

From Faith To Faith: The Rise and Spread of Catholicism in Georgia, 1732-1832

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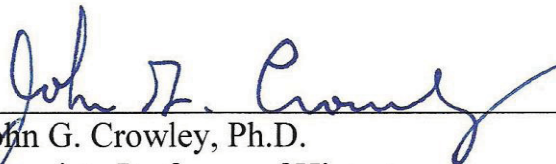
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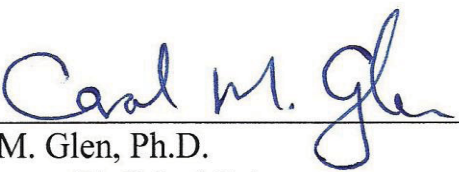
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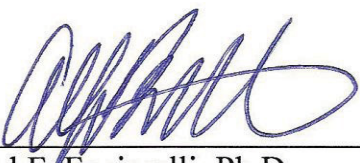


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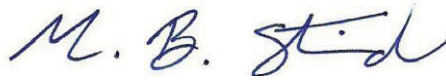
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ABSTRACT

The research holes of other historians reside in the fact that the Catholic story has been neglected in discussions of Georgia religion. There have been many neglected points made about Catholics in Georgia during the era of the early republic when there is ample source material to appropriately discuss this group of Christians.

In Colonial Georgia complete freedom of religion did not extend even to dissenters such as the Baptists, a group that became the dominant Christian denomination; however, they still retained some liberty. Because of various social issues along with outside circumstances, Catholics were completely banned from the colony in the beginning. However, the young state of Georgia in the emerging American republic was ripe for religious growth with the end of the American Revolution. Georgia provided the fertile ground and others provided the faith. The majority of Catholic believers in Georgia just after the American Revolution were foreign to the state. A group from Maryland traveled south to form the Church of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Later in the 1790s, French *émigrés* settled along the coast eventually moving to Augusta and other inland places. Many Irish Catholics became the major leaders of the Catholic faith and journeyed there to minister in the American mission.

Bishop John England was the most important figure in spreading the Roman Catholic faith in Georgia up to this time. Before he became the bishop of Charleston, the faith in Georgia was crumbling. Children were not learning their catechisms nor were marriages and deaths being blessed. A rift had formed between the laity and the clergy. Bishop England revived and helped further spread the Catholic Church in Georgia.

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Chapter I

RESEARCH HOLES: THE INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Before Georgia was conceived in the imagination of figures like James Edward Oglethorpe and other prominent Europeans, the land was home to various Native American groups with a rich religious culture. These Mississippian chiefdoms have been known as moundbuilders due to the large earthen structures they built for authorities and religious centers. The structure atop these miniature pyramids overlooked the rest of the people. Temples built on these mounds provided some spiritual leaders a home set above the common people. After the Mississippian period, other Native American groups in Georgia had their own religious views with nature being a key factor in their worship. In the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, the Spanish began their colonization of the New World. The area of modern Georgia was traversed by Hernando de Soto and others. Catholic missions were also established in Georgia by the Spanish in order to convert the Indians.

Religion has always been a force in the affairs of Georgia even before it was so named. The Spanish missions and the later English colonization brought various forms of Christianity to the area of Georgia. Great works have been written about most of the major Christian denominations of Georgia including the Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and even Quakers. Today, Georgia is a part of the Bible Belt which is best

described as being able to find a church of any denomination at arm's length from each other and where large percentages of the population profess to be Christians.¹

There is, however, one Christian group rarely seen in Georgia history. The Catholic story has been neglected in discussions of Georgia religion. If they are ever mentioned it is to simply quote from the colonial charter of 1732 that states,

And for the greater ease and encouragement of our loving subjects and such others as shall come to inhabit in our said colony, we do by these presents, for us, our heirs and successors, grant, establish and ordain, that forever hereafter, there shall be a liberty of conscience allowed in the worship of God, to all persons inhabiting, or which shall inhabit or be resident within our said province, and that all persons, except papists, shall have a free exercise of religion, so they be contented with the quiet and peaceable enjoyment of the same, not giving offense or scandal to the government.²

Many historians have stopped at the phrase “except papists” and think Catholicism did not exist in any form within Georgia; this hackneyed phrase has become an excuse rather than a starting point for further research.

Catholics were almost non-existent during the colonial period. Records of Catholics from the time period simply cannot be found since the religion was technically outlawed. Historian Reba Strickland has stated that “the largest number [of Catholics] reported to be in Georgia during the proprietary period was four in 1747.”³ Only four Catholics are on record at one time claiming to be a part of the “popery” that was outlawed in the charter.

¹ For a general overview of religion in Georgia, see David S. Williams, *From Mounds to Megachurches: Georgia's Religious Heritage* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008). Williams's book has a general overview of religion on the pre-history era of Georgia, the Spanish missions, and from the time of the colonial charter until the present while observing the social issues of the various time periods in Georgia history. Williams's bibliography is full of sources and can be used as an excellent source for religious research in Georgia.

² Georgia Colonial Charter of 1732; the charter's wording can also be found in Francis Xavier Curran, *Catholics in Colonial Law* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1963), 99.

³ Reba Carolyn Strickland, *Religion and the State in Georgia in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 43.

The non-existent Catholic population of the colonial period in Georgia is obviously a perfectly acceptable excuse for not having secondary source information on Catholics during that time period. However, in too many different works, there have been many neglected points made about Catholics in Georgia during the era of the early republic when there is ample source material to appropriately discuss this group of Christians. The phrasing of the charter was no longer applicable for the period of the early republic yet many historians who have opted to study the story of Catholicism in America have acted as if the charter and its phrasing were still the law of the land. More can be written and more should be written on this subject after the American Revolution concluded. It was very much desired that historians could have been proved wrong concerning the colonial era under the charter and that Catholicism did in fact flourish, but they are correct; Catholicism was non-existent. However, items can be found proving that Catholicism flourished during the early republic and showing the lacunae in previous historical research.

First, a proper discussion on the rise of religious liberty in Georgia is very important for this topic and will act as a solution to the problem of Catholicism being banned rather than looking at the simple fact “all persons, except papists, shall have the free exercise of religion.”⁴ It has already been stated that Catholics were initially banned from the colony but this ban did cease after a period of time. A deeper look at the social and religious events in the colony from its founding and through the end of the Revolution will help show how the atmosphere changed for Catholics within the state and how this atmosphere helped prompt the eventual creation of the Diocese of Savannah in 1850. It is evident that there is a change or a revolution of ideas that occurred in

⁴ Georgia Colonial Charter of 1732.

conjunction with the American Revolution that helped prompt the change from “except papists” to “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”⁵

The rise of religious freedom in Georgia due to the American Revolution is described in the work of Gordon Wood, a leading scholar of the American Revolution. A student under Bernard Bailyn, he developed a distinct interpretation of that period. Within American Revolution studies, interpretations fall into six different schools of thought: Whigs arguing a simplistic view of good versus evil; Imperialists looking at the revolution through the lens of the British; Progressives arguing economics as the force behind the revolution; Consensus historians arguing unity among the opposing ideas of the Founding Fathers; Neo-Whigs arguing the power of ideology; and the Neo-progressives blending economics with class struggle. Wood blends the Neo-Whig and Neo-progressive schools of thought together to form his own personal interpretation of social disputes driven by the changing ideas of the society.⁶

Wood’s major work, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, begins by giving a glimpse of colonial American society and how it was established on the principle that some white men had power while others were the bottom rung of the social ladder unable to progress forward. According to Wood, the American Revolution was so radical not because of the things that were done but because of the popular ideas that were rejected and the new, unheard-of ideas accepted in their place. The idea that all white men were equal was a preposterous idea that was accepted; even though rights were not

⁵ United States Constitution, amend. 1.

⁶ To find in-depth information about these individual schools of thought, see Richard D. Brown, ed., *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 1-3. This book is also a great source for students of history to get a grasp on the American Revolution as it contains primary source documents and essays written by professional historians.

extended entirely to all of humanity because of race or gender. The American Revolution was still truly revolutionary. The first part of this thesis examines the impact of the American Revolution on the rise of Catholicism in Georgia during the time period of the early republic to 1832 will use these same ideas. While there was not complete freedom of religion at the beginning in 1732, the idea of religious liberty was revolutionized within a few short years of independence.

Wood's work provides the backbone of the idea behind this section of the thesis. There are more books and articles that further elaborate on the rise of religious liberty in Georgia; however, a complete historiography will not be done on this section since it simply acts as an introduction to Catholicism from 1791 to 1832. Kenneth Coleman's *The American Revolution in Georgia, 1763-1789* outlines the events specifically in Georgia during the revolutionary era. *The Rise of Religious Liberty in America: A History* by Sanford H. Cobb covers the entire United States and assesses the rise of religious liberty. His references to Georgia create a sense of change and revolution specifically for religious groups.

Concerning colonial religion in Georgia, there are only two articles worth mentioning. "Anglicans and Dissenters in Georgia, 1758-1777" by Marjorie Daniel gives an overview of the power held by the Church of England during the colonial era in Georgia. "Georgia's Religion in the Colonial Era, 1733-1790" by Charles O. Walker gives descriptions of all the major religions during the colonial era and how they reacted to certain events such as the American Revolution.

A couple of other books that are very useful in trying to understand the state of religion in Georgia and Catholicism in Georgia during the American Revolution are

Religion and the State in Georgia in the Eighteenth Century by Reba Carolyn Strickland and *American Opinion of Roman Catholicism in the Eighteenth Century* by Sister Mary Augustina Ray. *Religion and the State in Georgia in the Eighteenth Century* by Reba Carolyn Strickland discusses the events concerning religion since Georgia was founded in 1732 until 1800. The first part of the larger thesis covers this entire time period until 1791 and deals with religion. Reba Strickland examines religion and politics, a slight difference from what this writer wishes to do which is outline the rise of religious liberty in Georgia and how that aided the growth of a Catholic population. *American Opinion of Roman Catholicism in the Eighteenth Century* by Sister Mary Augustina Ray covers the entire United States during the eighteenth century and includes brief sections scattered throughout the book that discuss Georgia. Though there were not a substantial number of Catholics in Georgia during the eighteenth century, some Georgians had a certain attitude toward the idea of Catholicism or Popery and Sister Ray captures this attitude.

Since the following historiography does not apply to this portion of the thesis that is clearly only used to set up the main narrative on Roman Catholicism in Georgia, a brief analysis will be placed here to help the reader understand the purpose for doing such a thing. The colonial charter, as quoted above, outlawed Catholicism while supposedly granting religious liberty to other denominations that were considered viable. Throughout the decades, ties between Great Britain and the colonies disintegrated creating the atmosphere for the American Revolution. With the Revolution and related ideology, Catholics achieved the same status as other Christian denominations. In colonial America and in Europe, some Christian denominations held substantial power within the governments. Though there may have been religious tolerance in Georgia, the American

Revolution swept away chances for political dominance by one particular religious group over another. Catholics were no longer outlawed. The Church of England was no longer the established denomination. Even the thought of Protestants having more rights ended in the final culmination of revolutionary ideals: the United States Constitution with the Bill of Rights and the tag along Georgia Constitution of 1789.

It must be established in the first part of this thesis that Roman Catholics rose from nothing in order to prove they existed. The second and most important part of the larger thesis will be the discussion that involves the post-revolutionary era from 1791 to 1832. This is a time period when Catholics become more notable in the pages of primary source documents. Even this period in Georgia is rarely discussed by historians of American Catholicism. However, this writer will fill in the blank spaces of the history that has been written over and over again proving that Catholics can be found in Georgia during that time. The historiography that follows does not concern the rise of religious liberty.

There are two groups of historians that will be analyzed in this paper. The first and largest group is the historians of Roman Catholicism in the United States. These historians tend to not focus on one certain state or group, but instead look at Catholicism throughout the United States. Catholics in Georgia should be taken into consideration when writing that story. The following analysis will show whether they are or are not. The second group of historians that will be briefly mentioned will be historians of Georgia history. Catholics in Georgia and their rise are no doubt a topic of social history that would be assessed by Georgia historians. A review of the work of the two historians will show whether they have or have not included Catholics in their narrative.

John Gilmary Shea's magnum opus, *The History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, moves chronologically from about 1521 to the 1860s. These works were written just before Shea's death in 1892; the last volume was published posthumously in 1892 by his wife. These four volumes have the potential of covering all of the information on Catholicism in Georgia making this project unnecessary; however, this is not the case. Shea does mention Georgia yet he seems to focus on the more prominent areas such as Spanish Florida, French Louisiana, and British Maryland. This is understandable since Catholicism played a more important role in these areas than in Georgia with evidence more obvious in the historical record. It must be stated, though, that this is meant to be a full history of Catholicism in the United States thus time should also be spent representing the less conspicuous places like Georgia. Though it be a minor role, Catholicism in Georgia is still a part of the Catholic story within the United States.

Shea's work is not altogether without its strong points. In volume one, 1521 to 1763, Shea states that "Georgia by its charter positively excluded Catholics, not one of whom was allowed to settle within its limits."⁷ In order to prove this assertion, Shea cites only one instance where Catholics were turned away when John Reynolds was the royal governor. The details concerning Georgia are good though incomplete. Shea thankfully does not cite the charter about religious liberty for all except the Catholics and then leave the reader wondering what the fate of "papists" in Georgia was; however, only one example of Catholics being turned away is not sufficient evidence to prove a point and there should be another.

⁷ John Gilmary Shea, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, vol. 1 (New York: D. H. McBride & Company, 1886), 437-438.

Shea's massive, filiopietistic *History of the Catholic Church in the United States* is silent on Catholic affairs in Georgia until the next volume, which discusses 1763 to 1815. Shea stated that "Georgia, in colonial days, had been closed to the Church, the fundamental charter expressly prohibiting the settlement of Catholics within its limits, and thus distinctly excluding the teaching of divine truth. The Revolutionary war opened the portals which bigotry had closed."⁸ This statement, though it contains obvious bias with Shea's belief of Catholicism being truth from God, is insightful in ways that other works are not. Shea specifically mentions the American Revolution as opening the doors for Catholics to enter Georgia which is something that other historians on the subject have not done. Shea is the first major historian of American Catholicism and is probably the last who would make this assertion. It is not an altogether new concept; most Americans understand that the Bill of Rights in the United States opened the doors for religious freedom. For Shea to make this statement is to go past the entire excuse that "all persons, except papists, shall have the free exercise of religion"⁹ and recognize that there was a change; this is something more recent historians have failed to do. After this statement, Shea says very little on Catholicism in Georgia other than mentioning that a small Catholic church was founded in the 1790s.

Shea's magnum opus on Catholicism in the United States is an excellent source; however, it has weaknesses concerning Georgia. Throughout all four volumes, Shea spends approximately four pages discussing Georgia and another fifteen pages discussing the Diocese of Savannah with several of those pages devoted to Florida. Regarding the rise of religious liberty in Georgia, Shea's work is good. This work is not about the rise

⁸ Shea, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, vol. 2 (New York: D. H. McBride & Company, 1888), 462.

⁹ Georgia Colonial Charter of 1732.

of religious liberty but it holds to the fact that Catholics did come from nothing in Georgia to having a diocese in Savannah. As for the overall history of Catholicism in Georgia from 1790 to 1850, John Shea's four volume *History of the Catholic Church in the United States* is incomplete. Georgia is only mentioned in the chapter concerning Bishop John England and Catholicism in South Carolina. There simply is not much information used and Shea tends to focus on the more prominent areas and people, such as Bishop John England. Shea's work briefly focuses on England's life with nothing but good things to say about him: "He was a priest of remarkable talents, of experience in various departments of priestly labor as professor in an ecclesiastical seminary, chaplain of prisons and refuges, rector of a large parish."¹⁰ It is unfortunate that while Shea sings the praises of the Reverend John England, Georgia is omitted from the general narrative unless the bishop travels to that state. Georgia is only mentioned a total of five times in the chapter devoted to the work of John England.¹¹ There simply is not enough information devoted to this topic in all four of the volumes. However, considering the scope of Shea's effort, there is good reason for not considering every detail.¹²

John Gilmary Shea also had a minor book published in 1890 titled *A History of the Catholic Church Within the Limits of the United States: From the First Attempted Colonization to the Present Time*. This work is much smaller than the other four volume history of Catholicism that Shea penned. Being a smaller work than the former, this book also holds fewer details.

¹⁰ John Gilmary Shea, *A History of the Catholic Church Within the Limits of the United States: From the First Attempted Colonization to the Present Time* (New York: Mershon Company Press, 1890), 306-307.

¹¹ Shea, *A History of the Catholic Church Within the Limits of the United States*, 311, 324, 325, 327, 329.

¹² Shea, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, vol. 4 (New York: D. H. McBride & Company, 1888), 99-103, 451-461.

Shea seems to begin the historiography on the topic of Catholicism in the United States. Many authors have come afterward to give their own account of the story of the Church in America. One of the first and primary writers on Georgia Catholicism was J. J. O'Connell who wrote *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia* which was published in 1879 after his death in 1878. O'Connell was also influenced by "John Gilmary Shea's works"¹³ even though O'Connell had his work published first. It is likely that since O'Connell and Shea were both academics holding doctorate degrees that O'Connell had access to Shea and his expansive knowledge on the subject of Catholicism in the United States. It is also likely that some of Shea's expansive works were laid out in minor journals before they were combined and published in the form of books.

O'Connell's work *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia* is a discussion on the state of Catholicism in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. The author said "The subject [of his work] is old, but the book is new"¹⁴ implying that everything stated should have already been said but his work on the topic is truly a first. Overall, the book tries to go back and examine all of the past events that had been left from the pages of Catholic history where renowned "writers...slightly noticed its existence in the South, or barely recognized it in a scant line or two."¹⁵ The subject has only been pointed at in a brief section with a minimum number of words and then left alone as if enough had been stated.

O'Connell sets out to right what he feels were the wrongs of the story of the church not being fully told. The author does have an excellent narrative on Georgia; the

¹³ J. J. O'Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Company, 1879), viii.

¹⁴ O'Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia*, ix.

¹⁵ Ibid.

last four chapters are devoted to different areas of the state. These are very insightful and informative. The only problems with this narrative involve the time frame; the author's primary focus is 1850 and beyond with very few references to anything before that date.

Theodore Maynard penned *The Story of American Catholicism* in 1941 arguing that the Roman Catholic Church has always had great influence in the United States and has retained its traditions through the changing times. Maynard seeks to give voice to Catholics who are given a "slighting notice in most of the standard histories."¹⁶ There is no mentioning of Catholics in general historical works. Maynard brings the Catholic story to life detailing events from the Spanish missions to just after the Civil War. Maynard's narrative is good, but Georgia is only mentioned a few times with no real reference to events or individuals. Maynard's work is not the true story of American Catholicism yet it still serves the purpose he intended. Unfortunately, Maynard did not intend to shed light on the Georgia Catholics who stood outside the realm of the well-known Catholic populace of the other colonies and states; he instead opted to mention Georgia as a place of "very few Catholics."¹⁷ Theodore Maynard is also the author of *The Catholic Church and the American Idea* where he argues that Catholics, though there is freedom of religion, are still considered foreign; "If, in religion we Catholics must maintain our unique position, such uniqueness in no way affects our adhesion to our country; rather this strengthens it."¹⁸ This work, though not necessarily important within the historiography of Catholicism in Georgia, reveals Maynard's approach to Catholicism

¹⁶ Theodore Maynard, *The Story of American Catholicism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942), ix.

¹⁷ Ibid, 222.

¹⁸ Theodore Maynard, *The Catholic Church and the American Idea* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1953), 300.

In 1950, Theodore Roemer wrote *The Catholic Church in the United States* as a means of having literature for use in colleges and seminary schools “to be a guide for students.”¹⁹ The time period covered in the book is from the Spanish missions until 1950. Unfortunately, a book that promises to discuss the Catholic Church in the United States. Georgia is mentioned only once and this instance concerns the Spanish missions. There is also one mentioning of the Diocese of Savannah in a section that is less than half a page. This book is a disappointment within the historiography of Catholicism in Georgia. A book of this magnitude could have more to offer but the author’s purpose was not to include everything. The author wanted to only include brief items of interest. Therefore, this book is only meant to outline the main themes so that other works could greatly expand on the details. Roemer makes the statement that “the general guiding lines of Shea’s four volumes [*History of the Catholic Church in the United States*] had to be followed...but the presentation had to go other ways.”²⁰ But there are holes in the story of the Catholic Church in the United States that do need to be stated.

Reverend William V. Coleman’s 1967 book, *The Church in South Georgia*, is an excellent secondary source for this subject. Coleman clearly outlines the rise of the Diocese of Savannah but with few referrals to the period before that date. Coleman wrote this book for the diocese and it contains some important facts about Catholics in Georgia and the creation of the Diocese of Savannah. However, there are some limitations to the use of this source within the confines of the topic being researched. A major problem with this book is the size. There are only forty-five pages and included within those pages are numerous pictures, a title page, a table of contents, and chapter outlines for each of

¹⁹ Theodore Roemer, *The Catholic Church in the United States* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Company, 1950), iv.

²⁰ Roemer, *The Catholic Church in the United States*, v-iv.

the five chapters. This book lures many into thinking it is a history of the church in South Georgia, as the title suggests, when really it barely moves into a history of the Catholic Church in Georgia especially since its scope is from 1733 to the 1960s. This book, while quoting often and mentioning very important details of events and people important to Catholic history, fails to cite sources or provide a bibliography. It is almost impossible to follow the trail that Coleman took while writing this book. There is nothing wrong with not using footnotes or endnotes, but it is highly important to use such methods so that others can follow with more. There is one thing that can be said which is unfortunate: Reverend Coleman's scant book says more of Catholicism in Georgia than any other secondary source previously mentioned. Congratulations to *The Church in South Georgia* for attempting to do something no other book does. This book deserves mention even though it has major flaws due to its lack of content.

A History of the Catholic Church in the United States, published in 1969 by Thomas T. McAvoy, moves through the main events of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. The index to the book gives no indication that Georgia is ever alluded to concerning American Catholicism which is either the result of a poor index or the book not covering Georgia in its narrative; unfortunately the latter case is the true reason. McAvoy does not even quote the jaded colonial charter and is similar to the other works about the not-so-grand stories and interpretations of Catholicism in the United States.

Jay Dolan's book *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* is the latest book on American Catholic history and perhaps the most unhelpful of the long list written by historians of American Catholicism. Each chapter has a subheading that serves only to further elaborate on the content of the

chapter. Each chapter is like a miniature case study that is meant to add to the overall narrative without actually looking at events from all over. For instance, the chapter discussing Catholics in the English colonies is subtitled “What it meant to be Catholic in Colonial Maryland” as if this is supposed to represent every colony and every event that occurred concerning American Catholics from the colonial times to the present. Georgia is never mentioned making this book scarcely the true American Catholic experience. Dolan was doing the scholarly work he believed to be important and organized his writing in the way he thought was correct; it was a means “to ask new questions of the past and to focus on themes often neglected in American Catholic history.”²¹ He also included all of the information that he wished. Yet the opinion still remains that too much was left unsaid.

From an analysis of the books written on the subject of American Catholicism, it is apparent that the quality of research and incorporation of information dwindles with time and with each subsequent book. This is probably due to the fact that no work approaches the four volume scholarship of John Gilmary Shea. Shea’s massive *History of the Catholic Church in the United States* is well researched and full of information that historians simply cannot further elaborate. His four volumes are the most important work detailing the history of Roman Catholicism in the United States. Other works can only add information that is post-1890 or magnify certain details omitted by Shea.

One of the most important works for Catholics in Georgia lies in the late-1800 book by J. J. O’Connell. O’Connell examines Roman Catholicism in Georgia like no other historian before or after him; however, there are several issues with his history. Jeremiah Joseph O’Connell was a historian giving a first-hand account of events. His

²¹ Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience* (Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1985), 10.

work provides much insight into the spread of Catholicism in the Carolinas and Georgia. His writing is both grand and overly stylized. He knew that his work would be read and perhaps he hoped everyone would read it. He was present for many of the key events and knew most of the key players. Although his words are delightful and useful, they must be taken with a grain of salt. O'Connell wrote the basic outline of the Catholic history of Georgia and now it can be expanded.

Two final books in the line of Catholic histories have great potential as scholarly works yet fall short. *One Faith...One Family: The Diocese of Savannah, 1850-2000* is a compilation of essays concerning Catholicism in Georgia before the diocese formed in 1850 until 2000 in order to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the diocese. The essays, although interesting and informative, are short and cover vast amounts of time with little detail. Some of the essays also quote quite liberally with no citation available for further research. Key ideas and people are not linked to past works. The bibliography is minimal. *The Archdiocese of Atlanta: A History* by John Hanley was written by the former archivist for the archdiocese and provides some basic background information on the settlement by early Catholics. Hanley, and possibly others working within the archdiocese, takes great pride in the fact that the area of Locust Grove where the first Catholics settled is now part of the Archdiocese of Atlanta. The history given by Hanley is disappointing. Some of Hanley's "facts" are erroneous and his book should be used as a starting point for deeper inquiry into the subject. Like *One Faith...One Family*, Hanley's work uses no citation and has no bibliography.

One other issue that is minor yet is a problem is the background of the authors documenting the histories of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States: they are

Catholic. From the beginning, John Gilmary Shea expressed Catholic sentiment in his massive work, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, when he called Catholic doctrine “divine truth.”²² He also dedicated each volume to distinct American clergymen within the Catholic Church. J. J. O’Connell dedicated his book, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia*, “To the Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Patroness of the Church, Destroyer of All Heresies, and Help of Christians, Whom None Ever Invoked in Vain, This Volume is Dedicated, with the Most Profound Humility and Confidence, by Her Unworthy but Devoted Client.”²³ O’Connell is also a member of the clergy. Theodore Maynard states in *The Story of American Catholicism* that he had much help from Catholic clergymen and laymen with the compilation of his book which shows the heavy Catholic influence involved in the work.²⁴ As stated above, Theodore Roemer produced *The Catholic Church in the United States* as a guide for students in Catholic seminary. William V. Coleman, author of *The Church in South Georgia*, was a Catholic priest and his book was written to praise the Diocese of Savannah. Thomas McAvoy, author of *A History of the Catholic Church in the United States* was a Catholic clergyman and scholar; and finally, the author of *The American Catholic Experience: A History From Colonial Times to the Present*, Jay Dolan, does not give any indication of his religious background. Dolan is one of the few scholars who does not openly express religious views that could be detrimental to the validity of his work.²⁵

Through the long list of scholars on the subject of Roman Catholicism in the United States it appears that there is heavy bias with the authors. This bias overlooks the

²² Shea, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, vol. 2, 462.

²³ O’Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia*, v.

²⁴ Maynard, *The Story of American Catholicism*, xiv-xv.

²⁵ Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 11.

flaws of Catholics while demonizing those who are outside of that cultural and religious sphere. The fact that Catholics are not discussed in Georgia is not the only problem with the historiography. Nine out of ten scholarly sources on Catholicism are written by Catholics and have some support from the Catholic clergy. There is far too much bias involved in the historiography.

Another group of historians must also be briefly looked at in order to adequately assess the historiography of Catholicism in Georgia. This chapter has only analyzed Catholic historians; however, the works by historians of Georgia history must be taken into consideration. There are numerous Georgia history text books that can be looked at; hundreds of books that have been written throughout the decades on Georgia history. This paper will only examine two books that document Georgia history written by well-known historians that hold much detail concerning the state.

Georgia: A Short History by E. Merton Coulter was first published in 1930 with several subsequent reprints and updates. Coulter offers a history from the colonial times to his present age. In regards to Catholics, he states that they were “not allowed a place in Georgia.”²⁶ Coulter later reconciles this by saying that Catholics arrive, but he never feels the need to tell the reader about Catholics on a deeper level. For a detailed history of Georgia, this is an excellent source; however, for information on Catholics this book, like the other books examined, falls short.

A History of Georgia edited by Kenneth Coleman first in 1977, and republished in 1991 is a general history with contributions made by other historians. This book does not say much concerning Catholics in Georgia other than the usual reference to them being

²⁶ E. Merton Coulter, *Georgia: A Short History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 31.

outlawed then subsequently allowed to enter. This is an excellent general history of the state but not useful in other regards.

One final book that will be addressed is *From Mounds to Megachurches: Georgia's Religious Heritage* by David Williams in 2008. This book is not categorized with the Georgia historians or with the Catholic Church historians because it blends Georgia history with religion and does not seek to give comprehensive account of the history of all the religions that have entered the state. He also examines how those religions and historical events have helped Georgians create a personal culture. There is a very brief section that is devoted to the rise of Catholicism. This section is not very helpful to understand the historiography, but it does reveal that there was some development that has not been noted in many other places. The brevity of the sections on Catholicism yet the mentioning of them inspires the thesis to be written since it will be one that will deal specifically with Catholics and not every religious group. This book is an excellent source. It was written by a religious studies professor and not by an historian. However, this book reads like a well-written history book with an excellent index, endnotes, and a bibliography. This book is easy to follow with great organization and an analysis that is excellent for any student of the history of religion or the history of Georgia to read in order to have a religious Georgian's viewpoint on events.

There are two major problems in the historiography of Georgia Catholicism. The first problem, the use of the charter as an excuse, has been expounded repeatedly in this chapter. The second major problem that has been noticed is that the only referrals to Georgia Catholics occur after 1850 when there is a clear Catholic population evident by the Diocese of Savannah. At one extreme, Catholics are never mentioned; at the other

extreme, Catholics are not covered when finding information is difficult. However, there are sources out there that prove Catholics existed from the early 1790s to 1850. The way Catholics in Georgia are treated, it would seem that one day in 1850 they came into existence by some magical means. They had to exist and be growing prior to 1850, so why are they not discussed?

A few more questions arise when reading about this topic. Why does it matter that Catholics are not written about in other notable scholarly works? Why does it matter that we even learn about Catholics in Georgia at all? This topic is relevant on so many different levels and the knowledge gained is only taken from what the reader learns and chooses to take away from it. To answer the first question, this topic is an example of how sometimes historians omit information when writing on certain topics leaving holes in the historiography. This thesis will bring new information that has been previously omitted and will add to the historiography of Catholicism in the United States. The second question deals with the fact that this is a social issue. Catholics went from being rejected completely under colonial law to having a diocese formed in Savannah with one of the largest churches in the South being built for their style of worship. The journey through this topic can help show the changes brought by the Revolution and it can also contribute to how religion has shaped the state of Georgia into being what it is today.

Historians on the subject need to move away from simply having the attitude of “except papists”²⁷ as cited in the colonial charter of Georgia and need to actually bring to the surface the story of this religious group in a less prominent state. This thesis will prove that Catholicism did not stop at the colonial charter and show that the American Revolution brought a change to the public mind on religion and then will prove that the

²⁷ Georgia Colonial Charter of 1732.

scholars of the past have omitted evidence of Catholicism in Georgia between 1790 and 1850. There is a story to tell; it is a story of the rise from nothing and also a story for all Americans to see the changes wrought by the great struggle that helped make all white men, and subsequently all men equal.

Chapter II

“EXCEPT PAPISTS”: THE REVOLUTION AND RELIGION IN GEORGIA, 1732-1791¹

In Colonial Georgia complete freedom of religion did not extend even to dissenters such as the Baptists, a group that became the dominant Christian denomination. Because of various social issues along with outside circumstances, Catholics were completely banned from the colony in the beginning. James Oglethorpe only thought that he and the other trustees granted the “Liberty of Religion.”² The path to complete religious liberty in Georgia was not easy or soon accomplished. It took the greater part of the eighteenth-century before Catholics became well-established within the state of Georgia. This chapter traces the chronological path of the rise of religious liberty from the colonial charter of 1732 through the end of the Revolutionary Era in America and will show the impact of the American Revolution on religion in Georgia.

The American Revolution, not simply the war that took place against Great Britain, was the culmination of ideas that led to equality for all men. In the Pulitzer Prize-winning book *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Gordon S. Wood asserts that the colonists not only declared their independence from Great Britain, but also rejected the entire system associated with rule by Parliament. This rejection, in turn, led to a society where all men could eventually become equal, though it did not necessarily

¹ The contents of this chapter have been published. See Matthew Blake Strickland, “‘Except Papists’: The Revolution and Religion in Georgia, 1732-1791,” *Tuckasegee Valley Historical Review*, 18 (Spring 2012): 121-139.

² James Edward Oglethorpe, “Appeal for the Georgia Colony (1732),” *The Publications of James Edward Oglethorpe*, Rodney M. Baine, ed. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 165.

happen immediately.³ This chapter will use the idea of changing societal norms mentioned in Wood's book and connect it to the change in religious tolerance in Georgia. The trustees banned Catholics from the colony because of European notions of the relationship of government and religion; after the American Revolution overturned these European notions, Catholics obtained religious freedom in Georgia.

The Spanish originally held claim to the area of modern Georgia and combined it with their colony La Florida. Hernando de Soto trekked through Georgia in the 1500s and Catholic missions were established before the English colonized the Carolina colony. The Spanish, defeated in Queen Anne's War, were forced to retreat from the Georgia territory allowing for the English to incorporate it into the Carolina colony.⁴

James Edward Oglethorpe stated some of the reasons behind starting the Georgia colony in his "Appeal for the Georgia Colony," first published anonymously in the *London Journal* on July 29, 1732. Oglethorpe, later recognized as the author, desired to accurately detail the purpose of the colony while maintaining privacy. In the essay, Oglethorpe states,

If the Trustees intend to employ the Money collected [from contributors to the new colony] to relieve the Prisoner, to give Bread to the Hungry, Clothes to the Naked, Liberty of Religion to the Oppressed for Conscience sake; to rescue deluded Orphans, from the Temptations Want or idle Company may expose them to; and of these to form well-regulated Towns, and to give them Houses, Cattle, and Lands of Inheritance; to instruct them how to raise all those good Things which make Life comfortable; and how to enjoy them under such Laws as tend to make them virtuous

³ Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991). Also, for a less detailed overview of the American Revolution, see Wood, *The American Revolution: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2002). In more recent interpretations of this period, the War of Independence is generally ascribed to the physical fighting while the umbrella designation of American Revolution can be attributed to the era ending with the formation of the new federal government of the United States in 1789. For the purpose of this essay and according to the writer's own interpretation, the end of the American Revolution is marked with the ratification of the Bill of Rights.

⁴ For more information on the Spanish missions, see John Tate Lanning, *The Spanish Missions of Georgia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1935).

and happy both here and hereafter. If these are their Intentions, these Motives will be the most active Tax Gatherers.⁵

Oglethorpe says the trustees created Georgia to act as a haven for those who lack and are socially burdened; the colony was formed as a sanctuary for the people who otherwise would not have such an opportunity. When Oglethorpe wrote to the *London Journal*, “If the Trustees intend...Liberty of Religion to the Oppressed for Conscience sake”⁶ he implied the actions of the Board of Trustees, who would implement freedom of religious expression in the colony of Georgia. Oglethorpe wrote this essay to the editor anonymously and used vague generalities to convey what he and the other trustees intended in order to gain financial support for the venture. Oglethorpe stated that the colony of Georgia truly granted religious liberty, which would help lead to an increased revenue for the Crown. Oglethorpe later stated,

If they [the trustees] give Liberty of Religion, establish the People free, fix an *Agrarian* Law, prohibit within their Jurisdiction that abominable and destructive Custom of Slavery, by which the laboring Hands are rendered useless to the Defence of the State. In fine, if they go upon the glorious Maxims of Liberty and Virtue, their Province, in the Age of Man, by being the Asylum of the Unfortunate, will be more advantageous to *Britain* than the Conquest of a Kingdom.⁷

Throughout this essay, Oglethorpe tried to convey some of the policies that he and the trustees wanted to implement in their new colony. He touched on religious freedom twice. By allowing the freedom of religion, among other issues of slavery and land, Oglethorpe implied that Georgians would be a great source of income for taxes and a great refuge at Great Britain’s disposal.

⁵ Oglethorpe, “Appeal,” *Publications*, 164-165.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

Oglethorpe intended religious freedom for the people of the colony, but security was intended for the colony's creation. To the south of Georgia, Spanish Florida loomed and to the west, France's Louisiana territory; two Catholic entities that had been historical enemies to Great Britain. In order to protect the wealthier and more prominent colony to the north, South Carolina, Georgia was created as what has been called a buffer colony. The British designed Georgia to act as a divide between the rest of the Carolina colony, the Catholic nations, and Indians. Oglethorpe stated that "Carolina is divided into North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia; the latter is a province which his Majesty has taken out of Carolina, and is the southern and western frontier of that province, lying between it, and the French, Spaniards, and Indians."⁸ In order to put a halt to spying and colonists in Georgia giving aid to the enemy, the charter prohibited Roman Catholics from entering the colony. The Board of Trustees targeted Catholics for fear they would act as spies or choose to fight against the English in the case of an invasion.

Thomas Rundle, an Anglican minister and Trustee of the Georgia colony praised the ambitions of the new colony in a February 17, 1733, sermon at St. George's Church in Hanover Square. He stated,

This colony is placed near many Indian Nations which are still plunged into the meanest Idolatries, busied in dishonest Superstitions, and deprived by ignorance and fears of the comforts of a life civilized by instruction and laws. The trustees of this Charity resolve to watch over the Virtue and Religion of the people committed to them. All will be permitted to worship God according to their conscience, but none to live without a regard to God and Conscience. They hope to *make the light* of this settlement *shine before* their neighbors, that they may *glorify* their Father which is in Heaven.⁹

⁸ Oglethorpe, "An Account of Carolina and Georgia (1739)," *Publications*, 246.

⁹ T. Rundle, *A Sermon Preached at St. George's Church, Hanover Square, on Sunday, February 17, 1733 to Recommend the Charity for Establishing the New Colony of Georgia* (London, 1734). This excerpt can be found in Spencer B. King, Jr., ed., *Georgia Voices: A Documentary History to 1872* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1966), 44-45.

The charter outlined the purposes of the new colony and operated as the regulation guide used by the trustees. The charter made a single statement on the status of religion within the colony of Georgia:

And for the greater ease and encouragement of our loving subjects and such others as shall come to inhabit in our said colony, we do by these presents, for us, our heirs and successors, grant, establish and ordain, that forever hereafter, there shall be a liberty of conscience allowed in the worship of God, to all persons inhabiting, or which shall inhabit or be resident within our said province, and that all persons, except Papists, shall have a free exercise of religion, so they be contented with the quiet and peaceable enjoyment of the same, not giving offense or scandal to the government.¹⁰

The charter granted religious liberty to all religious groups in Georgia except Roman Catholics. Theoretically, the charter extended religious freedom to those not of the Christian faith. It is ironic to think that a few Roman Catholics could hamper “the greater ease and encouragement of...loving subjects”¹¹ in a colony meant to cater to the needs of individuals who, as Oglethorpe stated in his essay, were to be the lowest individuals in British society. The irony lies in the idea that the trustees created Georgia to perfect the lives of society’s outcasts. If the ideals of the colony were so impeccable, why would a colonist want to act as a spy for Spain or France? Also, the word “papist” is used, not as a simple name for Roman Catholicism, but as a pejorative term to imply where a Catholic person’s loyalty lay. To Anglicans, citizens could not serve the Pope and king with equal fervor. The charter and trustees used the word derogatorily.¹²

¹⁰ Georgia Colonial Charter of 1732.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Although this occurred on a smaller level, using the term “Papist” can be closely linked to the Communist hysteria that occurred in the United States in the twentieth-century and to the fear of terrorism that has taken place in the early twenty-first century. All three instances use fear of foreign political and religious beliefs as a tactic of targeting an opponent.

Two separate occasions in 1733 tested the concept of religious freedom. On May 14, 1733, Oglethorpe wrote to the trustees that he “found and seized an Irish Roman Catholic...and...two others of the same nation and religion who were sent...with intelligence from our town to Saint Augustine.”¹³ After increasing the fortifications of Savannah, Oglethorpe showed the spies the city and its strength so that they could “give an account to the Governour of Augustine of what they then saw.”¹⁴ Oglethorpe hoodwinked the spies into thinking that they were stronger as a means of deterring an attack by the Spanish. Captured because of their Catholic faith and work for a Catholic adversary, Oglethorpe released the three Irishmen in order to report back to the Spanish as a means of military strategy. This event shows that the English had to fight against a Catholic adversary and believed their reasons for keeping Roman Catholics from the colony to be just. The fact that a man of a different nationality, in this case Irish, would serve the Spanish as a spy also showed the possibilities of a united ally loyal to the Pope. The second test of the charter came on July 11, 1733, when, only five months after Oglethorpe himself landed in Georgia, a ship with forty-two Jews arrived in Savannah on the *William and Mary*. Allowed by Oglethorpe, the Jews organized their own society centered on their religion.¹⁵

When Oglethorpe allowed the Jews to settle in Georgia, it was completely against the wishes of the other Trustees. Oglethorpe, faced with a population decrease due to disease, needed the Jewish doctor on board and the numbers of his colony would increase

¹³ James Oglethorpe, “James Oglethorpe to the Trustees, May 14, 1733,” in Mills Lane, ed., *General Oglethorpe’s Georgia: Colonial Letters, 1733-1743* (Savannah, GA: The Beehive Press, 1975), 1: 16.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Charles O. Walker, “Georgia’s Religion in the Colonial Era, 1733-1790,” *Viewpoints* 5 (1976), 21; Oglethorpe, “James Oglethorpe to the Trustees, August 12, 1733,” in Lane, ed., *General Oglethorpe’s Georgia*, 1: 21. Oglethorpe and others have cited the number of Jews at thirty-eight though the official number to have sailed is at forty-two.

by allowing them into Savannah. Although the Trustees did not want the Jews to disembark in Georgia, English lawyers in Charleston said they should be allowed because of the wording of the treaty where a freedom of religious expression was granted to all (except Catholics) living in the colony.¹⁶

It is possible that Catholics secretly lived in Georgia with no priest or church to practice their faith. One historian mentions the possibility of four Catholics living in the colony in 1747.¹⁷ Lucretia Triboudite, according to another historian, owned several items of Catholic nature such as “a crucifix, cross, beads, and a parcel of French books,” which may have suggested that she adhered to the Roman Catholic faith.¹⁸ Finding records of these Catholics—if they existed—in historical documents proves difficult. Catholics were considered an enemy of the Georgia colony and the word “Catholic” was used to label an opponent in order to place a dark mark on their character. Henry Parker, the president of Georgia after the resignation of William Stephens, was accused of being a Papist in 1751. Political opponents most likely used this attempt in order to gain a more favorable choice for the position. In order to quell any accusation of him being a Papist, Parker signed the Oath of Transubstantiation, a declaration against a chief pillar within Roman Catholicism: “I, *N*, do believe that there is not any Transubstantiation in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, or in the elements of the Bread and Wine, or after the Consecration thereof by any person whatsoever.”¹⁹ A true Catholic would not deny the

¹⁶ B. H. Levy, “The Early History of Georgia’s Jews,” in Harvey H. Jackson and Phiniza Spalding, eds., *Forty Years of Diversity: Essays on Colonial Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 167.

¹⁷ Reba Carolyn Strickland, *Religion and the State in Georgia in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 43.

¹⁸ Harold Earl Davis, “A Social History of Georgia, 1733-1776” (PhD diss., Emory University, 1972), 347.

¹⁹ Candler, *Colonial Records of Georgia*, XXVI, 324-326; Davis, “A Social History of Georgia,” 346; George White, *Historical Collections of Georgia: Containing the Most Interesting Facts, Traditions,*

presence of Jesus Christ in the bread and wine of the sacrament. The labeling of Henry Parker as a Papist was meant to be derogatory since the Spanish became insubstantial after the Battle of Bloody Marsh in 1742. Another instance of the word “Papist” being used derogatorily involves John Wesley. Some religious opponents charged Wesley, the recognized founder of Methodism, as being secretly Roman Catholic. Wesley’s religious opponents called him a “Papist” to tarnish his character.²⁰

John Reynolds arrived in Georgia in 1754 to take his seat as the first royal governor. The charter, granted to the Board of Trustees by the Crown in 1732, would expire twenty years after the issuance and negate directly to the king. However, in 1751, the trustees abandoned the charter early due to financial difficulties. Oglethorpe, the only trustee to go to Georgia, returned to England and abandoned all efforts to promote the colony. John Reynolds began the era with Georgia as a royal colony with laws and affairs governed directly by the king and his agents. Governor Reynolds received instructions upon his arrival. The royal decree approved by the government of Great Britain stated,

And it is our further will and pleasure that the writs for calling an assembly as aforesaid be issued thirty days before the time fixed in the said writs for the meeting of the assembly, and that no person shall be capable of being elected a representative to serve or of sitting in general assembly who is of Popish recusant or under the age of twenty-one years, or who is not possessed in his own right of a freehold estate of five hundred acres of land within the district or division for which he is chosen; nor shall any Popish recusant, person under the age of twenty-one years, or who is not possessed in his own right of a freehold estate of fifty acres of land be deemed capable of giving his vote for the election of a representative to serve in general assembly.²¹

Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, etc., Relating to its History and Antiquities, From its First Settlement to the Present Time (New York: Pudney & Russell, 1854), 38-41.

²⁰ Mary Augustina Ray, *American Opinion of Roman Catholicism in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Octagon Books, 1974), 77-80.

²¹ “Qualifications of Electors and Elected in Georgia,” in *Royal Instructions to British Colonial Governors, 1670-1776*, Leonard Woods Labaree, ed. (New York: Octagon Books, 1967), I: 96. A “recusant” is an English Roman Catholic who refused to attend services held by the Church of England causing them to break an established law.

A policy restricting the voting rights of persons adhering to the Catholic faith implies a lifted ban on Catholics entering the colony. The royal government simply restricted Catholics from taking part in the newly formed legislative process of making laws and voting that did not exist under the Board of Trustees. However, Governor Reynolds still adhered to some of the old ways. Around 1756, approximately four hundred Catholics traveled from Nova Scotia to Georgia. Reynolds allowed the group to wait for spring before giving them passports to leave the colony.²²

Also in 1754, Governor Reynolds received further instruction concerning religion: “You shall take especial Care that God Almighty be devoutly and duly served throughout your Government, The Book of Common Prayer as by Law established read each Sunday and Holiday, and the Blessed Sacrament administered according to the Rites of the Church of England.”²³ The royal governor was charged with bringing the influence of England’s institutional church to the colony. This instruction was a simple foreshadowing to what would take place in 1758. Bartholomew Zouberbuhler, an Anglican priest in Georgia, presented the colonial legislature a document on March 5, 1755, that outlined special treatment for Anglican officials and churches. With no consensus, they tabled the topic and the bill never came to a vote in the upper house or the lower house of the legislature. On February 7, 1757, Edward Barnard, a member of the lower house in the Georgia legislature, presented a bill that established the Church of England within the colony of Georgia. The legislation established the creeds and religious ceremonies of the Anglican Church above other denominations. The bill also called for the creation of more

²² John Gilmary Shea, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, (New York: D. H. MacBride and Company, 1886), 1:438.

²³ Spencer B. King, Jr., ed., *Georgia Voices*, 44-45.

Anglican churches to be built within the colony. The bill passed the lower house on February 10, 1757, and the upper house a year later on February 22, 1758. Governor Henry Ellis signed the bill into colonial law on March 15, 1758.²⁴ The General Assembly divided Georgia into eight ecclesiastical parishes of the Anglican Church: Christ Church, Saint Matthew, Saint George, Saint Paul, Saint Philip, Saint John, Saint Andrew, and Saint James. The law allowed for “the Rector, Church Wardens, and Vestry Men” to collect funds from Georgians living in their parish:

And be it further enacted by the Authority aforesaid that for repairing of the Several Churches already erected, or that shall or may hereafter be erected, with their several Cemeterys, Utencils and Ornaments, and also for providing bread and Wine for the Holy Eucharist, the payment of the Salaries of the Clerk and Sexton, and the making provision for important Poor Persons of the several Parishes respectively what shall be requisite over and above the several fines by this Act Directed to be applied for this purpose, and for other Necessary Parochial Charges, it shall and may be lawful to and for the Rector, Church Wardens, and Vestry Men of the said Several Parishes respectively, and the Majority of them that shall be present at any meeting for this Purpose, of which Publick Notice shall at all times be given in the Church on the Sunday before, immediately after Divine Service, and where there is no Church, at any other convenient place they shall appoint to raise such Sum and Sums of Money in their respective Parishes as shall be requisite and Necessary for all or any of the aforesaid Services, provided the same shall not Yearly or in any One Year, exceed the Sum of Thirty Pounds in the Parish of Saint Paul, or the Sum of Ten Pounds in either of those Parishes where no Churches are yet erected, by an equal Tax to be assessed on the Estate real and personal of all and every the Inhabitants owners and Occupiers of Lands Tenements and Hereditaments within each Parish respectively;...²⁵

Church leaders, the law declared, had the right to raise extra money they deemed necessary for the maintenance of the already-existing churches and for the erection of new churches. This would infringe upon those Georgians who did not attend Anglican

²⁴ A. D. Candler, ed., *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia* (Atlanta, 1907), XVI:65, 282; XVIII:156, 159; Marjorie Daniel, “Anglicans and Dissenters in Georgia,” *Church History* 7, no. 3 (September 1938), 248-249.

²⁵ Act of the General Assembly, March, 15, 1758, in Candler, ed., *Colonial Records*, XVIII:267-268; This excerpt may also be found in King, *Georgia Voices*, 45.

Churches as they would not be in attendance when these decisions were made on their behalf. Even areas without a church were subject to the penalties chosen by the church leaders.

A further law enacted March 4, 1762, required church attendance and restricted travel on Sunday.

That all and every person and persons whatsoever, shall on every Lord's day...having no reasonable or lawful excuse on every Lord's day shall resort to their Parish Church, or some meeting or Assembly of Religious Worship, tolerated and allowed by the Laws of England, and there shall abide, orderly and soberly during the time of prayer and preaching, on pain of forfeiture for every neglect, of the sum of Two shillings and six pence Sterling....No Person whatsoever shall Travel on the Lord's day...except it be to the place of Religious Worship, and to return again, or to visit or relieve any sick person or unless the person or persons were belated the Night before, and then to Travel no further than to some convenient Inn or place of Shelter for that day, or upon some extraordinary occasion, for which he, she, or they be allowed to Travel under the hand of some Justice of the Peace of this Province.²⁶

Though Georgians probably frequently violated these statutes, the Anglican Church further extended control over Georgians. Though the grip may not have been as tight as the laws insisted, they did create a sense of suffocation for those who did not wish to financially support the local parish church or attend it. The Church of England became the official religion of the colony until the Revolution began almost twenty years later.

Under the Church of England, disapproval of all religious groups in Georgia existed. It is also important to note that no initial wording existed in the charter that made the Anglican Church the official established church for the colony of Georgia. This, however, appeared to be what the Board of Trustees intended. All of the trustees professed Anglicanism with five recognized as ministers. Harvey H. Jackson stated in an

²⁶ Act of March 4, 1762, in Candler, *Colonial Records*, XVIII:508-509; King, *Georgia Voices*, 45-46.

article, “Thus although official policy might appear to limit Anglican influence in the colony, in reality the Church of England was expected to play a central role in the lives of Georgians.”²⁷ The Anglican Church had always been, without saying, a dominant force in the colony.²⁸

The 1758 law officially established the Anglicanism already accepted by the royal government. However, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Lutherans, and Quakers together outnumbered the Anglican Georgians. These groups have been called “dissenters” due to their dissenting views against the establishment of the Church of England as the established church of Georgia. All Christian denominations, in general, tended to be accepted in the Georgia colony with no laws forbidding worship. Even Jews by the era of the American Revolution had established themselves enough to not be bothered by the government. Only one record exists of a minister being arrested for preaching his form of Christianity. Officials seized a Baptist named Daniel Marshall from Connecticut and placed him in jail for preaching to the masses. One historian stated that no laws existed that could be used to justify the imprisonment thus they released Marshall and warned him to stop preaching. Marshall was possibly outside the protection of the Toleration Act, however, the Baptist minister continued his ministry while many Anglicans protested with no further action being taken against him.²⁹

It should not come as a surprise that the Church of England became the established church of the colony. An established religion, whether it be the Church of

²⁷ Harvey H. Jackson, “Parson and Squire: James Oglethorpe and the Role of the Anglican Church in Georgia, 1733-1736,” in Phinizy Spalding and Harvey H. Jackson, eds., *Oglethorpe in Perspective: Georgia's Founder After Two Hundred Years* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989), 46.

²⁸ Daniel, “Anglicans and Dissenters in Georgia,” 247-262.

²⁹ Kenneth Coleman, *The American Revolution in Georgia, 1763-1789* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1958), 13; Strickland, *Religion and State in Georgia*, 108-109.

England in Georgia or the Congregationalists in Massachusetts, the idea of government-guided religion was an integral part of colonial society that had its roots from the Catholic-driven civilization of medieval Europe. The Church of England theoretically guided the spiritual affairs of Georgia until almost twenty years after its establishment when a new constitution would be ratified.

The first permanent Georgia constitution, ratified on February 5, 1777, was a product of the War of Independence against Great Britain and acted as a crucial first step to creating an independent government. The new constitution created by Georgians established just a few things about religion that echo louder meanings.

Article VI. The representatives shall be chosen out of the residents in each county, who shall have resided at least twelve months in this State, and three months in this county where they shall be elected...and they shall be of the Protestant religion, and of the age of twenty-one years, and shall be possessed in their own right of two hundred and fifty acres of land, or some property to the amount of two hundred and fifty pounds.³⁰

While discussing the legislative branch of the newly forming Georgia government, those at the Constitutional Convention created a list of conditions for those wanting to be elected. Among the various requirements of age and land and property ownership or wealth, a stipulation placed on Roman Catholics, or any other religion outside Protestant Christianity, refused them the right to hold office. The constitution allowed Protestants to hold office while others were not afforded the opportunity despite their wealth and land holdings. Only the wealthy could serve in the legislature. The poor were not seen as having the capability and without the proper means to stand for a public office. And like the wealthy, only the Protestants had the capacity to stand for a government position. Though a majority of the population would not have thought these measures to be

³⁰ Georgia Constitution of 1777, article 6.

negative, the constitution discriminated against and restricted other religions, including Roman Catholics, believing them inferior. Do the wealthy think themselves equal with the poor? Does a gentleman meet with a commoner? So it is with religion; adherents of the more modern, Protestant doctrines should not be on an equal plane with Catholics, those who still had ties to the darkness of Europe's politics.³¹

The Georgia Constitution of 1777 also stated "All persons whatever shall have the free exercise of their religion; provided it be not repugnant to the peace and safety of the State; and shall not, unless by consent, support any teacher or teachers except those of their own profession."³² Everyone held the right to worship, as long as they worshipped orderly and did not hinder the workings of government or public order. The convention created the constitution as the founding document for the state of Georgia and implemented the new government in the midst of the War of Independence. The officials present created the phrase on religious liberty to give everyone the right to worship as they wished, a founding principle in the colonial charter. However, the idea that it could not have a negative effect on the people or the government targeted the high Anglican population living in Georgia that would use their religion to sway many to the Loyalist side to support the British.

³¹ These questions were asked to highlight the friction between one group of individuals who could serve and another who could not. The wealthy are certainly not on the same level as the poor; those of noble birth not on the same level as the commoner; and Protestants, in the case of the English and those of English background, were on a higher level than Catholics. The colonies were in the midst of a revolution against a European nation; Catholics had ties to the Pope, a European leader of a European institution. The colonists were trying to get away from European politics and procedure thus they did not grant Catholics the right to hold office as they were still unsure of where their loyalty lay. The French were later important in the American Revolution which may or may not have helped the status of Catholics in Georgia; it is this writer's opinion that it did not and that is why this information concerning the French is not included anywhere in this paper; this writer also does not have any source that would support or disprove this claim. This flows in the same vein of Gordon Wood's book that is mentioned throughout the narrative. The Revolution was radical because of its rejection of European norms; the Revolution was radical in Georgia because the end result was that all shall have the free exercise of religion and that all could be elected to public office.

³² Georgia Constitution of 1777, article 56.

Gordon S. Wood states in his book *The American Revolution: A History* that the established Anglican Church in the colonies was abolished at the end of the War of Independence. However, he also states that in Georgia, as with Maryland and South Carolina, the Constitution of 1777 authorized the legislatures to create “multiple establishment of a variety of religious groups, using tax money to support ‘the Christian religion.’”³³ The 1777 constitution does not require the funding of various denominations, but does allow the funding to take place. To say that various Christian denominations have taken over the status of the Church of England is too substantial and authoritative. However, Wood correctly believes that the Georgia Constitution of 1777 did not take away all of the problems associated with religion in colonial Georgia; 1777 was an early year in the revolution of religious expression.

After the convention ratified the new state constitution, Richard Howley became the governor of Georgia in 1780 in the midst of the fighting of the American War of Independence. Later that year, he served in the Continental Congress. Howley, considered a member of the radical Whigs, vehemently opposed the British. Upon his return from Philadelphia, Howley was later elected to the legislature due to his popularity and reputation as a hero fighting the tyranny of the British. In 1784, the same year he died, Howley journeyed to St. Augustine, Florida, and took the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church. He also asked a priest to travel to Savannah to help the Catholics who lived there. It is unknown whether the priest went. However, Howley traveled to Savannah and died there.³⁴

³³ Wood, *The American Revolution: A History*, 130.

³⁴ James F. Cook, *The Governors of Georgia* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005), 37-39; Richard C. Madden, “Catholics in Colonial South Carolina,” *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society in Philadelphia* 73 (March-June 1962), 40.

The Georgia Constitution of 1789 stated that “All persons shall have the free exercise of religion, without being obligated to contribute to the support of any religious profession but their own.”³⁵ Formed concurrently with the United States Constitution, the new state constitution granted the freedom of religion to every group, sect, and denomination while the federal constitution indicated nothing of religious liberty. The United States Constitution initially only stated, “no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.”³⁶ This concept of freedom of conscience was not new from the Georgia Constitution of 1777 since it too declared that everyone had the free exercise of religion. The one difference in the constitution of 1789 from the constitution of 1777 involved the credentials for those allowed to serve in the government. Many of the stipulations remained the same, such as an age limit and property value, but with the Constitution of 1789, a requirement no longer existed to be “of the Protestant religion.”³⁷ Anyone professing any religion, or Christian denomination could serve.

After the states officially ratified the United States Constitution and elected George Washington, the states ratified the Bill of Rights. The United States Constitution was the culmination of all that the Founding Fathers worked toward, an independent nation of their own, where individual rights would be respected. The states considered the Bill of Rights as a safety check on this new government. It established the freedoms held by the people or states that the federal government could not act against. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution states “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or

³⁵ Georgia Constitution of 1789, article 4, section 5.

³⁶ United States Constitution, article 6.

³⁷ Georgia Constitution of 1777, article 6.

abridging the freedom of speech, or of press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”³⁸ With this statement, the federal government became limited in how it could act when dealing with religion. Now that the United States Constitution brought all thirteen states together as one country with the United States Congress making laws for everyone, the states put a guard into place. Now, on the federal level, no established church or doctrine could exist, such as the established Church of England in Georgia.

Catholics and all other groups received true religious liberty. The Church of England was the major religious influence in the colony from the time of the charter. England meant Georgia to serve and provide for the realm in all ways, including the area of religion. Oglethorpe himself stated that the trustees intended Georgia’s creation to be “more advantageous to *Britain* than the Conquest of a Kingdom.”³⁹ Anglicanism denoted a loyalty to the crown as the supreme governor of the church. However, the Church of England became a hindrance to the growth of other religious groups.

The path from the colonial charter of 1732 to the Bill of Rights in 1791 was a long and arduous process. It began by allowing religious liberty to all except Roman Catholics, leading to the establishment of the Church of England as the state church in Georgia. In Georgia, the constitution of 1777 resulted from revolutionary ideas being created and promulgated. When the fighting ceased and the emerging independent nation faced the growing struggle of governing itself, American leaders met to create a stronger federal government; Georgian officials also brought a stronger document forward in order to establish their place in the new republic.

³⁸ United States Constitution, amend. 1.

³⁹ Oglethorpe, “Appeal,” *Publications*, 165.

A similar mapping of documents in regard to change in religion can be found in Massachusetts.⁴⁰ In the midst of the War of Independence in 1776, some prominent officials along with others maintained:

And now with regard to the positive interposition of civil magistracy in behalf of religion, I would say, what has been above suggested with respect to *toleration*, will not disprove the right of the legislature to exert themselves in favor of one religious profession rather than another, they have a right of private judgment as well as others, and are bound to do their *utmost* to propagate *that* which they esteem true. This they are to do by providing *able* and *learned* teachers, to instruct people in the knowledge of what they deem the truth, maintaining them by the public money, though at the same time they have no right in the least degree to endeavor the depression of professions of any religious denomination. Nor let it be said (in order to a perfect toleration) that all religious denominations have an equal right to public countenance, for this would be an evident infringement on the right of private judgment in the members of legislature.⁴¹

A belief in toleration existed for all religious groups. However, the belief existed that an established church helped maintain peace and order, not to necessarily infringe on the private rights or religious beliefs of people. This concept of an established church may seem archaic and somewhat contradictory of there being an established church that did not prohibit freedom of conscience, but for this time period in Massachusetts these ideas were in themselves revolutionary. The Congregationalists, better known as Puritans, had control of the colony since they first landed there in the early 1600s. The idea of

⁴⁰ Massachusetts and Georgia are two diametrically opposed states (or colonies in this time period being discussed). The political and religious ideals of the two states are different now and have always been this way. The individuals and culture that make up the two societies are different. It would seem as though comparing these two states would be a false comparison. However, there is a lesson to be learned from Massachusetts. The Congregationalists had vast more control over society in this state than did the Church of England in Georgia. If a state with that much control by a religious denomination could begin to develop the revolutionary ideals of tolerance and separation of politics from religion, then this could occur much faster and more successful in Georgia. Massachusetts also is important to look at because, although it is very different from Georgia, this state shows an evolution from no tolerance at all to having some tolerance and this is concurrent, like in Georgia, with this American Revolution.

⁴¹ "Worcestriensis Defends Religious Liberty and Congregational Preference, 1776," in *American Political Writing During the Founding Era, 1760-1805*, Charles S. Hyneman and Donald S. Lutz, eds., (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983), 1: 449-454.

tolerance and maintaining a state church mixed the old ways of viewing religion as being a part of the government and allowed for other religious groups to escape persecution for their beliefs.

The Massachusetts Declaration of Rights in 1780 stated much about religion, its correlation with private belief, and with the government. Article two states that:

It is the right as well as the duty of all men in society, publicly, and at stated seasons, to worship the Supreme Being. . . . And no subject shall be hurt, molested, or restrained, in his person, liberty, or estate, for worshipping God in the manner and season most agreeable to the distastes of his own conscience; or for his religious profession or sentiments; provided he doth not disturb the public peace, or obstruct others in their religious worship.⁴²

Everyone has the right to worship as they desire without harming others and receiving harm. The Declaration continues further by saying the legislature has the right to establish “public instructions in piety, religion, and morality,” but in turn, the people have the right to invest their time and money in whatever denomination they choose. The Massachusetts Declaration of Rights ends with this simple phrase: “And no subordination of any one sect or denomination to another shall ever be established by law.”⁴³ The established church so much a part of the society of colonial Massachusetts changed with the emerging independent state. Despite the fact that the institutional church continued into the nineteenth-century in Massachusetts well beyond the end of the American Revolution, a clear shift can be seen in the thinking of officials that would eventually lead to complete liberty in the New England state.⁴⁴

⁴² “The Massachusetts Declaration of Rights, 1780,” in *Massachusetts, Colony to Commonwealth: Documents on the Formation of the Constitution, 1775-1780*, Robert J. Taylor, ed., (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 129-130.

⁴³ “The Massachusetts Declaration of rights, 1780,” 129-130.

⁴⁴ In *From Jamestown to Jefferson: The Evolution of Religious Freedom in Virginia*, the various essays by historians of Virginian religion show an evolution from the established Church of England to

The events in Massachusetts were very similar to the events in Georgia. Looking at the major events and documents in Georgia, like in Massachusetts, a clear change can be seen. It began as “there shall be a liberty of conscience allowed in the worship of God, to all persons inhabiting, or which shall inhabit or be resident within our said province, and that all persons, except Papists, shall have a free exercise of religion”⁴⁵ and ended with the idea that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”⁴⁶ on the national level, which Georgia accepted, and “All persons shall have the free exercise of religion, without being obligated to contribute to the support of any religious profession but their own”⁴⁷ on the state level; for Georgia, all facets of government were brought into a system of checks when dealing with the right of religious expression held by the citizens of the state.

In regard to religion, the American Revolution was revolutionary. To go from having an established religion directed by the government to placing a restriction on the government from infringing on the rights of individuals concerning their worship of God was something entirely new. This process occurred over several years. However, this process happened concurrently with the American Revolution. As the ideas became more pronounced and as the colonists became more inclined to independence and forming a government of their own, the greater religious freedoms became available.

The fact that the colonists overturned what had been considered the norm was avant-garde and radical. Gordon Wood touches on these same ideas in his book *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, only with social issues and not religion. He

complete religious liberty that could be found in the premier document for freedom of conscience: Thomas Jefferson’s Statute for Religious Freedom.

⁴⁵ Georgia Colonial Charter of 1732.

⁴⁶ United States Constitution, amend. 1.

⁴⁷ Georgia Constitution of 1789, article 4, section 5.

promulgates his view by providing a glimpse into Colonial America and how society was established on the principal that some white men had clout and others simply remained on the bottom rung of the social ladder unable to progress forward. According to Wood, the American Revolution was radical not because of the things done. It was radical because of the popular European ideas rejected. The revolutionaries accepted the preposterous idea of the equality of all white men. Even though this equality did not reach some of humanity because of race or gender, the American Revolution was still revolutionary.⁴⁸

This chapter has tried to extend these same ideas that concern religion to Georgia. Wood's book is an important work on the revolution thus far, and his argument can be applied to the religious issue in the obscure colony of Georgia. In colonial America, some Christian denominations held substantial power within the governments. Though there may have been religious tolerance in Georgia, the American Revolution destroyed the possible political power of any one religious organization. Georgia no longer outlawed Catholics. The Church of England was no longer the established denomination. The revolutionaries developed their ultimate goals of liberty, the United States Constitution and the Georgia Constitution of 1789.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Historian Barbara Clark Smith responded to Gordon Wood's interpretation of the American Revolution's radicalism; calling the American Revolution "adequate," she believes the continuation of slavery and the continued restriction of women in politics marks the failure of the American Revolution as an upheaval of archaic ideals. Wood responds with an essay of his own in which he continues to argue that, though African slaves and women were oppressed, most common white men were also oppressed; the Revolution changed old ideals and introduced the idea that "all white men are equal." See: Barbara Clark Smith, "The Adequate Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (October 1994), 684-692; Gordon S. Wood, "Equality and Social Conflict in the American Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (October 1994), 703-716.

⁴⁹ Joel A. Nichols has written an essay that is interesting for the subject of religious liberty in colonial Georgia. Nichols writes from the legal stand point as a means of familiarizing the legal community with the important history of religious liberty for contemporary purposes. Nichols notes the evolution of religious liberty yet he treats the issue of religious-dominated politics lightly and tends to downplay the influence of the Church of England in the colony. Despite this downplay of Anglicanism, Nichols provides

Even after the fact, Georgians held to the same belief. The Georgia Constitution of 1798 in Article IV stated:

Section 10. No person within this State shall, upon any pretence, be deprived of the inestimable privilege of worshipping God in a manner agreeable to his own conscience, nor be compelled to attend any place of worship contrary to his own faith and judgment; nor shall he ever be obliged to pay tithes, taxes, or any other rate, for the building or repairing any place of worship, or for the maintenance of any minister or ministry, contrary to what he believes to be right, or hath voluntarily engaged to do. No one religious society shall ever be established in this State, in preference to another; nor shall any person be denied the enjoyment of any civil right merely on account of his religious principles.⁵⁰

After the revolution took place and Georgia entered the flourishing new republic, Georgians maintained the same ideas. The American Revolution was revolutionary and radical as it overturned the centuries-old ideas of church dominated politics rooted in Europe. The law not only gave liberty to all Christian denomination, but extended this liberty to all religions.

Georgia became such a tolerant haven for religious growth that two Catholic congregations became established simultaneously and independently of each other. Approximately fifty miles northwest of Augusta, a group of English Catholics from Maryland established the Church of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin. This church, commonly referred to as Locust Grove, was the first Catholic church in Georgia. French refugees, or *émigrés*, established the *Congrégation de Saint Jean-Baptiste* in Savannah. The erection of these two congregations of Catholics stands as testament to change found in Georgia at the end of the American Revolution. Georgia became a haven for a group

some excellent insight into the religious occurrences in colonial Georgia. See Joel A. Nichols, "Religious Liberty in the Thirteenth Colony: Church-State Relations in Colonial and Early National Georgia," *New York University Law Review* 80, no. 6 (December 2005): 1693-1772.

⁵⁰ Georgia Constitution of 1798, article 4, section 10.

once ostracized and religious liberty ruled supreme because of the radicalism of the American Revolution.⁵¹

⁵¹ Exact dates are unknown for the two Catholic congregations; however, Locust Grove was established between 1789, after Baltimore became a diocese, and 1792. The Congregation of Saint John the Baptist (the English translation of the above French) is given the date of 1796.

Chapter III

CATHOLICISM SPREADS TO GEORGIA, 1791-1798

The young state of Georgia in the emerging American republic was ripe for religious growth with the end of the American Revolution. The state constitution of 1789 stated, “All persons shall have the free exercise of religion, without being obligated to contribute to the support of any religious profession but their own,”¹ and the Bill of Rights of 1791 stated, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”² The following research will analyze the beginning of this new era in Georgia by specifically examining at the rise of Catholicism. This group, formerly banned under the colonial charter, could now flourish.

Georgia provided the fertile ground and others provided the faith. The majority of Catholic believers in Georgia just after the American Revolution were foreign to the state. A group from Maryland traveled south to form the Church of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Later in the 1790s, French *émigrés* settled along the coast eventually moving to Augusta and other inland places. The major leaders of the Catholic faith were also foreign to the state and journeyed there to minister in the American mission. Irish Catholics played a major role in the development and spread of Catholicism in Georgia. Figures like Father Robert Browne, Bishop John England, Bishop Francis Gartland, and historian Father Jeremiah Joseph O’Connell all had deep Irish roots and were instrumental in the leadership of Georgia Catholics. The following

¹ Georgia Constitution of 1789, article 4, section 5.

² United States Constitution, amendment 1.

research is both the rarely-told story of Georgia Catholics and an examination of the foreign influence found in the state. The individual with the greatest impact was Bishop John England. This chapter will discuss in more depth the immigration by Catholics to Georgia and a bulk of the next chapter is devoted to Bishop England's work in the state until 1832.

The Diocese of Baltimore was established by papal decree in November 1789 with John Carroll nominated as the bishop by his fellow priests in the following year. This was the first diocese in the United States and was commissioned to oversee the meager Catholic population in the emerging new nation. Carroll stated in a letter to Pope Pius VI, whom he calls the Most Eminent Cardinal, that "the Catholic people [of the United States], [who] seem so firm in the faith...will never withdraw from obedience to the sovereign pontiff."³ After trying to reassure the Holy Father, the future bishop requested that the Apostolic See grant the priests working in the American mission the right to elect a bishop for the new diocese, a power belonging to the pope. He further stated his reasoning for this: "The Catholic body...thinks that some favor should be granted to them by the Holy Father, necessary for their permanent enjoyment of the civil rights which they now enjoy, and to avert the dangers which they fear."⁴ The War of Independence was fresh in the minds of many Americans and article six of the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union forbade the practice of "enter[ing] into any conference agreement, alliance, or treaty with any...State;...nor shall any person...accept

³ John Carroll, "Letter to Pope Pius VI, February 27, 1785," Archdiocese of Baltimore, Archives. This letter can also be found in John Gilmary Shea, *Life and Times of the Most Rev. John Carroll* (New York: Edward O. Jenkins' Sons, 1888), 254-256 and in Larry Schweikart, Dave Dougherty, and Michael Allen, eds., *The Patriot's History Reader: Essential Documents for Every American*. New York: Sentinel, 2011, 44-48.

⁴ Ibid.

any present, emolument, office, or title of any kind whatever....”⁵ The new nation was fearful of outside influence and the Catholic population did not wish to rouse any fear concerning the papal appointment of a bishop in America. John Carroll concluded his letter on a somewhat desperate attempt to persuade the Most Eminent Cardinal. Carroll’s words seem as though the pope’s decision could either uplift the Catholic Church to a new level or completely destroy the work that had been done:

As to the method of nominating a bishop, I will say no more at present than this, that we are imploring God in his wisdom and mercy to guide the judgment of the Holy See, that if it does seem proper to allow the priests who have labored for so many years in this vineyard of the Lord to propose to the Holy See the one whom they deem most fit, that some method will be adopted by which a bad feeling may not be excited among the people of this country, [both] Catholic and Protestant.⁶

An assembly of priests elected Carroll in April 1788 and Pope Pius VI approved the request that November.

Carroll received the official news in early 1790 and journeyed to England in July where he desired his friend to consecrate him as the bishop of Baltimore. Thomas W. Spalding makes an important point in his history *The Premier See: A History of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, 1789-1994* when he remarks that two of Carroll’s friends in England, Charles Walmesley who consecrated the bishop-elect and Charles Plowden who preached the sermon, were outspoken opponents to an oath of loyalty. The oath would require Catholic clergy to pledge allegiance to the British government. Carroll, who willingly chose the components of his ordination, seemed to be on a path to supporting full religious liberty in the first diocese in the United States.⁷ It was at some point after

⁵ The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union, Article VI.

⁶ Carroll, “Letter to Pope Pius VI.”

⁷ Thomas W. Spalding, *The Premier See: A History of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, 1789-1994* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1995), 21.

Carroll took his seat in Baltimore that a group requested permission to establish a congregation in Georgia. Georgia was on the extreme periphery of the new republic and of little importance when major centers like New York, Boston, Charleston, and Philadelphia are considered. However, this group did settle in Georgia about fifty miles northwest of Augusta. The settlement, popularly called Locust Grove, was initially known as Mary Land and Mount Panoma.

In addition to being a state that recognized freedom of religion, Georgia also offered the availability of land. Thomas W. Spalding further claimed that Catholics dispersed from Maryland to the low population frontier regions like Kentucky and even Georgia. “Like other yeoman farmers on the seaboard,” he stated, “they made the long leap into the unknown in search of economic betterment. A spirit of adventure may also have played a part in setting them in motion, but religious persecution was not, as often claimed, a factor in the Catholic exodus at the end of the eighteenth century.”⁸ However, other works, such as Regina Combs Hammett’s *History of St. Mary’s County, Maryland*, claim religious intolerance as the reason for the movement of Catholics from Maryland.⁹

Determining an exact date for the arrival of the group from Maryland is difficult. There is no official decree establishing the creation of a parish in Georgia from this time period. Historians have tried to pinpoint a year but none seem to agree. Ernesto Begni in *The Catholic Church in the United States of America* states that “The records of the Church which are in the possession of the Bishop of Savannah date back to the year

⁸ Thomas W. Spalding, “The Maryland Catholic Diaspora,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 8, no. 3 (Summer 1989), 163.

⁹ Regina Combs Hammett, *History of St. Mary’s County, Maryland* (Ridge, MD, 1977), 83.

1790.”¹⁰ David S. Williams cites an encyclopedia and other internet sources on the subject with 1792 as the date of the creation of the Locust Grove church. The Very Reverend William V. Coleman cites 1790 as the year of settlement and John Hanley believes it to be 1790 to 1792. An essay in the official Diocese of Savannah history book cites 1793 as the year of settlement.¹¹ Another historian erroneously states, “This district [Locust Grove in Wilkes County] embraced northeastern Georgia, and was a laborious parish. The church at this point was one of the earliest in the diocese...and was erected about 1826 by some Maryland Catholics who immigrated to that county.”¹²

The only prominent Georgia newspaper of the time period, *Augusta Chronicle and Gazette of the State*, does not mention the establishment of a Catholic church. The newspaper is comprised of personal advertisements and political events occurring around the state, the new nation, and the world; a phrase, “The Freedom of the Press, and Trial by Jury, Shall Remain Inviolable,” pulled from the 1789 Georgia constitution displays the newspaper’s devotion to the idea of liberties obtained by the American Revolution. It is possible that the editor of the paper, and Georgians in general, saw nothing particularly exciting about Catholics coming to the area; after all, the new state constitution allowed for such an event. It is also possible that Georgians at this time cared little about what

¹⁰ Ernesto Begni, ed., *The Catholic Church in the United States of America* (New York, 1914), 3: 194. The exact document that Begni is referring to is difficult to pinpoint. He was writing from the early twentieth-century before Savannah and Atlanta split from each other as separate dioceses. He was likely referring to the sacramental register written by John England that is cited later in this paper; that particular document is now housed in the archives for the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

¹¹ David S. Williams, *From Mounds to Megachurches: Georgia’s Religious Heritage* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 132; William V. Coleman, *The Church in South Georgia* (Savannah, GA: Diocese of Savannah, 1967), 13; John Hanley, *The Archdiocese of Atlanta: A History* (Strasbourg: Editions du Signe, 2006), 8; Jane Abbott, “English Catholics at Locust Grove,” *One Faith...One Family: The Diocese of Savannah, 1850-2000* (Syracuse, NY: Signature Publications, Inc., 2000), 12.

¹² Joseph Jeremiah O’Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia: Leaves of its History, A.D. 1820-A.D. 1878* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1879), 537. It is possible that O’Connell was talking about the actual structure of the church, however, context clues from the text lead this writer to believe he was talking about the establishment of the congregation.

forms of Christianity were practiced around them. The settlement of Catholics from Maryland was not an exciting event at that moment but it was highly important for the growth of the religion in the state.

In a short book published in 1832, Bishop John England detailed the early history of Catholicism in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. He states, “At this period [just before 1793], a few Catholics from Maryland removed into the state of Georgia, to the vicinity of where the church of Locust Grove was subsequently built...yet was the spot on which they settled destined to be that from which the Catholic Church, in this State, should date its origin.”¹³ In one genealogical survey, one of the founding members of the church paid taxes in Wilkes County in 1792.¹⁴ Evidence suggests that the group arrived in the area of Locust Grove just after the consecration of Bishop Carroll in either late 1790 or early 1791 with more continuing to migrate to that area in later years to join together with family members who journeyed there years earlier.

The county at that time was Wilkes County and the closest large town was Washington, Georgia, the first place named for the founding father and first president of the United States. Washington, according to one Catholic historian, was “Founded by a colony of French Huguenots and native Virginians [while] its people were wealthy, well-bred, intellectual, and to this day [in 1894] the old families of Washington retain these

¹³ John England, *A Brief Account of the Introduction of the Catholic Religion into the States of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, U.S.A.: of the Creation of the Diocese of Charleston, the State of Religion, and the Wants of the Church in That Quarter* (Dublin: T. O’Flanagan, Printer, 1832), 18. This is also published in *The Works of the Right Rev. John England, First Bishop of Charleston, Collected and Arranged Under the Advice and Direction of His Immediate Successor, The Right Rev. Ignatius Aloysius Reynolds, and Printed for Him, in Five Volumes* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1849), III:246-263. The date of 1793 comes from the mentioning of Reverend Dr. S. F. O’Gallagher who began his ministry in Charleston around that year.

¹⁴ Mary Hart Lockett, *The Locketts of Georgia: A Genealogical History of Thomas Hussey Lockett and William Rhody Lockett of Wilkes/Warren/Taliaferro Counties, Georgia—Their Ancestors and Known Descendants* (Wichita Falls, TX: Nortex Press, 1976), 8.

distinguishing marks. Prejudice,” Maguire continues, “to Catholicity was strong; to admit a Catholic into their social circles would have been next to high treason, and the barriers of their exclusiveness were for the first time lowered to admit and welcome a Catholic *Semmes*.” The Semmes, along with Thompsons, Lucketts, Griffins, O’Neills, and Ryans, were the primary families who established the Church of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary approximately eighteen miles south of Washington, Georgia.

Harry Wright Newman, in a genealogical survey of Maryland Semmes and kindred families, provides interesting background into some of the characters instrumental in developing the church in Georgia. Joseph Thompson, born in Charles County, Maryland, relocated to Hancock County, Georgia, just a few scant miles south of the location of Purification Church. He died in 1810 and his will was probated in Wilkes County. In his will, he designated his son, Henry Bradford Thompson, to set aside land for a priest’s home, a chapel, and a cemetery.¹⁵ John England, on April 2, 1824, recorded this donation in the short history written at the beginning of the sacramental register for the Purification Church:

Ordered that a mass be celebrated every year upon some day most convenient to the 9th day of February in the Church of the Purification of the B.V.M. for the repose of the soul of Joseph Thompson.—And that the Pastor of the said Church do celebrate the same, or cause it to be celebrated & that he do on the day previous to said celebration publish the same to the congregation, & request their attendance, thereat, to pray for the repose of the soul of the said Joseph as a principal benefactor who bestowed ground for the Church & burying place & for the support of the Pastor.¹⁶

¹⁵ Harry Wright Newman, *The Maryland Semmes and Kindred Families: A Genealogical History of Marmaduke Semme(s), Gent., and His Descendants, Including the Allied Families of Greene, Simpson, Boarman, Matthews, Thompson, Middleton, and Neale* (Baltimore: The Maryland Historical Society, 1956), 259-260.

¹⁶ Sacramental Register of the Purification Church, 1822-1844, Archdiocese of Atlanta, Archives.

Mary Hart Lockett's genealogical survey on the Lucketts of Georgia is also an interesting source for delving into the background of another family who journeyed from Maryland. The Lucketts are traceable to Kent from about 1600. The original Lockett immigrant to Maryland was Anglican, however, his wife raised his children Roman Catholic. In 1792, Thomas Hussey Lockett migrated to Georgia. He originated in Charles County, Maryland, and was a cousin to the Semmes family. Thomas also married a Semmes in 1794 and "a dispensation was needed as they were cousins."¹⁷

One of the cousins of Joseph's wife, Elizabeth, settled in South Carolina along the Savannah River. Hugh Middleton named his South Carolina plantation Locust Hill, apparently "after his ancestral estate in Maryland."¹⁸ It is no mere coincidence that an important benefactor to Purification Church had a social and family tie to a man naming his plantation Locust Hill after a family estate in Maryland. Hugh Middleton was also, like Joseph Semmes, born in Charles County, Maryland. His wife was related to Middleton and also had a connection to the Maryland Locust Hill. Other Middletons also settled with the Thompson family in Hancock County, Georgia. Locust Grove was the common use for the first Catholic church in Georgia, along with other bynames. John Hanley states, "The settlement soon became known as 'Locust Grove' and was named for the large grove of locust trees that grew in the area surrounding the settlement."¹⁹ Jane Abbott mentions this point, as well, in *One Faith...One Family: The Diocese of Savannah, 1850-2000*.²⁰ It is possible that locust trees once formed a stunning grove in the area, though they are no longer present; however, it is far more likely that the name

¹⁷ Lockett, *The Lucketts of Georgia*, 1-8; Parish Register of St. John's Catholic Church, 1796-1816, Diocese of Savannah, Archives.

¹⁸ Newman, *The Maryland Semmes*, 278.

¹⁹ Hanley, *The Archdiocese of Atlanta*, 8.

²⁰ Jane Abbott, "English Catholics at Locust Grove," in BeVard, ed., *One Faith...One Family*, 13.

originated in Maryland. As previously stated, the Lockett family that relocated to this same area and was a part of forming the first Catholic Congregation were cousins to the Semmes family through a marriage in the 1740s in Charles County, Maryland. The two primary families that developed the Church of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary were close relatives.²¹

John England wrote the first history of the congregation at Locust Grove. Housed in the archives for the Archdiocese of Atlanta at the beginning of the sacramental register is a very short accounting of events from the arrival until 1830.

In the year 1790 the Rt. Revd Doctor John Carroll was appointed & consecrated first Bishop of Baltimore, with jurisdiction over the United States of America, in which Union, the State of Georgia was comprehended. In the year 1794 the Revd Mr. O'Reilly visited the State & remained for a short time in the vicinity of Warren, Wilkes, & Columbia [counties]. – In the year 1797 the Revd L. LeMercier visited the same place. The Revd Mr. Souzi arrived about the end of the year 1800 or the beginning of 1801. – A log church was then built & a cemetery was laid out and enclosed. – In about 17 months time he departed from the State –²²

It is important to remember that John England was writing from the 1820s after he was already consecrated as the bishop of Charleston so he was in contact with the original settlers to the area. His brief history holds a few interesting facts concerning the first Catholic congregation in Georgia. There was no priest that journeyed south with the Maryland immigrants; priests were few in the new nation and Bishop Carroll had other uses for them. Priests who were in the vicinity, perhaps in Charleston, ventured south to administer the sacraments; and, the priests who did visit usually did not stay long.

One priest did eventually travel to the area for a more permanent tenure. Father Jean Le Moine arrived in Locust Grove in 1793 or 1794 and traveled between that

²¹ Lockett, *The Locketts of Georgia*, 6.

²² Sacramental Register of the Purification Church, 1822-1844.

congregation, Augusta, and Savannah, performing the sacraments for the few Catholics he discovered in those areas. The exact date of Le Moine's death is unknown; however, he died of yellow fever near Savannah sometime in 1796. Olivier Le Mercier gives an account to Bishop Carroll in Baltimore:

My first care was to inquire about Mr. Le Moine. I soon discovered that he was dead but the circumstances which attended his death were not such as it was reported to you. He died within a few days although he had been languishing for a long while before....The day after they proceeded to the burial which was attended by all the ___ inhabitants of Savannah who had for him the greatest respect & consideration. There were in Savannah great many French sailors of a French privateer laying then in the port of Savannah. There were also a great many Spaniards....These Spaniards did insist that the greatest honor and respect be paid to that venerable priest and had him buried with all the pomp generally used in such cases...

Le Mercier states, "There is no appearance of having ever here a congregation, being but two or three families willing to attend to it. I will perform the funeral ceremonies on Mr. LeMoine's grave some time before I go away."²³ It was apparent that Father Jean Le Moine was quite influential in the areas in which he ministered; he was greatly admired. Father Olivier Le Mercier was to take the place of Le Moine as the resident priest of the Georgia Catholics.

French immigrants from Saint-Domingue and other portions of the French colonial empire fled the effects of the French Revolution. Saint-Domingue was in the midst of a slave revolt in 1796. An obituary from Savannah's *Morning News* in 1879 commented on the origin of French *émigrés* living in Georgia:

The deceased [ninety-year-old Victoria Barie] was a native of San Domingo, and was a daughter of the late F. B. Coquillon, a planter of that island, who came to Georgia after the terrible massacres of 1793, when many others, whose names are identified with our city, found a refuge on

²³ "Olivier Le Mercier to Bishop John Carroll, October 14, 1796, 4T9," Bishop John Carroll Letters and Papers, Archdiocese of Baltimore, Archives.

our soil from the brutalities of the insurrectionists....The remains will be interred this afternoon in the Catholic Cemetery.²⁴

The *Congrégation de Saint Jean-Baptiste*, later Anglicized to Congregation of Saint John the Baptist, in Savannah was established in that year with Le Mercier, as stated above, taking the mantle of priest for the Catholics who gathered there. The Parish of St. John's Catholic Church encompassed Savannah, Augusta, Locust Grove, and the other scattered areas of early Georgia. Le Mercier arrived in Savannah on October 9, 1796, and in the sacramental register, the first recorded baptisms took place in Savannah on November 13, 1796, with Le Mercier officiating. Surnames such as DeMelesse, Renouveau, Gilbert, and de Boisfeuillet attest to the French background for many of the Catholics in Georgia; these surnames were more prominent in Savannah, but can be found in other counties and towns showing the diffusion of the French throughout the state. The presence of individuals taking the sacraments in Savannah bearing the surname of Semmes, the primary family associated with Locust Grove and the Maryland settlers, is also a testament to the emigration of Catholics from one area in Georgia to another.²⁵

Of primary importance, however, is the reasoning behind the immigration of French Catholics to Georgia. As stated above, the French Revolution was in full force and slaves rebelled in Saint-Domingue. Realizing the revolutionary ideals taking place in these two settings is important for understanding why French Catholics moved to Savannah.

The French Revolution was a major disruption, not only in France, but throughout Europe. "Seldom," historian William Doyle writes, "has an upheaval in one country had such widespread repercussions beyond its borders; and the Revolution in turn was deeply

²⁴ "Death of an Aged Lady," *Daily Morning News* (Savannah, Georgia), August 20, 1879.

²⁵ Parish Register of St. John's Catholic Church, 1796-1816, Diocese of Savannah, Archives.

affected by how foreigners reacted to it.”²⁶ Beginning in 1789 and having several stages that lasted until Napoleon took control and finished solidifying power around 1802, the French Revolution brought the radical change of many institutions in France. The monarchical government changed and the institution of the Catholic Church was also secularized.

The Roman Catholic clergy were part of the First Estate and held an important place in French society. They were exempt from certain taxes and were treated as nobility. “The majority of the French,” a contemporary said, “desired the suppression of the feudal regime...and above all, religious tolerance. The influence of the clergy on temporal affairs revolted everybody; and as true religious sentiment is that which most avoids intrigues and power, there was no longer any faith in those who used religion to influence the affairs of this world.”²⁷ Roman Catholicism was the primary religion of the French people and this was a religion with much outside influence found in the Papacy at the court in Rome. In order to solidify the internal power of the newly-forming French government at the fall of King Louis XVI, certain decrees were issued.

As early as November 2, 1789—almost four months after the storming of the Bastille—the National Assembly decreed the confiscation of church property. “The National Assembly decrees...That all ecclesiastical property is at the disposal of the nation, upon condition of providing in a suitable manner for the expenses of worship, the maintenance of its ministers, and the relief of the poor.”²⁸ Monastic vows were prohibited

²⁶ William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), vii.

²⁷ E. L. Higgins, ed., *The French Revolution as Told by Contemporaries* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1938), 16-17.

²⁸ John Hall Stewart, ed., *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), 158.

a mere three months after that on February 13, 1790. “The constitutional law of the kingdom shall no longer recognize solemn monastic vows of persons of either sex....All individuals, of either sex, at present in monasteries and religious houses may leave them by making their declaration before the local municipality, and they shall be provided for immediately by a suitable pension.”²⁹ It was these leading decrees by the National Assembly that began the upward climb to more control of the Catholic Church in France.

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy was established on July 12, 1790. This represented one of the final steps to the National Assembly taking control of the Catholic Church and integrating it into the revolutionary government. The Civil Constitution established the new episcopal sees and metropolitan districts for the Catholic Church in France; these new dioceses and districts were to oversee the individual eighty-three departments. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy also created the guidelines for appointing bishops and other *curé* and regulated the salary of all the clergy in France. Title II of the decree required the clergy to take oaths of office before they could “perform any curial function.”³⁰

The National Assembly took their control of the clergy further on June 9, 1791. Any document issued by the Pope or any papal emissary was “null and non-effective” unless the National Assembly viewed the decree and allowed it. Those who broke this law were to be “prosecuted criminally as disturbers of public order, and punished with the penalty of civic degradation.”³¹ To disturb the public order, or to be against the revolutionary zeal that was taking place, was usually punished with death; this occurred to a greater extent under the Terror.

²⁹ Ibid., 168.

³⁰ Ibid., 178.

³¹ Ibid., 190.

Napoleon helped bring stability to the continuing upheaval by the peasantry due to their devotion to the Catholic Church. In July 1801 after secret negotiations with the Pope, Napoleon signed the Concordat with the Papacy. This Concordat recognized the primary religion of the French people to be Roman Catholicism and recognized the power of the Papacy, in concert with the French government, to appoint bishops and archbishops. This agreement gave some of the power back to the Catholic Church that was lost during the French Revolution.³²

In Saint-Domingue, the religious views of the French colonists were not threatened; however, it was their financial base of slavery that was turned upside down. African slaves, spurred by the happenings in France, rebelled against their masters. King Louis XIV issued *The Code Noir* (the Black Code) in 1685. This code of laws became the foundation on which French colonial slavery stood. This edict by the king gives some insight into the religious atmosphere found in Saint-Domingue before the revolution took place. Article III stated: “We forbid any public exercise of any religion other than the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman; we wish that the offenders be punished as rebels and disobedient to our orders.”³³ The king thrust upon the colonies the tenets of the Catholic faith and the superiority of the white Europeans over the native and African slaves.

Over one hundred years later after the fall of King Louis XVI, the National Convention declared the abolition of slavery in the French Empire. “The National Assembly declares that slavery of the *nègres* is abolished in all the colonies;

³² Mason and Rizzo, eds., *The French Revolution: A Document Collection*, 337-338.

³³ Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, eds., *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006), 50.

consequently, it decrees that all men living in the colonies, without distinction of color, are French citizens and enjoy all the rights guaranteed by the constitution.”³⁴

In the midst of the slave revolts, Napoleon Bonaparte in 1800 declared that the colonies shall be governed using special laws dictated from Paris. Toussaint Louverture challenged Napoleon’s authority and helped establish other laws. The Constitution of the French Colony of Saint-Domingue declared that the island was still part of the French Empire; its citizens would “live and die free and French.” Slavery was completely abolished and every man, despite color, was eligible to hold any government position; Toussaint Louverture was declared to be the governor. Referring to religion, Title Three stated: “The Catholic, Apostolic and Roman religion is the only one that is publicly professed.”³⁵

By 1804, all desire to be French citizens was thrown off. In 1805, the Haitian Constitution was created and Haiti became an independent nation. “Slavery is abolished forever,” Article Two stated. Article Twelve further showed outrage of the past aggression by declaring that “No white man, regardless of his nationality, may set foot in this territory as a master or landowner, nor will he ever be able to acquire any property.”³⁶

The religious atmosphere in Saint-Domingue changed little over the course of the slave revolts and in the end was not very different from what was found in the United States. However, the attitude toward white men was completely different. A former Frenchman would be loathed to seek safety in Saint-Domingue leaving the United States in the local vicinity as a haven. Savannah was a keen location for its importance as a port

³⁴ Ibid., 132.

³⁵ Ibid., 167-170.

³⁶ Ibid., 192.

and its close proximity to the Caribbean. No other quote displays the opposition to those who found themselves in Savannah in the late 1790s and early 1800s than what was said by Camboulas in the National Convention on February 4, 1794: “Since 1789, a great transformation remained incomplete; the nobilities of the sword and the Church were eliminated, but an aristocracy of the skin still ruled; it has just breathed its last. Equality is established.”³⁷ The power of nobility, the power of the Roman Catholic Church, and financial advancement created on the backs of slaves were all cast down. These three ideals forever changed by the revolutionary zeal which began in France led to French Catholics settling in the United States and, most importantly for this research, in Savannah, Georgia.

Victoria Barie’s 1879 obituary gives another hint about the people migrating to Georgia. Being French was a common trait along with having a wealthy background. Victoria Barie was born in “San Domingo” around 1789. She travelled with her father, F. B. Coquillon, “a planter of that island, who came to Georgia after the terrible massacres of 1793, when many others, whose names are identified with our city, found a refuge on our soil from the brutalities of the insurrectionists.”³⁸

On January 17, 1805, Antoine Carles wrote to Bishop John Carroll that two members of his congregation in Savannah applied for marriage. Carles stated that it was “not in my power to grant dispensation in such a degree [sic] of consanguinity” due to the fact that it was a man seeking to marry one of his nieces, “a daughter [sic] of his sister.” James Philip Rossignol de Grandmont, forty-five, and Maria Magdalen Henriette Rossignol de Belleanie, twenty-six, were both born on the island of Saint-Domingue and

³⁷ Ibid., 129.

³⁸ “Death of an Aged Lady,” *Daily Morning News* (Savannah, Georgia), August 20, 1879.

belonged to “one of the most distinguished and once the most fortunate families.” That family, however, was “now reduced in a state of such a mediocrity which leaves them no comfort by themselves by joining together the shattered remains of the fortune with their mutual industry.”³⁹

This French family living in Savannah had ties to the island of Saint-Domingue. Further, this family was also prominent enough to have ties to Paris, the city *par excellence*. Grandmont is noted by Carles to be “a member of the parliament of Paris.” The priest does not differentiate between whether Grandmont was a member of the law courts under the *ancien régime* or a member of the National Assembly or Legislative Assembly in the revolutionary era. Carles used the present tense when referring to Grandmont’s position in the parliament though Grandmont did fall on hard times and move to Savannah. It is probably likely that Grandmont, being a forty-five-year-old man in 1805, was recently a member of one of the revolutionary assemblies in Paris after the French Revolution began in 1789. The slave revolt in the future nation Haiti helped destroy his property holdings based on the colonial institution of slavery while the anti-Catholic sentiment of the French Revolution helped to destroy his social standing; after all, Grandmont and his niece were “distinguished by their piety and their attachment to the antique religion of our fathers.” Being a faithful Catholic who showed deep “respect and...submission to the laws of the holy church” would never see priests and bishops installed by a temporal leader as was occurring in France.⁴⁰ The same can be seen in the example of John Francis Pouyat and his desire to marry Maria Lamaignere, both of

³⁹ Antoine Carles, “Letter to Bishop John Carroll, January 17, 1805, 2G3,” Bishop John Carroll Letters and Papers, Archdiocese of Baltimore, Archives.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Saint-Domingue, who applied for marriage to Carles just days after Grandmont's petition.⁴¹

Dr. Thomas Paul Thigpen offers another instance of a French flight to Savannah. The Cottineaus sought refuge in the Caribbean after leaving the troubles in France, but the slave rebellions there forced them to find a new haven. Savannah offered that haven and it was in 1803 that the Abbé Carles also journeyed from France to Saint-Domingue and finally to Savannah where his sister, Madame Cottineau, was already living. It was at this point when Carles became the rector of the Church of Saint John the Baptist.⁴²

Following in the vein of religious liberty granted by the American Revolution, Georgia further compounded the ideals of religious liberty with a new state constitution in 1798.

Section 10. No person within this State shall, upon any pretence, be deprived of the inestimable privilege of worshipping God in a manner agreeable to his own conscience, nor be compelled to attend any place of worship contrary to his own faith and judgment; nor shall he ever be obliged to pay tithes, taxes, or any other rate, for the building or repairing any place of worship, or for the maintenance of any minister or ministry, contrary to what he believes to be right, or hath voluntarily engaged to do. No one religious society shall ever be established in this State, in preference to another; nor shall any person be denied the enjoyment of any civil right merely on account of his religious principles.⁴³

This constitution further solidified the right of religious groups to freely worship and declared that no single religious organization could be established as the principal

⁴¹ Carles, "Letter to Bishop John Carroll, March 13, 1805, 2G5," Bishop John Carroll Letters and Papers, Archdiocese of Baltimore, Archives.

⁴² Thomas Paul Thigpen, "French-Speaking Catholics and Their Descendants in Savannah," in BeVard, ed., *One Faith... One Family*, 17.

⁴³ Georgia Constitution of 1798, article 4, section 10.

doctrine for the state. Around that same year, the state legislature of Georgia incorporated the Church of Saint John the Baptist in Savannah.⁴⁴

Georgia offered economic prosperity for those Catholics who left Maryland and French-controlled territory. Thomas Spalding states, “With all the opportunities for economic and cultural improvement, however, only the Maryland Catholics who moved to Georgia...could claim as a whole any superiority over their non-Catholic neighbors....Thomas Lockett had five slaves and no land in 1794, three years after his removal to Georgia, but eighteen slaves and 540 acres of land when he died in 1827.”⁴⁵ French Catholics could also claim economic betterment. According to the sacramental records, some French *émigrés* carried their slaves away from the rebellion in Saint-Domingue and were able to obtain land, as where in Haiti, as stated earlier, white men were outlawed from owning property. Georgia also offered a haven for Catholics who were oppressed.

⁴⁴ John England, *A Brief Account*, 20.

⁴⁵ Spalding, “Maryland Catholic Diaspora,” 170-171.

Chapter IV

THE FAILING CHURCH AND ITS REVIVAL: BISHOP JOHN ENGLAND'S WORK IN GEORGIA, 1798-1832

The area of Georgia was vast and Catholics were few. Priests were still difficult to find to minister to the lay people. Trustees of the church helped to maintain the congregations, but there was a breaking away of devotion to the tenets of the Roman Catholic Church and children were not taught or consistently baptized at birth. Le Mercier and Reverend Carles primarily served the Parish of St. John in Savannah with pastors, like Robert Browne, who served Augusta; however, these individuals, though influential, were limited in their abilities. John England recounts later:

Savannah is about one hundred and twenty miles south west of Charleston; so that there was some opportunity afforded to their pastors occasionally to see each other. Augusta, which was about the same distance, in a north westwardly direction from Savannah, and on the river of that name, was sometimes visited; but owing to the difficulties and the distance, the upper and original colony very seldom had any spiritual opportunity. There, some of the members fell off into other congregations, and in many instances the children were neglected.¹

The distance also proved more difficult with the transportation available at the time. There were no railroads and most certainly no motorized vehicles. Traveling by water was also not an option for the inland settlements. "Inch by inch in the rumbling and crowded stage or on horseback must these long visitations be accomplished."² The

¹ John England, *A Brief Account of the Introduction of the Catholic Religion into the States of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, U.S.A.; of the Creation of the Diocese of Charleston, the State of Religion, and the Wants of the Church in That Quarter* (Dublin: T. O'Flanagan, Printer, 1832), 20.

² Joseph Jeremiah O'Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia: Leaves of its History, A.D. 1820-A.D. 1878* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1879), 537.

journey was tiresome with rest only coming in short moments before continuing the journey that took days to complete. There was a falling away from the Catholic faith in some places in Georgia.

J. J. O'Connell mentions scandalous behavior taking place in Augusta by early priests. "A schism never existed; but, in consequence of the disorganized state of ecclesiastical affairs, some unworthy priests...exercised the function of the holy ministry." He continues: "The evils were not removed for many years, and were effaced only by the noble vindication of Catholic virtue, and the sanctity of the priestly character restored in public estimation, by the blameless lives and irreproachable manners of several holy and learned ecclesiastics."³ Bishop England also remarks about a certain scandal taking place: "Georgia had however been exposed to affliction. The pastor who had succeeded Mr. Browne in Augusta, after that church had been for some considerable time vacant, became negligent and scandalous, and finally apostatized. His place was however supplied by the Rev. Mr. Cooper, a zealous American priest, who was a convert to the church."⁴

"In the year 1808 Baltimore was raised to an Arch Diocese of which Georgia still continued part—The duties of Warren, Wilkes &c [Locust Grove] were performed by the Priests of Augusta."⁵ Baltimore became an Archdiocese; John Carroll died in 1815 and was succeeded by Archbishop Neale. With territorial expansion and population growth at the beginning of the nineteenth-century, there was need for another diocese. "In the year 1820," John England wrote in the sacramental records for the Church of the Purification

³ Ibid., 555.

⁴ England, *A Brief Account*, 24. Neither O'Connell nor Bishop England gives the name of the priest who was scandalous and a hindrance to the growth of the church in Augusta.

⁵ Sacramental Register of the Purification Church, 1822-1844, Archdiocese of Atlanta, Archives.

of the Blessed Virgin Mary, “the Diocese of Charleston was created & the Rt. Revd Doctor John England was appointed & consecrated the first Bishop thereof. Georgia was part of this Diocese.”⁶ The Diocese of Charleston was formally created on July 11, 1820, and encompassed North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. John England was consecrated in the Church of Saint Finnbar in Cork, Ireland, on September 21 of that year and arrived in the new diocese that December. John England served as priest in Bandon in the Diocese of Cork in Ireland before he was consecrated bishop and journeyed to the United States. “Of medium size, regular, and manly features,” J. J. O’Connell describes upon Bishop England’s arrival in the United States,

[he is] strong, well-modulated voice, chiselled [sic] lip, high and retreating brow, strong-set jaw, an eye blazing and flashing like crushed diamonds, he stood the fearless tribune of a nation; clad in robes pontifical, Rome’s jewelled [sic] signet glittering on his hand, and the pectoral cross...resting on his fearless breast, he appeared like the high priest of one world and the prophet of the next.⁷

Bishop England was young and handsome and greatly admired by the people in his new diocese. If anyone could handle the ecclesiastical problems in Georgia, it was Bishop John England.

Bishop England recounted in another work that “Upon his arrival, the bishop found only two churches occupied, and two priests doing duty; one at Charleston, and one at Augusta.” Bishop England then traveled to Savannah “where the church was vacant; the number of Catholics was about five hundred, which was probably one-eighth of the population;” Robert Browne was appointed rector of the church. At Locust Grove, England gathered the remainder of the congregation of the Purification Church and “encouraged them to repair their church, leading them to hope they might soon have a

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ O’Connell, 50.

pastor.”⁸ Another account specifies January 1821 as the time England journeyed to Locust Grove: “In the latter part of January 1821 the Bishop first visited Warren & Wilkes.—In that year the old Church [made of logs in 1801] was taken down & a frame building was erected.” The hope that Bishop England granted the congregation at Locust Grove on the matter of a pastor was achieved with Father Francis O’Donoghue ministering until 1823 and Patrick O’Sullivan following in the same position.⁹ The Catholic Church in Georgia was in serious disrepair. Congregations were growing smaller and children were not being taught their catechism and they were not properly baptized and confirmed until much later in life. Bishop John England had much to do in order to bring back piety to Georgia Catholics and to help continue the spread of the faith in Georgia.

One aid used by Bishop England was the *United States Catholic Miscellany*. This was the first Catholic newspaper in the United States and was created by Bishop England as a means of spreading Catholic news throughout the nation and to publish theological essays and letters in order to strengthen the faithful. The editors released the first issue on June 5, 1822. “The object of this publication is to supply an apparent want in the United States of North America. In these states perfect freedom of conscience exists; hence, men of various religions have fled hither as to an asylum from the persecutions of the dominant sects in other countries. Almost every division of Christians here,” the editor continues, “has its peculiar publications, for the expositions of its doctrines, the communication of facts, and if necessary, the vindication of its tenets. The Roman Catholics of these states form a considerable portion of the citizens; it is natural they

⁸ England, *A Brief Account*, 25.

⁹ Sacramental Register of the Purification Church, 1822-1844.

should be desirous of having a similar publication for like purposes.”¹⁰ The congregation of Purification Church, in a meeting, offered as a resolution their support of the *Miscellany* as a means of promulgating the faith: “*Resolved*, That the existence and circulation of the Catholic Miscellany is considered by us as highly essential, to vindicate our religion from scurrilous and foul aspersions; to remove those prejudices, and correct those errors and mistakes, which often result from the want of proper information; and...it deserves the support of every Catholic in the Union.”¹¹

In 1826, four important events occurred: Bishop England spoke before Congress, the first Convention of the Roman Catholic Church of Georgia was convened, and two important documents for the diocese were published and dispersed. On January 8, 1826, Bishop John England was the first Roman Catholic leader to address a joint session of the United States Congress. He spoke of Catholicism’s compatibility with American democracy. “I am the minister of a religion professed by a minority of our citizens; standing, by the permission of the pastor of a different communion, in accordance with the wish of some of my friends and their associates, [them being] members of the legislature of this nation, to address you upon the subject of religion.”¹² He was an excellent speaker full of fervor; it is no surprise that Bishop England became a naturalized citizen the next month.¹³ This achievement shows the charisma of the young bishop of Charleston and opened an eventful year for Georgia Catholics; Bishop England used the same initiative in Georgia that he used in addressing the United States House of

¹⁰ *United States Catholic Miscellany* (Charleston, SC), June 5, 1822.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, March 3, 1825.

¹² John England, *The Works of the Right Rev. John England, First Bishop of Charleston, Collected and Arranged Under the Advice and Direction of His Immediate Successor, The Right Rev. Ignatius Aloysius Reynolds, in Five Volumes* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1849), IV:173.

¹³ *Catholic Diocese of Charleston: A History* (Strasbourg, France: Éditions du Signe, 2008), 17.

Representatives and the Senate on the tenets of the Roman Catholic faith and “the equal ground of religious right.”¹⁴

The Catechism of the Roman Catholic Faith was the first English language Roman Catholic catechism printed in the United States. As stated above, the tenets of the Roman Catholic were found wanting throughout the diocese, primarily in Georgia. This catechism, developed by John England, helped bring instruction to the far reaches of the Diocese of Charleston and established sound doctrine where priests were unavailable and few in number. The Constitution of the Diocese of Charleston brought unity to the dispersed Catholics of each of the three states. Catholics moved to the far reaches of the diocese and often, as mentioned several times, had no priest and sometimes no churches. “The portions of our church government are very like to those of the government of this Union. The entire consists of diocesses, the bishop of each of which holds his place, not as the deputy of the Pope, but as a successor to the Apostles; as the governor,” the preface continues, “of each state holds his place not as the deputy of the President, but as vested therewith by the same power which vests the President with his own authority.”¹⁵ By comparing a Catholic diocese and its members to the United States, Bishop England and those who helped negotiate the constitution were creating a sense of Catholic unity. Each Catholic who had access to the constitution (and they would through the *Miscellany*) would be included in the ideas circulating from their church leaders. Strengthening and codifying laws would give the diocese more uniformity and structure; Catholics on the fringes would less likely leave the Roman Catholic Church. Though they may not have had a priest, the idea that the bishop and other church leaders were

¹⁴ England, *Works*, IV:190.

¹⁵ England, *Works*, V:92.

structuring the diocese they were citizens of helped create a sense of ecclesiastical work being done.

The first Convention of the Roman Catholic Church of Georgia occurred at Augusta's Church of the Holy Trinity on April 2, 1826, in which lay delegates from the District of the Holy Trinity in Augusta, the District of Saint John the Baptist in Savannah, and the District of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Locust Grove met with Bishop England and delegates of the clergy. After being seated at the altar, Bishop England addressed the delegates:

There are some concerns of its [the Church in Georgia] government which God has committed wholly and exclusively to the charge of those whom the Holy Ghost hath placed bishops to govern the Church. In the administration of other matters, those prelates are aided by the counsel and the co-operation of their clergy—but in the regulation of its temporal concerns, they have not unfrequently [sic] found it prudent and beneficial to request aid from the zeal and the experience of the Laity. According to the principles of that constitution upon which we have agreed, one of the great objects of the present convention is to consult together how the several scattered portions of our flock in this State might be able to co-operate for their mutual benefit, their increasing affection, and by what prudent means they might insure to themselves the certain aids of Religion, and transmit them to their descendants. You are yourselves equally well aware as is he who addressed you, of the serious obstacles which have hitherto generally impeded the prospects of our Church in this State...Our few dissociated congregations had no bond of union but their common faith. It is true they were united in doctrine, in discipline, and in sacraments, but they did not co-operate as one body; each congregation confined itself merely to its own concerns, and appeared totally regardless of any general object, and altogether insensible to the welfare of the body at large.¹⁶

The issue in the Catholic Church in Georgia was the lack of unity. Towns were spread out and distant from each other yet nothing was being done to bridge these gaps. Bishop England, with this convention, involved the lay leadership, or trustees, who had a hand in the governance of the church in Georgia since the first Catholics settled there in the early

¹⁶ England, *Works*, IV: 383.

1790s due to the lack of priests and members of the clergy. Bishop England included this institution that became established during a time of spiritual deficiency in order to fix this new deficiency now being found among Georgia Catholics; after all, the trustees did have “zeal” and “experience” in these matters. Bishop England continues:

If you confine your views to the individual wants and interests of separate and single congregations, you will do little in your distinct churches, and nothing as a body. Years will elapse, and you will remain just where you now are. But if you consult together, your zeal will be enkindled, you will be animated to exertion, and in your co-operation you will prosper. You will grow into a large compact church: instead of continuing to be dissociated, little, scattered portions.—The means of our prosperity are in the State, but your exertion is required to make them available.¹⁷

The lay delegates and the clergy separated to deliberate on all that was said. In the spirit of spreading the faith, the trustees selected Saint Peter as the patron saint of the Roman Catholic Church in Georgia. Officers were also elected from the lay delegates and the clergy in order to continue the spread of the faith and to bring more unity.

Catholics were continuing to spread throughout the state. In October 1826, two priests from Augusta and Locust Grove travelled to Madison, Georgia, a town approximately forty-five miles west of Purification Church. They initially journeyed there to administer the sacraments to a dying man but found four adults and two children to baptize and a couple whose marriage had not yet been blessed by a priest.¹⁸ Someone who designates himself “A TRAVELLER” tells of the events occurring in Madison as he passed through the town. “I must candidly confess, that my astonishment was a little excited at even hearing the name of a catholic minister here, much less seeing a numerous body of people in anxious expectation for the arrival of the hour in which their prejudices

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *United States Catholic Miscellany*, October 14, 1826.

were either to be realized, or proved to be groundless.”¹⁹ Another communication to the *Miscellany* that same October showed the growing Catholic population near Bainbridge and throughout Decatur County, 250 miles from Locust Grove in the southwestern extremity of the state.²⁰

In January 1827, it is noted that the state legislature of Georgia, in its last session, established Carroll County in honor of Archbishop John Carroll, the first bishop in the United States. “The number of Roman catholics [sic] in this state,” the *Miscellany* also noted, “is every day proved to be much larger than we originally supposed. Applications have been made for spiritual aid, for several members of our church in *Gwinet* and other counties, where we knew not of their existence.” It is at this point in 1827, upon hearing of new Catholic settlements, “that some little time must elapse before those requests can be fully complied with.”²¹ The spread of Catholicism moved much faster than the procuration of priests to minister to those of the faith.

Bishop England spent much time traveling around Georgia and preaching to the masses. In January and February 1827 he travelled to Darien where he “preached in the Presbyterian church,” Savannah, and had hopes of reaching St. Mary’s where the congregation was to soon be organized.²² While in Savannah, England appointed Reverend Patrick O`Sullivan to pastor the church and further congratulated Reverend Magennis who formerly had the charge; “The catholic population in the county of

¹⁹ Ibid., October 21, 1826.

²⁰ Ibid., October 14, 1826.

²¹ Ibid., January 13, 1827.

²² Ibid., February 3, 1827.

Chatham has increased very considerably.”²³ In Locust Grove, the bishop was quick at practicing his right to appoint leadership in churches that lacked a pastor.²⁴

The second Convention of the Roman Catholic Church of Georgia was held in Savannah on April 27, 1827. The established congregations at Locust Grove, Savannah, and Augusta were thriving. In addition, Catholicism had spread to other areas of the state.

“I shall now draw your attention to the particular situation of the church of Georgia,”

Bishop England stated.

We have but three organized congregations, and as many resident clergymen. But there are other places in the state, which have made application for clergymen to reside permanently in some places, and to attend occasionally in others. It is, indeed, principally my duty, but it is also that of the clergy and of the lay-delegates to consider how those requests are to be met. You are also aware, that when I took charge of the church of this state, now little more than six years ago; since then, ten priests have been successively appointed to different stations therein, and have served for longer or shorter periods.... This is a question of deep importance to the churches of this state, as is also that other. How shall we have the benefits of the ministry extended to our destitute brethren?²⁵

The gathered delegates resolved to start a seminary in the diocese in order to train priests.

The clergy and lay-delegates also pledged to work harder in reaching the scattered Catholics found throughout the state.

The third Convention of the Roman Catholic Church of Georgia was held in Augusta on April 17, 1828. Support of the proposed seminary was failing and the number of priests was on the decline. “The upholding of the seminary is not for the emolument of service, nor for the benefit of the individual who addresses you: to him it has been the cause of unusual privations, of extraordinary labour, and of harassing anxiety; and the same might... be said of the other members of the clergy.” Bishop England continues:

²³ Ibid., February 10, 1827.

²⁴ Ibid., May 12, 1827.

²⁵ England, *Works*, IV: 387.

To whom then is its existence chiefly beneficial? What can be the object of its continuance? It is easily answered: to you, to your children, and to your children's children. How could I now fill your churches, or to what source could I look for future labourers in the vineyard of the Lord; from whom are the words of instruction to come, who are to administer the sacraments, if this gate be closed against those who would come amongst you for this purpose? When, therefore, I call your attention to the concerns of this institution, I do not beg a boon, I ask not for charity, I do not propose what you can with a safe conscience overlook, I only draw your minds to the consideration of a solemn duty, and I tell you that I ask you to do an act of justice to us, to your selves, and to your children.²⁶

At the second convention, the delegates and Bishop England agreed that it would be disastrous to employ priests from outside the diocese. They opted instead to establish a seminary to train priests for the vast work needed in Georgia. At this point, as stated above, the plan was failing.

The year 1828 saw the further spread of Catholicism in the state of Georgia. Places never visited by a priest were hearing sermons and had the opportunity to take the sacraments. By May 1828, priests were being instructed to travel further in order to administer the sacraments to known Catholics living in more isolated areas. "The Rev. Andrew Byrne has been directed to extend his visits farther than usual to the South West in Georgia, in order to supply the wants of several Catholics who requested the aid of the Ministry, and particularly to pay one or two visits to Madison."²⁷ In August, a missionary, Reverend Andrew Byrne, visited Clarke County and performed several Masses, preached a few sermons, and gave communion to three people. "Several persons from the vicinity who had never before seen a Roman Catholic clergyman attended, most of whom expressed their astonishment and gratification at finding that the doctrines...were not the *unclean thing* which had been exhibited to them as a correct

²⁶ Ibid., 390.

²⁷ *United States Catholic Miscellany*, May 3, 1828.

picture.” The missionary then journeyed to Madison where he “preached to a large and respectable congregation in the Presbyterian church.” The Catholics of Madison, at this time, showed enthusiasm for building a church of their own. In Monroe in Walton County, a priest ministered at the Academy “to a very numerous congregation...[where] very few of them had ever before seen a clergyman of our church.” Reverend Byrne finally travelled to Hall County where he preached to a large crowd in the court house and held mass. Byrne was the first priest to visit this county and discovered “the number of Catholics in this vicinity is much greater than was supposed.”²⁸

The fourth Convention of the Roman Catholic Church in Georgia was held in Savannah on May 1, 1829. The membership of the Catholic Church in Georgia had grown and membership was continuing to grow in the western and southern portions of the state. Bishop England continued to impress upon the delegates of the continued maintenance of a diocese seminary and the extent of Catholic believers in the state only hastened that need.²⁹

In August 1829, “The interior of this state has been lately visited for missionary purposes by the Rev. M. D. O’Reily, and we are happy to find that in several places, our brethren who are by their situation, as it were excluded from the ordinary opportunities, are desirous of being supplied in the best way that the circumstances of the Diocese will admit.” Madison, Monroe, and Gainesville were mentioned, as before. However, Newnan in Coweta County, Fayetteville in Fayette County, Thomaston in Upson County, Macon

²⁸ Ibid., August 30, 1828.

²⁹ England, *Works*, IV: 391-394.

in Bibb County, and Clinton in Jones County were new towns mentioned in regards to having Catholic populations worthy of remark.³⁰

The fifth Convention of the Roman Catholic Church of Georgia began on April 23, 1830, in Augusta. The bishop continued to extoll his belief in charitably supporting the seminary and Church. He also showed enthusiasm for the unity formed at the provincial synod. “Turning our attention to our own diocess, I bless God that we have much matter for congratulation.” Bishop England continued,

It is true that we labour under serious difficulties, and have mighty obstacles to overcome; still our situation is greatly ameliorated. Our few churches are in perfect harmony within themselves, and with each other, and, as far as I can perceive, are faithfully served. The confidence of the flocks in their pastors, and the affection of those pastors for their flocks, are unprecedentedly perfect and universal: besides this, we have now, for the first time, all the churches and congregations organized under the same constitution, whose fitness for its object, the peace and prosperity of the churches, and the exact preservation of the respective rights of the clergy and laity, is daily proved the more, the more exactly and fully its provisions are carried into execution—those churches which have most accurately conformed to its regulations are those which are the most progressive.³¹

The state still lacked enough priests to cover the missions and the seminary was still in need of money. The established churches were never without a pastor.

The sixth Convention of the Roman Catholic Church of Georgia began on March 20, 1831, in Savannah. Years after the creation of the seminary, fruits were finally being seen. “In contemplating the benefits conferred upon our diocess by the establishment and continuance of our seminary, no portion of our charge appears to have derived more advantage therefrom than the state of Georgia; by its means, the ministry has been supplied and extended, within this district;” Bishop England stated, “the regular churches

³⁰ *United States Catholic Miscellany*, August 15, 1829.

³¹ England, *Works*, IV: 395-396.

have been duly filled, and in several places our remote and scattered brethren have been visited and encouraged.” Priests were beginning to infiltrate the interior of the state, ministering to those groups of Catholics scattered in isolated areas. The seminary, though it still needed financial support, was beginning to be a success. “So far, we have much reason for being thankful and pleased.”³²

The seventh annual Convention of the Roman Catholic Church of Georgia began on March 25, 1832, in Augusta. Bishop England reiterated most of the usual information concerning the seminary and the unity of the churches. However, Bishop England, at this meeting of clergy and lay-delegates, had the pleasure of announcing Georgia’s fourth established and incorporated church at Columbus. Bishop England further declared that he “shall soon be able to place a clergyman in charge of that district, and that he will be able to extend his missionary labours to several of the adjoining counties.”³³

On his travels in Dublin, Ireland, in 1832, Bishop England published his work *A Brief Account of the Introduction of the Catholic Religion into the States of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, U.S.A.; of the Creation of the Diocese of Charleston, the State of Religion, and the Wants of the Church in that Quarter*. This “pamphlet” was meant to garner support for the diocese by recounting the history, some of which has been cited throughout this paper, and finally concludes with Bishop England’s personal success in the diocese, especially in Georgia.

In Georgia, the congregation at Savannah has had a regular pastor, the number probably amounts to five hundred; their church is old and tottering, and they are endeavouring to raise the funds to erect one better suited to their numbers and their worship. In Augusta, though the congregation is not as numerous as at Savannah, yet their church is far too small; they also have a regular pastor. The congregation at Locust Grove,

³² Ibid., 398.

³³ Ibid., 406.

about sixty miles above Augusta, has greatly increased, chiefly by Irish settlers; their church has, about eight years since, been taken down, and a good wooden church of framework erected in the place of the original log building. The legislature of Georgia, at its last session, passed two acts, one incorporating the Catholics in Columbus, a new town laid off on the Chattahoochie river, nearly two hundred miles west of Augusta, . . . the other [act] granting them a lot of land in the town, upon which to build their church. The bishop [John England] had previously organized them, and advised them to petition for those favours. The few Irish Catholics there have endeavoured to collect the means of raising the building, but have not as yet succeeded. The bishop trusts upon his return, to be able to send a priest to this district. In this region there are a considerable number of Irish Catholics spread through an immense extent, whom a priest endeavours to see once in the year; and the bishop never has had more gratification than in an excursion of two months, doing duty amongst them; separated, from each other by fifty or an hundred miles, the families have congregated to the stations where he fixed to meet them, that they might hear his voice, and receive the Sacraments. He does not think he goes farther than he is warranted by facts, when he states that in Georgia, six or seven places would require churches, and the attendance of a clergyman. The present number of priests in the diocess is eleven. Three or four students are pursuing their studies, and he has received ten candidates since his arrival in Ireland; so that if he had some pecuniary assistance, he trusts that ere long the forlorn emigrant, who now wanders, far from kindred and country, through this immense tract, seeking for sustenance and settlement, would have at least the opportunity of worshipping, even if it were in the midst of the forest, at the altars of his fathers.³⁴

Within the ten years of Bishop John England taking control of Georgia's faithful Catholics through the Diocese of Charleston, the affairs of the faith in that state were beginning to improve. New churches were being established, new settlements were beginning to form, and more priests were becoming available to provide ministry and to administer the sacraments more often.

Bishop John England, though he was aided by influential priests like Robert Browne and LeMercier, was the most important figure in spreading the Roman Catholic faith in Georgia up to this time. Before he became the bishop of Charleston, the faith in

³⁴ England, *A Brief Account*, 47-48.

Georgia was crumbling. Children were not learning their catechisms nor were marriages and deaths being blessed. A rift had formed between the laity, who noticed the failures of the clergy, and the clergy, who noticed the possible usurpation of their ecclesiastical rights. “There existed jealousy between the clergy and the laity, each fearing an encroachment upon its rights by the other....I know there is not on either side any proper grounds for this fear.”³⁵

³⁵ England, *Works*, IV: 383.

Chapter V

THE FUTURE OF CATHOLICISM: THE DIOCESE OF SAVANNAH AND WHERE TO GO FROM THERE

Bishop John England was instrumental in tending to the seeds of faith that were present in the fertile soil of Georgia. The Catholic Church, initially the religion of Irish and French immigrants, became the religion of assimilated Georgians. Bishop England helped foster this growth. He was beloved by many, not only Catholics. The Diocese of Savannah never would have been formed had it not been for the leadership of John England and others who followed in his legacy.

Bishop John England, the inspirational leader who furthered the Roman Catholic religion in Georgia, died on April 11, 1842. “Our father and friend has departed from us—we are orphans; the fold is without a shepherd; the diocess without a Bishop!—The episcopal chair is vacant; the sable emblems show where the venerated tenant lies;” the vestry of the Catholic Church of St. John the Baptist in Savannah declared. “The Sanctuary is without its ornament; the widow mourns the loss of her support; the orphan weeps for him who gave him food.”¹ Bishop England was important to many in Georgia. He was the influential leader and guide for many discouraged Catholics. England advanced the Roman Catholic faith in Georgia; he built churches and sent priests to tend to the spiritual needs of individuals in the far reaches of the state. When John England entered the Diocese of Charleston, he found less than five thousand Catholics, very few

¹ John England, *The Works of the Right Rev. John England: First Bishop of Charleston, Collected and Arranged Under the Advice and Direction of His Immediate Successor, the Right Rev. Ignatius Aloysius Reynolds, and Printed for Him, in Five Volumes* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1849), I:34.

priests, and three functioning churches. At his death, the number of priests doubled, the number of Catholics quadrupled to over twenty thousand, and seventeen functioning churches could be found throughout the three states consisting of the diocese.²

On July 19, 1850, Pope Pius IX issued a decree that created the Diocese of Savannah. The decree also outlined the territory to be governed by the bishop.

And so, on our own initiative, with our certain knowledge and mature deliberation, from the fullness of our apostolic power, we erect and establish an Episcopal See in the City of Savannah, which shall encompass the State of Georgia as well as Florida to the Apalachicola River, and which shall be contained within the limits of the Ecclesiastical Province of Baltimore as suffragan.³

The Diocese still submitted to the premier see of Baltimore and to the archbishop there.

On July 23, 1850, Francis Xavier Gartland was named first bishop of Savannah. Gartland was born in Dublin, Ireland, “about 7 o` clock in the evening” on January 19, 1808. April of that year, at just a few months old, Gartland set sail with his family for the United States.⁴

One of Bishop Gartland’s last letters was written to a Mr. M. A. Frenaye in Philadelphia on August 29, 1854.

My dear friends: We are in a sad condition still—very sad—& God alone knows when a favorable turn will take place. Two of my Priests are sick, both convalescent however at present—do not know that either of them had the Yellow Fever positively—but I believe one of them had it in its incipient stage. The place looks very desolate—at 8 o`clock P.M. looks as deserted as at midnight at other seasons—Every night large fires are kindled in various parts of the city & great quantities of tar burnt—On approaching the city in the ev’g, as I did the other ev’g from our Cemetery, you see clouds of dense black smoke rising up in all parts of the

² *Catholic Diocese of Charleston: A History* (Strasbourg, France: Éditions du Signe, 2008), 19.

³ “History of the Diocese I,” Diocese of Savannah, Archives. In Latin, the papal decree reads: “Itaque motu proprio, certa scientia ac matura deliberatione nostra, deque apostolicae potestatis plenitudine Episcopalem Sedem in Civitate Savannah erigimus et instituimus, quae statum Georgiae comprehendat, necnon et Floridam usque ad flumen Apalachicola quaeque intra limites Ecclesiasticae Provinciae Baltimorensis uti suffraganea contineatur.”

⁴ “Bishop Francis Xavier Gartland Papers,” Diocese of Savannah, Archives.

city, so that one w. suppose that the city was on fire, or that our city was something like Pittsburgh is described to be—So far I keep well, though constantly on the go—I hope this letter will reach y'r City before the arrival of the Steamer, as I wish you to inform my brother that Miss G. will leave the Steamer tomorrow for Philada.—She is not at all well—Mr. Prendergast & his two sons, & a Mrs. Dillon and her son and two daughters will be with her—Great numbers of our people have left—I write in great haste—my buggy is at the door for me to make my rounds.⁵

Savannah was struck with an epidemic of yellow fever. Many in the city fell ill and died, including priests who stayed to perform the sacraments for those who were dying. Bishop Gartland's letter was quickly written and nervous anticipation can be gleamed from his words; he was tired, possibly sick, and at a loss for how to continue. Bishop Gartland did eventually die from yellow fever later in October 1854. His last words in the form of the above letter create a sense of unease for the future of the Diocese of Savannah.

Georgia was a state declaring religious liberty allowing for oppressed Catholics to settle there. Foreign Catholics provided the faith and toiled the land but the Roman Catholic Church in Georgia became assimilated into the state's society and became a force in the state with the creation of the Diocese of Savannah. The Diocese of Savannah was the legacy of those first Catholic settlers who desired freedom of religion and the chance at economic independence, the legacy of the many unknown priests who toiled in Georgia, and the legacy of John England and Francis Xavier Gartland. What would become of this legacy? With this last letter written by Bishop Gartland, events in Savannah displayed a bleak future. However, with influential leaders found in the past, more would surely come to pave the way for the future.

⁵ Ibid.

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