was ready, at any cost, to oppose their onward march.⁹

Nathan P. Bryan's loss of his United States Senate seat to Park Trammell in 1916 was attributed partly to anti-Catholic voters who remembered his controversial nomination of a Catholic as postmaster in Jacksonville.

These pressures began to be felt in the Florida legislature. No anti-Catholic proposals were introduced in 1911, but two years later numerous bills were debated which threatened the Church's freedom. The convent inspection and the "garb" bills were introduced in this legislative session in the house, which proved more receptive than the senate to these anti-Catholic measures. In May 1913, Representative S. H. Strom of Gadsden County introduced the bill "regulating the garb or dress to be worn by teachers in the public schools while performing their duties as such teachers."¹⁰ The house publicity committee was more to the point, describing the bill as, "Prohibiting the wearing of the garb or insignia of religious societies by public school teachers while performing their duties as such."¹¹ County boards of public instruction would have discretionary powers to regulate their teachers' dress. The bill was directed specifically

9. Tallahassee *Daily Democrat*, April 30, 1915.

10. *Florida House Journal* (1913), 953.

11. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, June 5, 1913.

against schools in such towns as St. Augustine and Loretto (near Madison) which were staffed by the Sisters of St. Joseph but which operated as public schools. Non-Catholic students were enrolled, and the schools collected public funds for their operation. One opponent of the bill charged that its impetus came from St. Johns County citizens resentful of the Catholic-staffed schools.

The bill passed the house by a vote of forty-nine to eleven in a stormy session, in which Representative Edwin Spencer, Jr., of Marion County, leading the opposition, called the bill "the most vicious piece of legislation that could be enacted." He also charged that a Methodist minister was behind this effort. Representative Glenn Terrell of Sumter County spoke for enactment, arguing that the fundamental issue was separation of church and state and that is what the bill sought. An opponent countered that the United States Secretary of the Interior had ruled in a similar case that Catholic sisters teaching in public schools did not violate separation of church and state.¹² Another opponent stated that the bill would bar the wearing of such innocent badges as an Epworth League pin. "It will make a criminal practically of every schoolteacher in the state."¹³ The bill went to the senate during the hectic closing days of the session where it was referred to the senate committee on education. There it received a cool reception; the committee sent the bill back to the senate, the same day it was delivered from the house, with no recommendation. The bill died quietly after its second reading.¹⁴

Limited public reaction to this threat to religious freedom came quickly. It was not hard to gauge the *Tampa Tribune's* view of the bill from the headline, "Another Freak Passed by Florida Solons," after it received a favorable house vote. In a later editorial, the *Tribune* stated the bill was "unnecessarily unjust and discriminatory and, perhaps, unconstitutional, in that it interferes with the freedom of religion."¹⁵ The *Palatka Times-Herald* felt that "the limit has been reached" when such a bill could be introduced, "Evidently there is much work in Tallahas-

12. *Tampa Tribune*, May 31, 1913.

13. *Florida House Journal* (1913), 2064.

14. *Florida Senate Journal* (1913), 1940.

15. *Tampa Tribune*, May 31, 1913.

see for the 'fool killer.' "¹⁶ The *Punta Gorda Herald* stated, "We hope the day will never dawn when the people of Florida will stand for a law like that, . . . when we do, bigotry and religious feeling will again distract the country as they did during the witchcraft delusion in Massachusetts colony."¹⁷ The *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, usually quick to condemn anti-Catholic efforts, made no comment on the measure other than reprinting some short criticisms of it written by other papers. No public comments seem to have been made by officials of the Catholic diocese of St. Augustine.

Two weeks after the garb bill was introduced, Representative A. M. Wilson of Manatee County proposed a law providing "for the inspection of all private or public hospitals, reformatory houses, homes of detention, convents, asylums, houses of Good Shepherds, sectarian seminaries, schools or institutions, by the Commissioners of the county in which such institutions are situated, by the grand jury thereof, or by any person or persons appointed by a Judge of a Court of Record, upon a petition signed by twenty citizens of said county."¹⁸ The house committee on public health, by a vote of three to two, opposed the measure, and it was dropped.

Another bill, initially without any obvious anti-Catholic intent, had consequences damaging to Catholic schools. The act prohibited black teachers from teaching whites and whites from teaching Negroes in Negro schools. It passed the house by a unanimous vote, indicating that the representatives usually alert to oppose anti-Catholic measures were unaware of the consequences of the law. It failed to distinguish between private and public schools, so that white Catholic nuns who taught Negro children in parochial schools were also subject to arrest.¹⁹ Bishop William Kenny of St. Augustine consulted with Alston Cockrell of Jacksonville, a Catholic lawyer, who affirmed that the sisters could be arrested, depending on local law enforcement officials.²⁰

16. Palatka *Times Herald*, quoted in *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, June 9, 1913.

17. *Punta Gorda Herald*, quoted in *ibid.*, June 9, 1913.

18. *Florida House Journal* (1913), 1337-38.

19. *Laws of FLorida* (1913), 311. Two hundred thirty-seven Negroes were being taught in Catholic schools in the school year, 1909-1910, according to the Diocese school report of that year.

20. Alston Cockrell to Bishop William Kenny, September 3, 1913, Archives of the Diocese of St. Augustine, box 3-W-22. In a 1916 test case set up

Other bills in which Catholics saw religious prejudice were introduced in the 1913 legislature. The compulsory school attendance bill, which failed to pass the senate, was opposed by Catholic officials who claimed that it was an unnecessary regulation of private schools. A provision in the bill called for inspection of private institutions to ensure they met the same standards met by public schools, a provision which irked Catholics already sensitive to attacks on their freedom.²¹ Some prohibition bills in the legislature suggested an anti-Catholic flavor, especially an unsuccessful house bill prohibiting "the carrying or drinking of intoxicating liquors at churches, school houses, picnics or other public gatherings in this State."²² Church officials, who had heard of efforts in Colorado to require Catholic churches to purchase liquor licenses in order to serve sacramental wines, understandably were sensitive to such bills. As it turned out, most prohibition legislation in Florida was fair to the Catholic church, and the bills generally excepted sacramental wine from their bans.

No particular legislators stood out as anti-Catholic leaders in the 1913 session, which was also true of the succeeding sessions. Almost all of the anti-Catholic legislation originated in the lower house and was killed in the senate. What the originators of such bills had in common was a strong rural constituency, where religious intolerance was strong.

The fight over a convent inspection bill resumed when the legislature met in April 1915. In the first week of the session Representative William H. Mapole of Walton County introduced a convent inspection bill similar to the one debated two years earlier, but he immediately ran into stiff opposition. When the committee on judiciary by a unanimous vote opposed the measure, Mapole tried to bring it to the house floor for a vote. He was twice unsuccessful.²³ Mapole, who reportedly had con-

by the church, three sisters were arrested at St. Benedict's School for Negroes in St. Augustine for violation of the law. Petition of *habeas corpus* was granted by the judge of the circuit court of St. Johns County, who ruled that private schools were not affected by that law. Just as a white doctor was free to sell his services to a Negro patient, a white teacher in a private school had the right to teach blacks. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 21, 1916.

21. *Florida House Journal* (1913), 1284.

22. *Ibid.*, 1219.

23. *Florida House Journal* (1915), 750.

gressional ambitions, established a reputation as an anti-Catholic during this session and received recognition for his efforts in *The Menace*. He was also the persistent sponsor of a progressive bill designed to help working-class Floridians, a "pure shoe" bill to prohibit the use of non-leather materials in the manufacture of shoes without prominent mention of the leather substitute by the manufacturer.

Mapole's effort to pass the convent inspection bill generated effective opposition by Catholics and their supporters. Partly to combat anticipated anti-Catholic legislation, Bishop Michael J. Curley sent the missionary priest, Father Bresnahan, to Tallahassee as resident pastor in 1915. Unlike his predecessor, Curley was a vocal and vigorous defender of Catholic prerogatives in Florida. Father Bresnahan, because of the contacts he had made during his travels around the state, was well suited for the task of lobbying against such bills as Mapole's. In his later account, Father Bresnahan reported that he and sympathetic legislators "won out and silenced to this day the cheap politicians who made capital out of the ignorance of their non-Catholic citizens."²⁴ Other reactions to the bill varied. According to the *Tampa Tribune*, "Mapole has been generally regarded as a joke, and this effort of his will strengthen that impression."²⁵ Earlier the *Tribune* had dubbed him the "most obstreperous" house member. Mapole was not alone in his attempt to pass the inspection law. Sidney Catts, then campaigning for governor, was in Tallahassee only a few days before the inspection bill reached the house floor, and he announced his support of such a measure "in the interest of the childhood of the State."²⁶ *The Menace*, at the peak of its influence in 1915, applauded Mapole for his "honesty and nerve" in trying to "regulate Romish prisons in the State of Florida."²⁷ However, the anti-Catholic effort was no match for the careful planning which the Catholic clergy and sympathetic legislators put into their defeat of the 1915 inspection bill. Senator William B. Johnson of Live Oak, chairman of the rules committee, was a powerful opponent of the anti-Catholic forces. According to Bresnahan, he did more than anyone else to offset those bills; the priest-lobbyist saw Johnson

24. Bresnahan, *Seeing Florida With a Priest*, 64.

25. *Tampa Tribune*, quoted in Tallahassee *Daily Democrat*, May 6, 1915.

26. *Ibid.*, April 30, 1915.

27. *Ibid.*, May 6, 1915.

take the rostrum three times to denounce bigots.²⁸ In a later fight against religious intolerance in Fort Lauderdale, Bishop Curley again put to use his knack for mustering newspaper and public support for his cause.

A week after Mapole's bill was introduced, Representative W. J. Gray of Gadsden County submitted the garb bill to the house. It called for firing teachers who violated the rule: "No teacher in any public school of the State of Florida shall wear in said school, or whilst engaged in the performance of his or her duty, as such teacher, any garb, dress, or wearing apparel indicating the fact, that such teacher is a member of or adherent of any religious order, sect or denomination."²⁹ The house committee on education voted unanimously to recommend passage, but the Florida House Journal makes no further mention of the bill past this point. Apparently the bill died sometime between the committee's recommendation and its second reading.

The *Miami Herald* included the garb bill in its own classification of "freak bills" – bills which should not have been taken seriously except as a source of embarrassment to the state. However, Catholic officials took the measure more seriously. The Diocese arranged to have its schools at St. Augustine, Elkton, and Loretto no longer considered or supported as public schools, which they had been considered as a result of special arrangements with local school officials.³⁰

The compulsory education bill, which passed the legislature in 1915 in the form of a county option, drew opposition from Father John O'Brien, rector of the Cathedral at St. Augustine. He objected to the authority given local superintendents of public instruction to inspect private schools in their districts, and he raised the possibility of a state takeover of parochial and private schools. "Is it safe or desirable to pass a law laying us open so flagrantly as this to the possibility of state monopoly of education?" he asked.³¹ Another bill into which was read some anti-Catholic sentiment was the compulsory Bible reading bills, which drew fire from the *Miami Herald*. It argued the bill implied that "the public schools are for Protestant Christians

28. Bresnahan, *Seeing Florida With a Priest*, 13.

29. Tallahassee *Daily Democrat*, April 15, 1915.

30. Page, "Bishop Michael J. Curley and Anti-Catholic Nativism in Florida," 106.

31. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 5, 1915.

only, and in that sense such legislation would be a violation of the fundamental principles upon which the American government was founded."³²

The 1915 session as a whole drew criticism for the slowdown in progressive accomplishments and a tendency to dissipate legislative time and energy on such issues as prohibition, convent inspection, Sunday ban on non-religious activities, and other matters involving public morals. The *Miami Herald* noted that, "if all the regulatory laws proposed in the legislature should be passed, the jails of the state would have to be enlarged, for all that a man could possibly do without violating some law would be to sit on the church steps."³³

The 1916 gubernatorial campaign brought anti-Catholicism even more into the public mind. Nearly 40,000 Floridians voted for Catts in the general election, even though he was not running as a Democrat. This gave him what he interpreted as a mandate for repressive measures against the Catholic church. Catts's victory and the defeat of Senator Nathan P. Bryan created much apprehension among Florida Catholics as they awaited the 1917 legislature.

The legislature was opened by Catts's call for laws taxing church property, convent inspection, and state examination of private school teachers to ensure their qualifications to teach. Ten days later Representative W. G. Seals of Bradford County introduced a strongly worded inspection bill which authorized the governor and other officials to call for inspection of the "sanitary and moral conditions" of suspicious institutions. Running into some opposition, Seals withdrew the original bill and replaced it with a milder measure. The committee gave the bill a favorable recommendation, but when it reached the house floor on May 15, Seals had to thwart determined opposition to the measure. The most dramatic effort to defeat it was fielded by Representative Marion B. Jennings of Duval County, who proposed an amendment to strike out the enacting clause of the bill. At one point during his denunciation of the proposed law, he declared that "the hatred displayed against one denomination made him sometimes doubt the pretensions of the Chris-

32. *Miami Herald*, quoted in *ibid.*, May 13, 1915.

33. *Miami Herald*, May 13, 1915.

tian religion." His speech stirred only sixteen representatives to vote for amendment, and it was defeated by a large vote. After some minor amendments, mainly to reduce harsh penalties, the bill passed by a vote of fifty-six to twelve.³⁴

The senate seemed reluctant to accept Seals's bill and sent it to the committee on education, chaired by Senator C. C. Mathis of Panama City. His committee drafted a substitute bill reducing violations of the act from a felony to a misdemeanor. After receiving the bill from committee, the senate five days later discarded the house version and passed its own measure by a vote of twenty-six to three. The ease with which the bill had been enacted by the senate, which normally had defeated anti-Catholic measures, was motivated by some senators' feelings that passage would relieve them of a nagging problem. As one senator admitted, "I vote 'aye' not because I believe the Bill should pass, but to stop the agitation. People are riding into office by appealing to the religious prejudice of the voter, and I believe the passage of the Bill will stop such agitation."³⁵

House members promptly passed the senate substitute when it reached them on May 30. H. S. McKenzie of Putnam County, one of eleven representatives to vote against the measure, labelled it "ill-timed" in light of the nation's involvement in World War I, as well as being "unpatriotic and un-American."³⁶ The bill in its final form authorized the governor to appoint inspectors, upon recommendation by county commissioners in each county, to check local institutions at least once a year, "for the purpose of ascertaining the treatment of the inmates . . . and general conditions . . . and report their findings to the Governor and the County Commissioners of the County; Provided, the visits of said Commission shall not be made known or announced beforehand."³⁷

Although never enforced in Florida, the act was the first and only baldly anti-Catholic law of the decade, and it marked the high water mark of anti-Catholic legislative efforts in Florida. The *Florida Times-Union* relayed the feeling from the capital that passage of the inspection bill was a victory for the new

34. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 16, 1917.

35. *Florida Senate Journal* (1917), 2251.

36. *Florida House Journal* (1917), 2455.

37. *Laws of Florida* (1917), 239-40.

governor, but it was uncharacteristically silent editorially. Perhaps the paper was embarrassed after having predicted defeat when the measure was first introduced. Reaction from Catholic authorities was strong. In a letter to the house speaker, Bishop Curley asked, "May I not with due propriety, say that we the Catholics of this state, have a right to justice and fair play?" He denounced the anti-Catholic campaign of the previous two years, "during which the Catholics of Florida have been vilified, misrepresented and held up to the hate and derision of their fellow citizens." He called the inspection bill, "an implied and outrageous insult to women who rank with the best, purest and noblest on God's earth."³⁸

After the passage of the inspection law, legislation directed against Florida Catholics went no further. Perhaps the legislators felt that the inspection law was their sop to anti-Catholic constituents and they needed do no more. No other bills in the 1917 session were patently anti-Catholic, and attention turned toward the problems of mobilizing Florida for the war.

When the 1919 legislature opened, Governor Catts renewed his efforts in his opening message. He called the 1917 bill "a very lame effort to correct evils," and he asked the legislature to pass a tougher inspection law.³⁹ As the session wore on, however, even Catts's interest seemed to wane. On May 29 he criticized the legislature for keeping important bills "far back upon the Calendar or quietly slumbering in the committees." Put an inspection law was not among the bills the governor considered important enough to list.⁴⁰ The legislature itself was too concerned with other matters during the busy session, and not a single bill was introduced suggesting hostility toward Florida Catholics.

The flurry of anti-Catholicism which had lasted for three sessions of Florida's legislature was ended. In the long run, the legislation had little effect on the Catholic church of Florida, which continued to prosper. Father Bresnahan reported more successes among rural Floridians on his travels. The convent inspection law was repealed in 1935, without it once being enforced. Catts, the main beneficiary of anti-Catholic sentiment, suffered a remarkable political eclipse in 1920 when he was de-

38. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 26, 1917.

39. *Florida House Journal* (1919), 46.

40. *Ibid.*, 1959.

feated by the incumbent Duncan U. Fletcher for the Democratic nomination for the United States Senate. The Florida voters decided against any more of Catts's rural rabble-rousing in favor of the genteel Fletcher. And except for a revival of anti-catholicism in the 1928 presidential campaign, religious prejudice ceased to be a potent force in Florida.

The passage of the inspection law deserves appraisal. It seems doubtful that many of the legislators who supported it really expected the law to be enforced. It is likely that they merely wanted to relieve the pressure of public opinion at home, so they voted for the law. The observations of one southern scholar on anti-evolution laws seem appropriate:

. . . the average rural southern legislator could easily be rushed into supporting legislation that would both satisfy the people back home and hold off the noisy lobbyists at the state house door. What did it matter if an intellectually stifling law were placed in the statute book? Already statute books everywhere bulged with the sinful indiscretions of other legislative sessions. A good way to bury a pesky issue was to pass a law. The law has long been the tomb of political problems, and politicians were able to accept the anti-evolution laws, because their enactment allowed them to go home to their constituents without criticism.

It is doubtful that a single legislator in a state which passed an anti-evolution bill really envisioned a culprit being brought to the bar of justice.⁴¹

Perhaps the main effect of anti-Catholic legislation during this decade was the role it played, along with such issues as prohibition and "blue" laws, in sapping the time and energy of legislators attempting to give Florida a comprehensive set of progressive laws. A survey of the indices of the house and senate journals of the 1915 and 1917 sessions shows that they were crammed with bills legislating morals. Thus, really constructive measures were impeded by the clutter. In a very real way, anti-Catholicism during this decade helped in the disintegration of the progressive movement in Florida.

41. Thomas D. Clark, *The Emerging South* (New York, 1968), 250.