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CHARLES CARROLL OF CARROLLTON: CATHOLIC REVOLUTIONARY

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In this final installment in his four-part series on the Founding Fathers, author Donald J. D'Elia appropriately focuses on the only Roman Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence, Charles Carroll. In so doing D'Elia attempts the difficult task of delineating historically the sense in which one could be fully Catholic and fully Revolutionary in 1776. This article, like the series as a whole, is exciting and provocative-filled with insight into the relationship between faith and politics, and alive to the American need to find once again a common basis for the simultaneous love of country and of God. In Charles Carroll, maintains the author, an authentic Catholic and American spirit can be found.

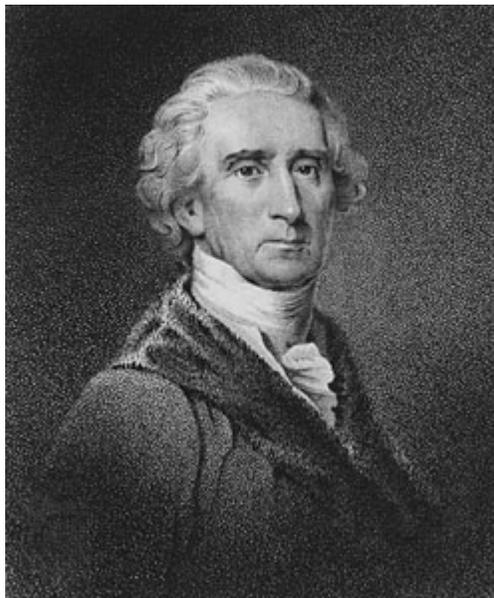
“I have lived to my ninety-sixth year; I have enjoyed continued health, I have been blessed with great wealth, prosperity, and most of the good things which the world can bestow—public approbation, esteem, applause; but what I now look back on with the greatest satisfaction to myself is, that I have practiced the duties of my religion.”⁽¹⁾

O WROTE CHARLES CARROLL OF CARROLLTON, THE LAST SURVIVING SIGNER OF THE Declaration of Independence, of his Roman Catholic faith just before his death in November 1832. These last words, recorded by Carroll's friend and confessor, Father Constantine Pise of Georgetown, were not the pious hyperbole of an old man. For the last Founding Father, who, next to his Bible, cherished Thomas a Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* as the greatest of books, was a courageous witness to the Roman Catholic Church throughout his life and strove, like Thomas, to find union with God in humility and self-denial, and especially in frequent reception of the Blessed Sacrament. It is cause for great joy to think that a Signer of the Declaration of Independence was intensely devoted to the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

GROWING UP PERSECUTED

Carroll's witness to the Faith began from the moment of his birth in Annapolis, Maryland, on September 19, 1737. He was born into a province to which his grandfather, Charles Carroll, had come in 1688 after Charles Calvert, the Third Lord Baltimore, had appointed him Attorney General of Maryland. The founder of the Carroll line in America had himself been born into a wealthy family in Ireland and had received an excellent education including legal training in law at the famed Inner Temple in London. On arriving in Maryland, however, the new attorney general found many of Maryland's Protestants in rebellion against the legitimate proprietary government and all of its officials. This was the New World version of the so-called "Glorious Revolution" in England which toppled Catholic

King James II from his rightful place as sovereign, and usurped power over his subjects in the name of a Protestant legislature. In Catholic Maryland a renegade priest, the mysterious John Coode from St. Mary's County, led an army of some seven hundred men, known as the "Protestant Association", against the legitimate government of Lord Baltimore, forcing an end to Catholic proprietorship and a regime distinguished for its religious freedom for Catholic and Protestant alike. Calvert's enlightened Charter of 1632 was revoked in 1692, and the Maryland Toleration Act of 1649,



Charles Carroll

guaranteeing religious freedom to all persons believing in Jesus Christ, soon became a dead letter as Maryland Catholics were denied religious and civil rights and priests were banished from the colony. What the fair-minded American historian George Bancroft acknowledged as the first government in history "to make religious freedom the basis of the State" now fell before the onslaught of bigoted men on both sides of the Atlantic. And without trial by jury and without any charge being brought against him, Catholic Lord Baltimore was, for all intents and purposes, stripped of his proprietary rule.

In 1692, the so-called royal government of Maryland passed an "Act of Religion" which imposed upon Maryland Catholics the same penal laws that were in force in England. The Church of England was established as the religion of all Marylanders, the majority of whom were not Anglican, and, in 1702, a tax for the support of the Establishment clergy was enacted into law. Quakers and Puritans subsequently were exempted from the penal laws, leaving the full burden on Maryland's Catholics who would be persecuted systematically right down to the American Revolution. Catholic lawyers were barred from the colony's courts. Priests were forbidden to celebrate Mass, or to teach the Faith. Parents were threatened with criminal action simply for teaching their children the doctrines of the Church in the privacy of their homes. Indeed, children were encouraged to disobey their Catholic parents and abandon the Catholic Faith; a law of 1715 required that Catholic children should be taken from their parents whenever possible and educated in the Protestant religion. Justices of the county courts were empowered to settle these children wherever they

thought fit. And an inducement was held out to Catholic children who apostatized: they could inherit by law all family property rights.

Maryland Catholics were declared unqualified to vote in 1718, and barred from holding any office in the colony. But it was the French and Indian War that emboldened the illegitimate, anti-Catholic ruling party to reveal its deep, satanic plan for the total destruction of the Catholic Church in the land of St. Mary. And although the lands of the Jesuits were indeed to be confiscated in Maryland and elsewhere, and

their very order suppressed, although Maryland Catholics were to be double-taxed and subjected to other penalties and indignities, a true son of St. Ignatius-and member of the Blessed Virgin Mary Sodality-Charles Carroll of Carrollton was to thwart the diabolical plan and help restore Maryland to Christ.

Charles Carroll's grandfather and father, after whom he was named, survived the harsh penal laws of Maryland in this period because of their deep and uncompromising faith in the true Church of Christ. The prominent Catholic families, of whom the Carrolls were one, seemed to have attained a remarkable degree of unity in their passive and sometimes active resistance to the anti-papist governments after 1688. As a boy, Charles was taught by his father the real character of the Revolution of 1688 as a Protestant rebellion against the Catholic governments of England and Maryland. In this historical perspective, the much-vaunted "Glorious Revolution" was revealed as little more than another rebellion against Catholic authority and civilization. Other Catholic boys and girls were secretly taught the facts of history by their parents, and some of the boys were fortunate enough to attend clandestine grammar schools like that at Bohemia Manor run by the Jesuit fathers. Even more fortunate were the sons of the few wealthy Catholic families who could afford to send their children to France for an outstanding classical education. But for most of Maryland's Catholic people there was no hope of escape from a cruelly oppressive Establishment.

Humanly speaking, the key to Catholic survival in Maryland in these pre-Revolutionary years was the exist-

tence of a superiorly educated and wealthy Catholic elite who could plan and lead the resistance against the state. This was achieved in what the Jesuit historian Father Thomas O'Brien Hanley has called a "Catholic counter-revolutionary society," which included the Carrolls and several other influential families. They intermarried, lent money to one another, educated their children in common, opened and maintained lines of communications with their brethren in England, and even occasionally deemed it necessary openly to violate the pseudo-laws of Maryland and go to prison in order to bear witness to their Catholic Faith. Charles' grandfather and father, despite their high station in Maryland society, were often imprisoned for breaking the penal laws against Catholics. Sometimes the weak and opportunistic fell away, like the apostate Daniel Dulany the Elder, who came as an indentured servant to Maryland, and whose more famous son by the same name was to act as the foil to Charles Carroll's greatness in the American Revolution-or Catholic Counter-Revolution. For, as we shall see, Charles Carroll's signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 meant to him and to practically every other Catholic in Maryland and elsewhere a counter-revolutionary victory over English totalitarianism, early modern style, as brazenly announced to the world in the Revolution of 1688 and seen in Parliament's policy of systematic rejection and erosion of the divinely-given rights of Englishmen and all men created in the image of God.



A CATHOLIC EDUCATION

The Catholic counter-revolutionary society of Maryland, in which young Carroll was formed, emphasized the teaching of history, especially Irish and English, the classics, and law within the Western, Catholic tradition. The ideal of manhood was that of the Catholic knight of the Middle Ages. Charles Carroll was taught chivalry and that respect for woman which was already being eroded by the crudities of the post-medieval world. A true education, his father insisted, must be one of virtue. This counter-revolutionary education, forbidden by the anti-Catholic government of Maryland, was continued for young Charles Carroll, his cousins John and Daniel Carroll, and other boys at the Jesuit-run school at Bohemia Manor. Indeed, the Jesuits' influence on the

formation of these boys-later to be prime movers in the American Revolution-cannot be exaggerated. At Bohemia Manor and, after 1748, at the Jesuit College of St-Omer in French Flanders, Charles Carroll and his cousins and friends were taught the Jesuit philosophy of limited civil government, especially as developed from the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, Francisco Suarez, and Juan de Mariana. This exact understanding of government rested upon the classical and medieval conception of natural law as the ultimate humanly accessible criterion of right social and political order.

At St-Omer, where Maryland's and other Catholics were brought together, forming cells of opposition to English totalitarianism, young Carroll spent six years reading the great books of Christendom. In St. Thomas's *Summa Theologica* he read these words, fully relevant today as they were to the governments of Maryland and England then:

St. Augustine says: "There is no law unless it be just." So the validity of law depends upon its justice. But in human affairs a thing is said to be just when it accords aright with the rule of reason: and, as we have already seen, the first rule of reason is the Natural law. Thus all humanly enacted laws are in accord with reason to the extent that they derive from the Natural law. And if a human law is at variance in any particular with the Natural law, it is no longer legal, but rather a corruption of law. (2)

Conscience rejected, and must reject, such pseudo-laws. St. Thomas concluded: "Man is bound to obey secular rulers to the extent that the order of justice requires. For this reason if such rulers have no just title to power, but have usurped it, or if they command things to be done which are unjust, their subjects are not obliged to obey them, except perhaps in certain special cases, when it is a matter of avoiding scandal or some particular danger." (3) Clearly then, as young Carroll had been taught by his father from the start, it was his duty to oppose, subvert, and finally destroy the illegal pseudo-governments of England and Maryland which, since 1688, had violated and perverted the true constitutions of Englishmen and Marylanders, indeed have violated and perverted the natural, God-given constitution of all men. And at an even deeper level of reality, the mature Charles Carroll was to come to see that, far beyond the natural law and reason of Thomistic philosophy, was the absolute, living norm of Christ Himself: "Because the Lord had said - /

am the Truth, not I am Custom or Constitution.”

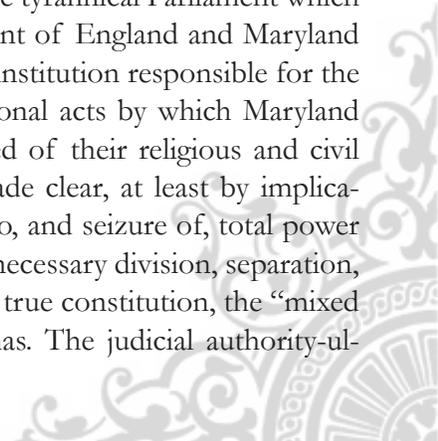
At the time of the American Revolution and ever afterwards, the object of Charles Carroll's life was, in his own words, “to be justified before God & man.” And this meant unswerving fidelity to the Church, the mystical body of Christ. It is essential to understand this point, that Carroll as a Signer of the Declaration of Independence was fully and completely within this medieval, Thomistic tradition of the Roman Catholic Church, a tradition whose metaphysics presumed, as St. Thomas himself said, “the world to be governed by divine Providence.” If this is forgotten, then Charles Carroll of Carrollton becomes just another natural-rights thinker like Jefferson and Franklin, prodigal and alienated sons of the Church, lost in the shadows of the modern world. What Charles Carroll learned among the Jesuits at St-

Omer and later at Reims and the College Louis le Grand in Paris during his nine years in France, was the true place of natural law in Catholic philosophy and the function of human or positive law as being that of working out the conclusions of natural law and, in St. Thomas' words, of restraining “evil men from wrongdoing by force and by fear.” He learned that, according to Thomist legal philosophy, natural law, or what is basically the same thing, human reason, is not self-sufficient but must be perfected by grace. And this lesson, taken to heart, prevented Carroll from falling victim to the Enlightenment rationalism of Jefferson, John Adams, Franklin, and other American philosophes, while protecting him from the mock-Augustinianism of the New England Calvinists and other schismatics. He could subscribe to the natural-rights theory of the Declaration of Independence only in terms of the Church's teaching, after St. Thomas, that “the rights of the human person” have no abstract existence, but that the so-called “rights of man” have value only in the light of objective natural law and, ultimately, God's redemptive plan for man. The individual person, Jefferson notwithstanding, was not and could not be the source of laws and standards. Such egoistic individualism violated natural law and order in its rejection of the “common good” and was unthinkable to the Jesuit-trained Carroll. One had to be demented like Thomas Hobbes or Rousseau, Charles Carroll believed, to accept this Protogorean relativism twenty centuries after Socrates had refuted it.

The Marylander's teachers in the College of St-Omer instructed him in the fatal weaknesses of Carte-

sianism. The Jesuits pointed out Descartes's angelism, the excessive rationalism of his dualistic philosophy which made man over into a kind of angel, who arrived at “self-evident truths” directly by intuition. Charles Carroll as a result was too well educated in Thomistic philosophy to adopt the naive realism-or, ultimately, the subjectivism-of Jefferson and other American *philosophes*. Interestingly enough, he read Voltaire's satires and admired in some degree his tolerance, but wrote that he abhorred Voltaire and others of his sort “who laugh at all devotion, look upon our religion as a fiction, & see its holy misteries [sic] as the greatest absurdities.”(5) The same penetrating intellect, rigorously exercised in the best traditions of medieval scholasticism at St-Omer, made short work of other Enlightenment claims to naturalistic and rationalistic philosophy. And when the time came, in the 1760's and 70's, Charles Carroll was ready to bring to bear all of his critical powers, knowledge, and deep Catholic Faith on the issue of British tyranny.

CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES

Among the profoundly influential books he studied in France was Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*. Published in 1748, the year young Carroll arrived in Europe, Montesquieu's book was to provide Carroll over the next ten years with ideas that confirmed, refined, and advanced his thinking as a Catholic counter-revolutionary. Montesquieu, like the Englishmen Richard Hooker and John Locke, helped revive the natural law tradition which had been slipping out of Western consciousness ever since the breakup of the Middle Ages, a Catholic tradition in which young Carroll was being educated by the French Jesuits. The author of the *Spirit of the Laws*, moreover, convinced the Maryland counter-revolutionary that the virtuous Roman Republic was not a thing of the past, lost forever, but an ideal form of government which could be attained again by his fellow-Catholics and other men of good will who loved their country and wished to restore the chartered civil and religious liberties taken away by the Revolution of 1688. The tyrannical Parliament which had usurped the government of England and Maryland in 1688 was the very same institution responsible for the unnatural and unconstitutional acts by which Maryland Catholics had been stripped of their religious and civil rights. As Montesquieu made clear, at least by implication to Carroll, this claim to, and seizure of, total power by Parliament violated the necessary division, separation, and balance of powers in a true constitution, the “mixed constitution” of St. Thomas. The judicial authority-


timately based upon natural law, as St. Thomas taught had been virtually destroyed in the English Constitution, explaining why Maryland Catholics and others were being increasingly deprived of their natural rights. Like the executive branch of government, the English judiciary could no longer check Parliament in its shameless bid for total control over the life of Englishmen.

Montesquieu's thesis of the separation and balance of powers was made even more convincing to the Maryland counter-revolutionary by the author's appeal to history for examples. Carroll knew the history of the oppression of his Catholic people intimately enough to see that this thesis described the pathology of English tyranny in Maryland. It led him to the conclusion, by the mid-1760's, that the only way to recover Catholic religious and civil rights-natural rights-was by restoring the Maryland Constitution, and that could only be done by gaining independence from Britain. He was later to write in his classic *First Citizen* letters that "not a single instance can be selected from our history of a law favorable to liberty obtained from government, but by the unanimous, steady, and spirited conduct of the people. The Great Charter, the several confirmations of it, the Petition of Right, the Bill of Rights, were all the happy effects of *force* and *necessity*." (6)

Ultimately, Carroll believed, it was the people-never the mob-who must depose a tyrant, whether legislative, executive, or judicial. He knew that the Jesuit philosophers, Mariana (1599) and Suarez (1613), had even justified tyrannicide in extreme cases. But before resorting to revolution and tyrannicide, Carroll held, appeal should be made to the judiciary as the institutionalized defender of natural law and natural rights. This "checks and balances system", operative among the three branches of government, was what Montesquieu taught in the *Spirit of the Laws* and what the Founding Fathers later adopted in the United States Constitution.

Even before he returned to America in 1765, Carroll believed that "the period of the English Constitution is hastening to a final period of dissolution." And, back home in Maryland, he wrote to a friend in England urging him to sell his property there "and purchase land in this province for liberty will maintain her empire..." (7) The Stamp Act, passed that very year, Carroll saw as tantamount to "political death" for Marylanders and all colonists; in his realistic appraisal, which was entirely too sophisticated for most Americans to appreciate Parliament

herself in this brazen, unconstitutional act was revealing to the world her contempt for natural law, English law, and the rights of man. Just as the corrupt and illegitimate parliament of 1688 had violated the civil and religious rights of English Catholics, so now the parliament of 1765, driven by an even greater passion for absolute power, was trying to reduce all men to slavery. True, it was easier for Carroll to see this, since the Revolution of 1688 and its Parliament had always been a symbol of tyranny for him and other members of the Catholic counter-revolutionary society. He did not, like Jefferson and Dr. Benjamin Rush, for example, have to re-evaluate and re-define the "Glorious Revolution", which they, as Protestant boys, had always been taught to revere, if not worship. Long before other colonial spokesmen, acting on good Catholic principles which they were too invincibly ignorant to recognize, saw the conspiratorial design of the Sugar, Stamp, Quartering, Declaratory, and Townshend acts, Carroll was denying Parliament's constitutional right not only to tax internally and externally but to regulate commerce and trade. This he could do because of the ancient charter of Maryland which reserved these privileges for the proprietor and freemen of that colony alone. Besides, as he wrote just before coming home, the Jesuits were "men of republican principles" (that is, men who taught that government was limited by divine and natural law) and he had been inspired by them with "a love of liberty." (8)

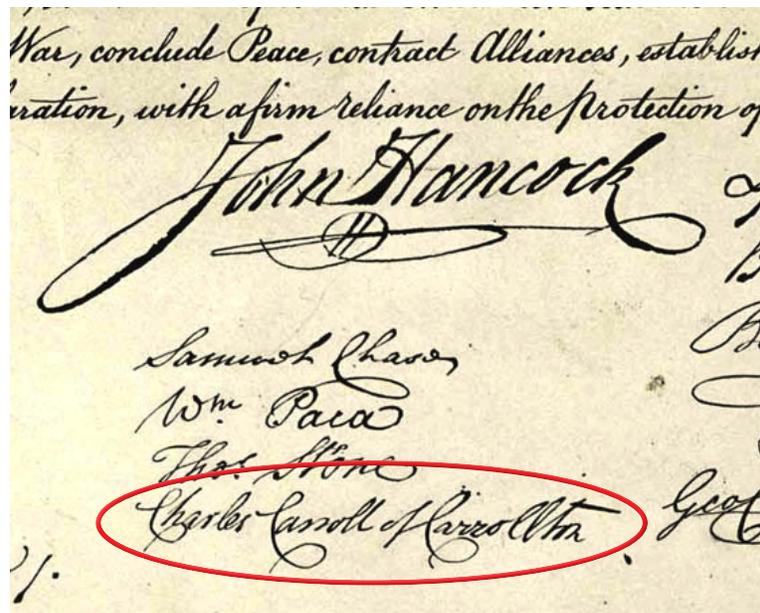
The Maryland Catholic counter-revolutionary society, of which Carroll was now a leader, enjoyed the support, to some extent, of anti-establishment and anti-clerical whigs like William Paca and Samuel Chase and other Protestants who resented the opportunistic and doubtfully constitutional policies of the Maryland government. These dissenters were much less fearful of the Catholic minority than they were of the self-aggrandizing rulers of Maryland who, in league with the Church of England, were making a mockery of the lower house as representative of the people. Chase and Paca were Catholics in spite of themselves in appealing to natural law against the tyrannical government. They agreed with Carroll's argument from Catholic social doctrine that, "No stretch of the Prerogative of the general good will ever endanger our constitutions." (9) And they sympathized with the plight of Maryland Catholics who, since 1755, had suffered cruelly under the double-tax.

In 1765, at the very time the Stamp Act's repeal was being prepared in England, the governor and up-

per house in Maryland proclaimed new taxes in open disregard of the assembly's right to make tax policy. The principle of "no taxation without representation", urged against the Stamp Act by James Otis, Patrick Henry, Daniel Dulany of Maryland, and other patriots, was now being violated by a governor and his minister as they imposed new taxes by proclamation. What Britain's Parliament could not do, as the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766 seemed to make clear, Maryland's government went ahead and did; and when the lower house protested the governor's usurpation of power over the purse, Governor Robert Eden prorogued the assembly. This tyrannical act by the governor outraged Carroll and the other members of the Catholic counterrevolutionary society, who were already smarting under anti-Catholic taxes. It also infuriated whigs like Chase and Paca and the growing number of their followers among the non-Catholic inhabitants of the province. Daniel Dulany, the scion of a once-Catholic family which had weakened under years of persecution, had won fame throughout the colonies and England for his eloquent opposition to the Stamp Act, but now the Cambridge-educated lawyer shamelessly abandoned his own principles and became the government's chief apologist for the new policy of taxation by executive proclamation. What was at stake in Maryland was nothing less than the constitutional right of the people to tax themselves, a question that Carroll quickly saw as transcending time and place and, indeed, offering a grand opportunity for a defense of natural law as he had learned it in his Thomistic and other studies. Against "placemen" like Daniel Dulany, Charles Carroll of Carrollton now assumed the burden of Truth. This "Catholic burden" was to be carried by Charles Carroll right down to his death in 1832 when, as the last surviving Signer of the Declaration of Independence and the only living Founder of the American nation, he solemnly rededicated and reconsecrated the American Revolution to Christ in the Holy Eucharist.

FROM THOUGHT TO ACTION

The opportunity for Carroll to take a public stand on the new Maryland tax policy and indirectly to attack the double-tax policy against Catholics, came in early 1773. It was then, and only then, that Carroll, as a leader of the Catholic counter-revolutionary society, dared to test public opinion in Maryland on whether he as a member of the Catholic minority was entitled to freedom of speech. Public opinion in Maryland, Carroll knew from the signs of the times, was mounting against the proprietary government in the fee proclamation controversy. In January of 1773, the government's spokesman, Daniel Dulany, showed that he too was aware of this disaffection among all classes in the province. Dulany sought publicly to defend the new tax policy in the pages of the *Maryland Gazette* by means of a dialogue between two citizens, himself taking the part of the "second citizen" and arguing the constitutionality of the proclamation fees against the weak literary protests of the "first citizen". In truth, Dulany was employing the device of the



Carroll's signature on the Declaration of Independence

"Second Citizen" to defend not only the governor and the upper house but himself as the minister responsible for the new tax policy. Now Carroll saw his chance. He would use the device of the "First Citizen"—Dulany's straw man—to demonstrate that the Maryland governor and upper house were violating the English and provincial constitutions by denying the assembly's time-honored right to tax its people. The February 4th issue of the *Maryland Gazette*, accordingly, printed Carroll's argument against the new tax policy under the rubric of the "First Citizen", turning the tables on Dulany who now had to fight for his political life.

The Maryland Catholic counter-revolutionary society had entered the contest on the side of the Independent Whigs, as they were called; and it was this alliance that was to lead to the downfall of Dulany and of the tyrannical, anti-Catholic faction which had ruled since the Revolution of 1688. Dulany knew from the start who the "First Citizen" was—no one but Charles Carroll of Carrollton would dare to stand up to the famous and

powerful author of the *Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes* (1765), a book which had established Dulany as an authority on constitutional taxation. But Dulany also knew that his only hope in the controversy was to discredit Carroll religiously and personally, since there was no way of refuting the Catholic's arguments that taxing power belonged in the lower house where the people were physically represented. He knew too that Carroll had behind him not only the force of his own powerful logic but the recognized authorities of constitutionalism: Bracton, Coke, Hooker, Grotius, Locke, and Montesquieu, who upheld the natural right to property and, emphatically so in the case of Montesquieu, insisted upon the separation and balance of the executive, legislative, and judicial departments of government. Taxation by proclamation, Carroll argued, clearly upset this balance and was a return to the unconstitutional practices of the Stuart kings.

Dulany tried every way he could to free himself from the net of Carroll's argument. The "First Citizen" was a Jacobin, a conspirator for the Pretender. As a "son of Saint Omer" Carroll was a Jesuit out to destroy the Church of England in Maryland, just as his father had tried to do years ago. Carroll, Dulany charged, was acting the role of "chaplain" to Paca, Chase, and the Independent Whigs. Finally, about to succumb, as he must, Dulany challenged Carroll's right as a Catholic to speak on public questions. This was exactly what Carroll had hoped Dulany would do, for, instead of impugning Carroll's motives, it had the opposite effect of discrediting the very anti-Catholic penal laws which indeed, as Dulany charged, should have prevented Carroll from exposing the government's conspiracy to take away the constitutional rights of Marylanders. The Independent Whigs and the majority of Maryland's people now, in 1773, came to see the true face of anti-Catholicism as it was unmasked by Carroll with the unwitting assistance of Daniel Dulany. "I have not," wrote Carroll, the First Citizen, "the least dislike to the Church of England, though I am not within her pale, nor indeed to any other church; knaves and bigots of all sects and denominations I hate, and I despise." (10) Penalties against Catholics were to be swept away three years later, thanks, in large part, to Carroll's brilliant intervention in the First Citizen controversy.

Indeed, after 1773, Charles Carroll was known in Maryland and the surrounding area as the "First Citizen"; and his support by both the Catholic counter-revolutionary society and the patriot party, the Independent Whigs,

made him a leader in the struggle against unconstitutional government at home and abroad. He soon was rewarded with membership on the Annapolis Committee of Correspondence, the Maryland Convention, and the provincial Committee of Safety. In February of 1776 he was asked by the Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia, to join fellow-Marylander Samuel Chase, Benjamin Franklin, and his cousin, Father John Carroll, in a commission to Canada, whose purpose was "to promote or form a union" between the Thirteen Colonies and the estimated 150,000 Catholics who, as against less than 400 Protestants, constituted the population of the former French possession. Carroll accepted the charge and went to Canada; but largely because of the anti-Catholic policies of the Continental Congress, in its outrage over the Quebec Act, the commission failed and the American army retreated. Returning to serve in the Maryland Convention of 1776, Carroll helped significantly to commit Maryland to independence; and in July of that same year he was elected to the Continental Congress where he voted for independence on July 19 (the engrossed copy) and signed the Declaration of Independence on August 2.

One story has it that Carroll added the phrase "of Carrollton" after his name when someone observed that there were so many other Carrolls in Maryland that King George would not know whom to hang. More reliable is the anecdote about John Hancock's asking Carroll if he cared to sign it. "Most willingly," was the prompt reply, and as he made his signature, a member standing near observed, "There go a few millions," and all admitted that few risked as much in a material sense, as the wealthy Marylander." (12) Indeed, Charles Carroll was at the time the wealthiest person in the colonies, the equivalent of a modern millionaire, for his grandfather and father had left him a great fortune which he was now committing wholly to the cause of the Catholic counter-revolutionary movement in America.

ULTIMATE VALUES, ULTIMATE GOALS

Fifty years later, to the very day on which he had signed the Declaration, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the last surviving Signer (Adams and Jefferson had died the month before) wrote these stirring words rededicating the American Revolution to Christ:

Grateful to Almighty God for the blessing which, through Jesus Christ our Lord, he has conferred upon my beloved country, in her emancipation, and upon myself, in permitting me, under cir-

cumstances of mercy, to live to the age of 89 years and to survive the fiftieth year of American Independence, and certifying by my present signature my approbation of the Declaration of Independence adopted by Congress on the fourth day of July, in the year of our Lord, one thousand seven hundred and seventy-six, which I originally subscribed on the second day of August of the same year, and of which I am now the last surviving signer, I do hereby recommend to the present and future generations the principles of that important document as the best earthly inheritance their ancestors could bequeath to them, and pray that the civil and religious liberties they have secured to my country may be perpetuated to the remotest posterity and extended to the whole family of man.(12)

Carroll had ever been a Revolutionary in order to free the Faith. He personified that truly Catholic Republicanism which is so elusive in our own day. Recognizing that a return to Christendom under the Pope was unrealistic in his day, he opted for the next best thing. Thus, in 1827, Carroll wrote to Rev. John Stanford of New York that “To obtain religious, as well as civil liberty, I entered zealously into the Revolution, and observing the Christian religion divided into many sects, I founded the hope that no one would be so predominant as to become the religion of the State. That hope was thus early entertained, because all of them joined in the same cause, with few exceptions of individuals. God grant that this religious liberty may be preserved in these States, to the end of time, and that all believing in the religion of Christ may practice the leading principle of charity, the basis of every virtue.”(13) God, not man, had been from the first at the center of Carroll’s program. “Who are deserving of immortality?” he reflected in a letter to a woman who had published a flattering poem in his honor as the Last Signer. “They who serve God in truth, and they who have rendered great, essential, and disinterested services and benefits to their country.”(14)

“The principal object” of government, Carroll insisted as always “should be the preservation of morals..”(15) His own personal and family life indicates how totally committed he was to stressing the importance of this view. In several letters to his only son, who was in declining health and was to predecease him, the aged hero of American Independence testified once again to his deep Catholic Faith.

In writing to you I deem it my duty to call your attention to the shortness of this life, and the certainty of death, and the dreadful judgment we must all undergo, and on the decision of which a happy or a miserable eternity depends. The impious has said in his heart, “There is no God.” He would willingly believe there is no God; the passions, the corruptions of his heart would fain persuade him there is none. The stings of conscience betray the emptiness of the delusion; the heavens proclaim the existence of God, and unperverted reason teaches that He must love virtue and hate vice, and reward the one and punish the other.

The wisest and the best of the ancients believed in the immortality of the soul, and the Gospel has established the great truth of a future state of rewards and punishments. My desire to induce you to reflect on futurity, and by a virtuous life to merit heaven, have suggested the above reflections and warnings. The approaching festival of Easter, and the merits and mercies of our Redeemer ...have lead me into this chain of meditation and reasoning, and have inspired me with the hope of finding mercy before my Judge, and of being happy in the life come, a happiness I wish you to participate with me by infusing into your heart a similar hope. Should this letter produce such a change, it will comfort me, and impart to you that peace of mind which the world cannot give, and which I am sure you have long ceased to enjoy.(16)

And:

God bless and prepare you for a better world, for the present is but a passing meteor compared to eternity.. At the hour of your death, Ah! my son, you will feel the emptiness of all sublunary things; and that hour may be much nearer than you expect. Think well on it. I mean your eternal welfare.(17)

Charles Carroll’s son died in April of 1825, seven years before his father. The event certainly caused him to meditate on his own Judgment which he knew must come soon:

On the 20th of this month I entered into my

eighty-ninth year. This, in any country, would be deemed a long life, yet ...if it has not been directed to the only end for which man was created, it is a mere nothing, an empty phantom, an indivisible point, compared with eternity. Too much of my time and attention have been misapplied on matters to which an impartial judge, penetrating the secrets of hearts, before whom I shall soon appear, will ascribe no merit deserving recompense. On the mercy of my Redeemer I rely for salvation, and on His Merits; not on the works I have done in obedience to His precepts, for even these, I fear, a mixture of alloy will render unavailing and cause to be rejected.(18)

And in another letter:

As I am fast approaching to the last scene, which will put an end to all earthly cares and concerns, I am looking to that state from which all care, all solicitude and all passions which agitate mankind are excluded. Revelation instructs us that eternal happiness or eternal misery will be the destiny of man in the life to come; the most pious, the most exemplary have trembled at the thought of the dreadful alternative. Uhl What will be the fate of those who little think of it, or thinking square not their actions accordingly.(19)

Finally, during the last three years of his life, Carroll witnessed and participated in two great events which symbolize his contribution to America: the completion of St. Mary Roman Catholic Church in Annapolis, the first in the city where as a boy Carroll had been forbidden by law to attend public Mass; and the laying of the corner-stone, performed by Carroll himself, of St. Charles's

College on land donated by Carroll for a Catholic college. His only request, characteristically, was "that mass be said once a month for myself and family" and "That this gift may be useful to religion and aid our church in rearing those who will guide us in the way of truth..."(20)

On November 14, 1832, in his ninety-fifth year, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the Roman Catholic and last surviving Signer of the Declaration of Independence, prepared for death in Christ. "On each side of his chair," one of his attending doctors remembered, "knelt a daughter and grandchildren, with some friends, making a complete semicircle; and just in the rear, three or four old negro servants, all of the same faith, knelt in the most venerating manner. The whole assemblage made up a picture never to be forgotten. The ceremony proceeded. The old gentleman had been for a long time suffering from weak eyes, and could not endure the proximity of the lights immediately before him. His eyes were therefore kept closed, but he was so familiar with the forms of this solemn ceremony that he responded and acted as if he saw everything passing around. At the moment of offering the Host he leaned forward without opening his eyes, yet responsive to the word of the administration of the holy offering. It was done with so much intelligence and grace, that no one could doubt for a moment how fully his soul was alive to the act."(21) The doctor tried to make him take some food. "Thank you, Doctor, not just now; this ceremony is so deeply interesting to the Christian that it supplies all the wants of nature. I feel no desire for food."(22) Thus with the Eucharist on his lips, Charles Carroll performed that action the willingness for which may be taken as the acid test for all leaders who would truly benefit their nations. He left his beloved country and, without altering his principles, went home.



NOTES

1 Quoted by Fr. Constantine Pise in Kate M. Rowland, *The Life and Correspondence of Charles Carroll of Carrollton 1737-1832* (2v., New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1898) II: p. 370) The standard biography of the only Catholic Signer of the Declaration of Independence, from which the following essay is largely derived, is Fr. Thomas O'Brien Hanley, *Charles Carroll of Carrollton: The Making of a Revolutionary Gentleman* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1970).

2 *Summa Theol.*, Ia 2ae, 95, 2. Quoted in A. P. d'Entreves, *Natural Law: An Introduction to Legal Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1951), pp. 42-43. Cf. Christopher Dawson *The Gods of Revolution: An Analysis of the French Revolution*, edited by John J. Mulloy, with an Introduction by Arnold Toynbee (New York: Minerva Press Edition, 1975), esp. ch. ii. pp. 14-31.

3 *Summa Theol.*, 2a 2a3, 104, 6.

4 A commentator on Gratian, quoted in d'Entreves, p. 34.

5 Quoted in Hanley, *Charles Carroll*, p. 65. See Maurice De Wulf's *Philosophy and Civilization in the Middle Ages* (New York: Doven Publications, Inc., 1953).

6 Rowland, *Life and Correspondence*, I: p. 347. Also see Peter S. Onuf, ed., *Maryland and the Empire, 1773: the Antilon-First Citizen Letters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Hanley, *Charles Carroll*, p. 62 et passim.

7 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 212.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 133.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 214.

10 Rowland, *Life and Correspondence*, I: p. 358. On anti-Catholicism in America at this time, see Sister Mary Augustina Ray B.V.M., *American Opinion of Roman Catholicism in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936. Standard also is Charles A. Barker, *Background of the Revolution in Maryland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940).

11 Rowland, *Life and Correspondence*, I: p. 181; John Tracy Ellis, *Catholics In Colonial America* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1965; Charles H. Metzger, S.J., *Catholics and the American Revolution. A Study in Religious Climate.* (Chicago: Loyola Univ. Press, 1962).

12 Rowland, *Life and Correspondence*, II: title page. Carroll wrote this on a copy of the Declaration of Independence preserved in the New York City Public Library.

13 October 9, 1827, *ibid.*, p. 358.

14 September 14, 1826, *ibid.* p.346.

15 June 25, 1827, *ibid.*, p. 354.

16 To Charles Carroll of Homewood, April 12, 1821, *ibid.* pp. 327-328; Ellen Hart Smith, *Charles Carroll of Carrollton* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1945), pp. 299ff.

17 To Charles Carroll of Homewood, 1809, 1815, Rowland, *Life and Correspondence*, II: p. 335.

18 September 1825, *ibid.*, p. 336.

19 To Charles H. Wharton, July 19, 1826, *ibid.*, p. 340.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 362.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 369

22 *Ibid.*