

CATHOLICISM IN THE ERA OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

by Leonard P. Liggio

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POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The events leading to the American Revolution have Catholicism as a background element. English colonists in North America were engaged in occasional conflicts with the French in Quebec whenever France and England fought major wars. Although the Holy See could be found among the opponents of French foreign policy, France and Catholicism formed a single unit in the minds of English colonists in the eighteenth century. Americans saw the Black Robes' missions among the Iroquois and Great Lakes tribes as part of a Catholic intrusion from Quebec. Christian Indians were military allies of the French.

In the 1750's Virginians led by George Washington and Pennsylvanians led by Benjamin Franklin were seeking gigantic land grants in the Ohio region from London. But French trading forts were constructed south of Lake Erie, focused on Fort Duquesne. England sent regiments to Alexandria which marched against Fort Duquesne. They were defeated by the French and Indians, and the commander General Edward Braddock died (1755).

European capitals saw the possibility of another major war. Austria's long time alliance with England had not prevented her from losing provinces; France's long time alliance with Prussia had not given her any advantage. A new French foreign minister, the Abbe (later Cardinal) de Bernis, and the Austrian foreign minister of Empress Maria Theresa, Count von Kaunitz, agreed to a "Reversal of Alliances." Maria Theresa's daughter, Marie Antoinette, would marry Louis XV's grand-son (future Louis XVI). The Empresses of Austria and Russia with the King of France had huge armies to confront the smaller, if well-led, armies of Prussia and Hanover (of which the English king was the Elector). (In the end, the death of the Russian Empress relieved Frederick the Great of Prussia of being overwhelmed by Russia.)

England and France challenged each other at sea and in the colonies in this Seven Years' War (French and Indian War). England regained the advantage in North America, as well as in India and the West Indies. As the French losses mounted around the world, Spain honored the Family Compact between the Bourbon dynasties of France and Spain and declared war on England. The Spanish fleet was destroyed and Manila and Havana fell to England. In the Peace of Paris (1763) France surrendered Quebec and the Ohio Valley to England, and transferred Louisiana to Spain to compensate its loss of Florida to England.

England had gained the greatest victory of the century, at the cost of the largest national debt. London's proposal to impose taxes on the colonists for the debt and to set up garrisons in American cities (after the French threat was totally removed) caused the conflicts leading to the Declaration of Independence. The heated anti-Catholicism of anti-French propaganda in America cooled after the war. The possibility of independence led to the recognition of potential alliances with

Quebec or with the French monarchy. One example of the change in attitude toward Catholicism occurred after the American victory at Yorktown (October, 1781): "It is a little more startling to learn that the French and American armies, after the victory, attended a solemn High Mass" (Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America*).

MARYLAND - ENGLAND'S CATHOLIC COLONY

Maryland had been established originally (1632) as a Catholic-led colony under its proprietor, George Calvert, Lord Baltimore. The second Lord Baltimore, Cecil Calvert, sent colonists under his brother, Leonard, as governor of Maryland. Under Leonard Calvert religious toleration was legislated by the Maryland assembly. "It is significant that in the year 1642 members of the English Church meeting in the Colony of Maryland, and frequently other groups in that early period, described themselves as Protestant Catholics, and this designation, if rightly interpreted in the light of history describes well the doctrinal position of the Protestant Episcopal Church . . ." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, University of Chicago Press, 1947, vol. 18, page 612).

By the eighteenth century penal laws were imposed against Catholics who often were major land owners. Penal laws meant Catholics could not hold office, had to pay double taxes and could only educate their children at home with secret Catholic tutors. Becoming an Anglican the then Lord Baltimore retained his proprietorship. Successors of the original English Jesuits who accompanied Leonard Calvert and the first colonists continued to labor in Maryland, and quietly set up parishes in Philadelphia and New York (where churches had to be entered from interior courtyards so as not to be facing the public streets).

Maryland Catholics sent their sons to Jesuit colleges in Europe. Catholics often were among the best educated Americans. John Carroll (1735-1815) studied at St. Omer with his cousin, Charles Carroll (1737-1832), and after the suppression of the Jesuits in France, he became a Jesuit professor of philosophy in the prince-bishopric of Liege. The Pope's suppression of the Society of Jesus (July, 1773) led John Carroll to return to Maryland. The Maryland Jesuits placed their property in a corporation, the Company of Gentlemen of Maryland, and continued their priestly ministry. (The papal bull of suppression required the civil magistrates' promulgation for

effect; Catherine the Great, King Frederick the Great, and King George of England and of Hanover refused to recognize a papal document, and thus, the Jesuits were suffered to continue their ministries in those jurisdictions, for example, the colleges in West Prussia and White Russia which had been detached from Poland in the First Partition (1772).)

JOHN CARROLL'S EMERGENCE

Fr. John Carroll was asked in 1776 by the Second Continental Congress to join a diplomatic mission to Quebec. His cousin, Charles Carroll of Carrollton (a signer of the Declaration of Independence), Samuel Chase, also of Maryland, and Benjamin Franklin were the other delegates. The French Canadians received good treatment by London and did not seek independence (they may not have been unhappy to see the English colonies leave British North America, not realizing that they would be saddled with the embittered Empire Loyalists after their support of King George failed).

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On the return from Quebec through Maine, Benjamin Franklin suffered a serious illness and Fr. John Carroll nursed him back to health. Franklin not only was grateful but he became well and favorably acquainted with such a superior product of the *Ratio Studiorum*. On returning to Philadelphia with Dr. Franklin, John Carroll wrote to his uncle Charles Carroll of their Montreal embassy and concluded (June 2, 1776): "Ten tons of powder, 500 small arms came in yesterday."

Franklin was named U. S. Minister to France in September 1776 and arrived in France in December. Franklin was lionized by the French court and gained its support for the alliance with the United States. John Carroll wrote to Franklin in Paris about articles in the *Leyden Gazette* and provided American news from "near George Town" (January 18, 1778): "Genl. Schuyler's oldest daughters have been married for sometime; but I have not heard that the mild Miss Peggy has found a match to her liking yet. I mention this, because I am well convinced you can not but interest your self in the concerns of that most amiable and hospitable family . . . As I make no doubt that every man of letters in Paris is desirous of being introduced to you, perhaps you may have seen a very amiable & modest man L(or)d. abbe Brotierz an Ex-Jesuit, editor of a fine edition of Tacitus & author of some other performances, which recommend him much to the literary world."

ARTICLE

(Miss Peggy was Margaret Schuyler; her sister Elizabeth married Alexander Hamilton in 1780).

FOUNDING FATHERS AND ROMAN CURIA

With the emergence of peace negotiations recognizing America's independence, the Apostolic Nuncio in Paris approached Franklin regarding the organization of the post-Independence Catholic Church in America. America (like England) was a missionary country (America continued to be until the early 20th century), and had been under the authority of the English Jesuit Mission and the Catholic vicar apostolic in London, Bishop John Challoner (1691-1781). The Papal Nuncio, Giuseppe Doria-Pamphili, inquired of Franklin what kind of arrangement and under whose administration the United States Congress wished the Catholic Church to be organized. Franklin wrote to the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Congress under whose authority Franklin served. The chairman was James Madison, who responded that the U. S. Congress did not intend to control or become involved in any church's organization. Franklin returned the question back to Rome to answer.

The Anglican Church in America also faced a problem of organization, and its solution provided an example for Carroll to present to Rome. Some Anglican clergy had been active Loyalists. Contrary to their claims of the revolution as a Puritan project, two thirds of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were Anglicans. The clergy of Connecticut elected Samuel Seabury who sought episcopal consecration in England. Rejected there, he was consecrated in Aberdeen, November 14, 1784, by the Scotch non-juring bishops (the Anglican bishops who recognized the Stuarts rather than Hanoverians as legitimate kings of Scotland).

Carroll corresponded with Leonardo Cardinal Antonelli, Prefect of the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide. To one of its members, Vitaliano Cardinal Borromeo, Carroll wrote (10th Novr. 1783): "You are not ignorant, that in these United States our Religious system has undergone a revolution, if possible, more extraordinary, than our political one. In all of them, free toleration is allowed to Christians of every denominations; and particularly in the States of Pennsylvania, Dela-

ware, Maryland, and Virginia, a communication of all Civil rights, without distinction or diminution, is extended to those of our Religion. This is a blessing and advantage, which is our duty to preserve and improve with the utmost prudence, by demeaning ourselves on all occasions as subjects zealously attached to our government and avoiding to give any jealousies on account of any dependence on foreign jurisdictions, more than that, which is essential to our Religion and acknowledgement of the Pope's spiritual Supremacy over the whole Christian world. You know that we of the Clergy have heretofore resorted to the Vicar Apostolick of the London district for the exercise of spiritual powers, but being well acquainted with the temper of Congress, of our assemblies and the people at large, we are firmly of opinion, that we shall not be suffered to continue under such a jurisdiction, whenever it becomes known to the public. You may be assured of this from the following fact. The Clergy of the church of England were heretofore subject to the Bishop of London; but the umbrage taken at this dependence was so great, that notwithstanding the power & prevalence of that sect, they could find no other method to allay jealousies, than by withdrawing themselves, as they have lately done, from all obedience to him (Thomas O'Brien Hanley, S. J., Editor, *The John Carroll Papers*, volume I American Catholic Historical Association, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976, pp. 80-81).

However, John Carroll was anxious that the Catholic Church in America not be under the administration of a European prefect apostolic. Carroll had been appointed a trustee of two colleges, Washington College, Chestertown, Maryland (1783), and St. John's College, Annapolis (1784), of which he became president of the board (1788). He was actively engaged in the development of Georgetown College (1788). Carroll organized the Catholic clergy and was elected superior of the American clergy. The Roman authorities accepted this, and created Carroll as vicar apostolic, and finally as bishop of Baltimore (1788).

Franklin and then Thomas Jefferson had an impact through their French clerical friends. Jefferson inherited from John Adams (when Adams moved from Paris to become minister in London) a set of clerical friends

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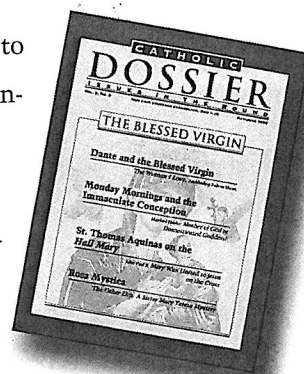
to which Jefferson added more abbes. (Jefferson had an apartment in the Carthusian monastery in Paris to which he retired for contemplation and writing for a week or more at a time, taking his dinner in the refectory. Jefferson's daughters were placed in a convent school.) Jefferson was a friend of the Papal Nuncio to Paris, Comte (later Cardinal) Dugnani and remained a life long correspondent until the Cardinal's death in Rome in 1820.

Charles Carroll of Carrollton, John's cousin and sometime fellow student at St. Omer, not only signed the Declaration of Independence but was elected Maryland's first U. S. Senator. He supported the U. S. Bill of Rights. However, he later relinquished his Senate seat when Maryland legislated against serving in both the federal and state legislatures. Charles Carroll had written the provisions for the Maryland state senate and preferred to keep his seat in the senate in Annapolis. Charles played an important part in the founding of America's first railway, the Baltimore and Ohio. John's older brother, Daniel Carroll (1739-1796), had earlier studied at St. Omer. He signed for Maryland on the Articles of Confederation (1781) and the Philadelphia Constitution (1787). He served in the Maryland senate, of which he was elected president for three terms. He was elected to the first U. S. House of Representatives where he supported the Bill of Rights. All the Carrolls were closely associated with George Washington, who reciprocated their admiration.

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