



## Our Founding Father

By William A. Borst, Ph.D.

As the nation slips further away from its religious heritage, conservative Christians, such as David Barton, are attempting to put God back into American history. In February, in the Capitol Rotunda, Barton mused how interesting it was *that we have been trained to recognize the two least religious founding fathers*, namely, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. Compared to today's secularists, Barton contends that these two looked like a pair of *Bible-thumping evangelicals!*

### CATHOLIC ROOTS

Similarly American Catholics should look to their own historical roots. The Church in America has unique attributes that distinguish it from other Catholic communities around the world. The Church's American identity has been distinct, though not independent of its rich European heritage, even from its first days as a germinating seed in America. Just as the nation had its Washington, Hamilton, and Jefferson, the Church in America owes its unique historical direction to its founding father, John Carroll.

John Carroll was born in an aristocratic Irish family in Upper Marlborough, Maryland on January 8, 1735. His cousin Charles Carroll became one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and his brother Daniel Carroll signed the United States Constitution in 1787. When 12 years of age, John Carroll went to the Jesuits' grammar school at Bohemia, Maryland where he was *assiduous in study, pious and amiable*. One year later he and his older cousin Charles Carroll went to Europe for extensive studies. John went first to St. Omer's College in French Flanders and there for six years he pursued a liberal education with *marked capability of mind, attention to his studies and docility and kindness of manner*. Following his father's death in 1750, John joined the Society of Jesus and after fourteen years of philosophy and theology he was ordained a priest in 1769 at thirty-four years of age.

In the summer of 1773 he received news that Pope Clement XIV had succumbed to clerical and Bourbon pressure and suppressed the Society of Jesus. Profoundly discouraged, he returned to his mother's home in Rock Creek, Maryland, away from the *scandal and defamation*, which followed in the wake of the historic event.

### REVOLUTIONARY IMPACT

The American Revolution had great impact on American Catholics. Prior to the Declaration of Independence, Catholics suffered under the bigotry of the British government. The Revolution brought with it new constitutions and greater religious liberties in many of the colonies, especially Pennsylvania and Maryland, where the majority of Catholics lived. It inspired Catholics to knock on the doors of mainstream America with a fervor and a resolve that did not reach fruition until 150 years later.

In 1776 the Continental Congress persuaded Father Carroll to accompany his cousin Charles Carroll, of Carrollton, MD, Samuel Chase and Benjamin Franklin to Canada in an effort to secure Canada's neutrality during the Revolution. The hierarchy turned a deaf ear, extending few courtesies. After this diplomatic failure, Fr. Carroll moved to Philadelphia near the ailing Franklin where he ingratiated himself to the revolutionary icon with his *friendly assistance and tender care*.

### A GENIUS FOR ORGANIZATION

In 1783 it was obvious that ecclesiastical ties with Britain would soon be broken, Father Carroll deplored the apathy and irresolution of the former American Jesuits, in Maryland and Pennsylvania who had not gotten over their suppression. Out of concern for their security and extensive properties, Father Carroll called a meeting of several priests at White Marsh, Maryland. A genius for organization, Carroll devised the Form of Government Rules for the Select Body of Clergy and the Regulation for the Management of Plantations in 1784. This plan provided for a chapter of the clergy elected from three districts that would have charge of all temporal affairs. At his prompting, the ex-Jesuits petitioned the Holy See to grant the necessary faculties or ritual powers to their former superior, Fr. John Lewis.

Rome went through proper channels and enlisted the advice from the American minister in Paris, Benjamin Franklin. Not forgetting Carroll's Christian charity during his illness, Franklin suggested that Rome name Carroll as superior of the American mission. His fellow clergy agreed and Fr. Carroll was chosen by 24 of the 25 priests. For the next few years, Carroll acted as the chief spokesman for American Catholics, defending their rights while touting their belief in the principles of liberty.

## PRONE TO DANCING

In 1788 Rome decided to create the first diocese in the United States. On September 17, 1789, Pius VI confirmed the choice of the American clergy with a papal bull, naming Carroll as the first Bishop of Baltimore. His consecration took place on August 15, 1790 in Lulworth Chapel at the hands of Bishop Charles Walmesley, Dorset, England.

In November of 1791, Bishop Carroll held his first and only Synod. Though it dealt primarily with the uniform administration of the sacraments, Carroll's key concern was education. Earlier that year the Sulpician Fathers, at his invitation, had opened in Baltimore St. Mary's, the country's first seminary. In December some former Jesuits began teaching at Georgetown College, which the new Bishop Carroll had established in the District of Columbia earlier that year.

Under Carroll's dedicated leadership rules were drawn up governing the administration of the sacraments for a country where the faithful were scattered into tiny enclaves, often far from their clergy.

In 1802 Carroll recommended that his Baltimore diocese be split into four parts with additional centers in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. He also recommended several priests to head these new dioceses. Carroll's decision, not to name anyone for New York, forced Rome to choose someone handpicked by the Irish hierarchy and unfamiliar with the Church in America. This created a test of faith for Carroll. He vowed never to allow the meddling and interference of other foreign prelates. Their interference tended to undermine everything he had done to maintain a Catholic presence in America.

Carroll later petitioned Rome to establish a method of clerical appointment that would avoid the appearance of receiving such an appointment from a foreign power. To the Pope's pleasure, he reported to the Pope that the Church was alive and well in Maryland, notwithstanding a dearth of priests. Many Catholics, *despite being prone to dancing and novel reading* were still strong in the faith.

Carroll's leadership made possible the later expansion and status of the Church in the United States. As first bishop and later first Archbishop of Baltimore, he deserves full credit for the vitality of the faith in the early years of the Republic. In 1808 he became Archbishop with suffragan sees in New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Bardstown, Kentucky. Two years later Archbishop Carroll and three of his suffragans drafted an agreement that established the rules for uniformity of Catholic discipline throughout the country. Together with the regulations of the Synod of 1791, this agreement constituted the first codification of Canon Law for the American Church.

## THE MARYLAND TRADITION

Carroll's American intellectual and cultural roots melded perfectly with his rising ecclesiastical star. By 1784 Carroll realized that America had undergone an historic revolution, not only in political ideas but also in religious theory and practice. He was the architect of the *Maryland Tradition in American Catholicism*, which enthusiastically accepted such American

principles as freedom of conscience and separation of church and state. The true separation of Church and state, that is federal neutrality toward religion, has always been an integral part of its American inculturation.

According to political and religious historian William J. Federer, the American clergy, including Carroll, were not worried about the many other sects in America. Having just relieved themselves of the oppressive edicts of a state religion, Catholics viewed the American idea as a unique form of personal freedom, a virtual *free market of religious ideas* that served to check and balance one another. Since their faith had been freely chosen, it gave greater glory and honor to God. Federer contrasted this idea with those other world religions where religion had been forced upon the people by their kings and caliphs. He reminds his readers that Jesus never forced anyone to believe in Him.

As both a Catholic prelate and an American, Carroll sought a modicum of autonomy for the American church in his relationship with the Holy See. Carroll and the other American clergy were forced to tiptoe around their overt allegiance to the papacy with an embroidered skill that put new vitality in the term *Jesuitical reasoning*.

His openness to religious dialogue with other faiths contributed more to the acceptance of the Catholic faith than anyone else in history. Part of the hope of American Catholics to be true Americans was reflected in their desire to end any appearance of dependency on any foreign jurisdiction even that of the Pope.

His American Catholic spirit was also reflected in the United States Constitution, which gained final passage in 1789. Fr. Carroll had impressed Congress with the need of a constitutional provision for the protection and maintenance of religious liberty for Catholics. Many historians consider him responsible for the provision in Article Six, Section 3 of the Constitution, which declares that *no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States*. Others have noted his role in the first amendment passed the same year which said, *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof*.

## PURITY OF VIEWS

John Carroll accomplished a great deal in establishing a Catholic presence for the Church in America. His personal diplomatic skills cemented a strong relationship with presidents Washington and Jefferson. He set a precedent for cordial relations between the government and the hierarchy. As the first bona fide leader of the Catholic Church in America, Carroll was an innovating force for religious liberty, analogous to Washington in the political realm as the first president. Carroll initiated the custom of public prayers for the president and the government. He persuaded Washington to ask Congress for appropriations to support the work of two priests among the native Indians of the Northwest Territory. Thanks to Carroll's influence, Washington emphasized on a number of occasions the undying and in the case of the Revolutionary war, the *dying*

*patriotism* of American Catholics.

Not everyone agreed with Washington. Many Americans believed that Catholics were representatives of a foreign government and questioned their loyalty accordingly. Carroll's apologetics skills were always up to the test. He answered every complaint in a serious tone: *Their blood flowed as freely...to cement the fabric of independence as that of any of their fellow citizens.*

Carroll's surprising relationship with Thomas Jefferson did a great deal to advance Catholic interests in the emerging nation. When the Louisiana Territory was purchased in 1803, Bishop Carroll secured Jefferson's protection for the Ursuline nuns and their properties. In return, he appointed two Louisiana priests with unquestionable loyalty to American principles, eliciting Jefferson's comment that he had perfect confidence in Carroll's *patriotism and purity of views.*

### A FEDERALIST TEMPERAMENT

Liberal Catholics today, who claim John Carroll as a leading force in the *American Church*, or rather, the alienation of the Church from Rome, gravely misunderstand his significance. Shortly after the Revolution, Carroll was smitten with a fondness for republican ideas. The events that emanated in Paris and its surrounding towns in the bloody aftermath made him renounce any thoughts he had of a marriage between Republicanism and Catholicism. The *reign of terror*, and the sacrileges fostered on the Church in France made him a steadfast opponent of the enlightened slaughter and desecration of his Church.

All through his ecclesiastical career he had walked a tightrope between his allegiance to his Church and his loyalty toward his country, that is a balance between being a loyal American and a faithful Catholic. As a young priest he leaned toward the independent spirit of the new nation but as a bishop he found himself relying on Rome as the center of the Church's existence. His early enthusiasm for the vernacular Mass faded as the Church established itself under his control. As leader of the Church, he did not want the independent spirit of American Catholics to conflict with his authority and that of the Holy Father. As the rigors of ecclesiastical leadership bore heavily on him, he became more of a *Federalist* in his temperament and Holy Office.

Like John Paul II, John Carroll encouraged a personalist religious faith rooted in the *Imitation of Christ*. Like the Pope, Carroll was a man of deep faith. Prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, and works of charity were at the core of his religious belief. One of his first pastoral letters emphasized the importance of the family and the educational role of mothers and fathers. He saw the Christian education of children as a *special duty* incumbent upon parents. Carroll believed that all sincere Christians, not just Catholics, seek to gain eternal life. His irenic rather than militant approach to the heated conflicts of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was light years ahead of his times.

Carroll's devotion to religious freedom and his delineation of the relations with the Church with Rome in spiritual matters defined and lent credibility to the compatibility of Catholicism and republican government. He measured every crisis by the

common good of both the Church and the country. He lived to see independence declared, won, and preserved in the War of 1812. As Cardinal Gibbons said, *from this mutual accord of the Church and State there could but follow beneficent effects for both.*

Enfeebled by age and illness, Carroll received the last rites. On his deathbed, he said that he had *always fixed on the Cross of Christ* and that he had always *received great consolation from the practice of the devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.* He died at age 80 on December 3, 1815 and was buried in the chapel of St. Mary's College Seminary but later his remains were removed to the Cathedral, later Basilica of the Assumption in Baltimore, MD.

**William A. Borst is a weekly talk show host on WGNU radio. He is the author of *Liberalism: Fatal Consequences* and his new book, *The Scorpion and the Frog: A Natural Conspiracy*, which are available from him at PO Box 16271, St. Louis, MO 63105, for \$17.50 ppd. (*Consequences*) and (*Scorpion*) for \$19.95 soft and \$35 hard ppd.**

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*Motherhood Awardee, Mary Patricia Pelletier and Family.*

## News and Notes

**DALLAS, TX**—The 21<sup>st</sup> annual CMF Conference in Dallas featured star-studded speakers on the critical issues of Faith, Family Life, Freedom.

Chairman Carmen S. Glenn and Hon. Chairman Susan Stanzel provided a faith affirming and educational fulfilling program: **Cathy C. Ruse**, spokesperson for the U.S. bishops mission to deepen respect for human life; **Patrick Reilly**, on resolving the tragedy of pro-aborts, immoral “entertainment” and heretical speakers on Catholic campuses; **Dr. John Lenczowski**, on highlights of the Cold War flowing in today's Culture War; **Fr. Dr. Tad Pacholczyk's**, topic of embryos, stem cells, cloning, etc. was a masterful presentation well received at the final session of the Conference.

Order cassettes or CDs of the four talks at \$8 each or a set at \$32 from ACTS, 11139 S. Towne Square, St. Louis, MO 63123. Or call 1-800-642-2287.

The Motherhood Award was given to Mary Patricia Pelletier and the Freedom Award was given to Hon. Will Ford Hartnett, both by their full lives are following the principles for which we admire Cardinal Mindszenty.

May God bless each participant and each person who attended!

### ST. JOHN 13:34

*“A new Commandment I give you that you love one another: that as I have loved you, you also love one another.”*



*Freedom Awardee Will Ford Hartnett, wife Tammy, Pres. Eleanor Schlafly, Hon. Chrm. Susan Stanzel and husband Tom Stanzel.*



*Speaker Cathy Cleaver Ruse and husband Austin Ruse.*



*Hon. Chrm. Susan Stanzel  
 Rev. Dr. Tadeusz Pacholczyk.*



*Speaker John Lenczowski  
 Fr. Julius Leloczky, O. Cist.*



*Chrm. Carmen Glenn and  
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