

“Popery and Tyranny”: King George III as a Late Stuart

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The Glorious Revolution cast a long shadow. Throughout the eighteenth century, English subjects found in it evidence of a commitment to long-standing constitutional principles: parliamentary supremacy, due process of the law, protection of civil and property rights, and Protestant rule. This understanding of liberty had a life of its own in the colonies as American insurgents cited the same principles in the course of their own revolution. Theirs, after all, was a case built on precedent, and few precedents were then as significant as the expulsion of the Catholic Stuarts. For two crucial years, from the Quebec Act of 1774 to the summer of 1776, the issue of Protestant rule in particular played a key part in the march towards independence. “Popery,” in language inherited from the wars of religion, remained the foremost threat to the rights and well-being of Englishmen. Accordingly, the constitutional and religious discourses of the early revolutionary period were entwined. As one of the central planks of the British Constitution, religion was never wholly depoliticized. This paper details how anti-Catholic discourse evolved through the revolutionary period and, through the invasion of the Province of Quebec, presents Catholicism as a political problem that insurgents could in turn utilize as a political lever.

American colonists found, in 1774, a failure to protect their rights on the part of British authorities and expected that despotism in politics and in religion would ensue. Central to that debate were the role of executive power in the British system of governance, as well as the place

to which Catholicism ought to be relegated in public matters. From the moment that word of the Quebec Act reached American shores, through the invasion of Quebec, to the fateful summer of 1776, responses arose which successively indicted different institutions for their pro-Catholic sentiments. New Englanders in particular, true to their Puritan mythology, were troubled by the establishment of Catholicism on their borders. While revolt failed to materialize in that neighbouring province, anti-monarchical rhetoric developed in full in the Thirteen Colonies. By then, however, the Quebec Act was overshadowed by the more urgent issue of military defence.

This essay begins to answer historian George A. Rawlyk's call for better integration of Canadian and American events during the revolutionary period, which, several generations later, remains insufficiently explored. This also represents an effort to "de-centre" Maryland in the story of colonial Catholicism. For most colonists in British North America, Catholicism was as powerful a threat as it was generally unseen. Its incarnations in the popular mind were not drawn from Maryland, but from conflict in Europe and from encounters with France and Spain in the New World. To colonists of the revolutionary period, the threat was external, likely not to grow from their midst, but rather to come from the metropole or from a neighbouring colony, Quebec. In this sense, this paper adds to the recent work of Robert Emmett Curran, who, though attentive to colonial wars and to the constitutional issue, offers little consideration of British-led Canada after 1760 and only briefly surveys the events of 1774-78.¹

Enlightenment, Empire, and the British Monarchy

Often identified as anti-papery or anti-papistry in its political manifestations, anti-Catholicism was, in the eighteenth century, part and parcel of the English identity. This was more than a purely religious identity: "enlightened" Protestantism, in contrast to the despotic Church of Rome, informed British political culture as a central tenet of the British Constitution. In consequence of the Glorious Revolution, Crown and Parliament would be jointly responsible for the maintenance of Britain's Protestant character. Drawing on memories of the Gunpowder Plot and the Stuarts' attempts to reclaim the throne, the English came to imagine their polity as one engaged in a perpetual struggle with the forces of religious despotism. Catholicism was "a consistently hostile, foreign, and anti-

national threat.” The connection between Protestantism and one’s condition as a free Briton persisted in British America, where fears of Catholic power were fuelled by imperial rivalries. Religious bigotry had lost little of its edge in this supposedly enlightened age, on either side of the Atlantic.²

The chief concern regarding Catholicism, however, was not its foreignness, but rather the connection of priests with secular authority, which seemed to invite both religious and political tyranny. The tolerant spirit among Protestants had its limits on this very point. Dissenters were quick to depict Anglicanism as a vestige of Catholicism partly for its ties to civil authority. The language of anti-popery targeted the Church of Rome but also became code for British and American opposition to episcopal authority and to the “Anglo-Catholic ‘high flyers’ of the Church of England.” Nonconformists feared that Anglican bishops and the Crown might combine to undermine their denominations and their autonomy. Too easily could priests suppress religious freedom and become the agents of a despotic prince.³

Continued hostility to foreign, despotic Catholicism reveals the practical and intellectual limits of the Enlightenment. In the English world, religious toleration generally had a caveat: all individuals were to have their freedom of conscience and worship protected – all except Catholics. In a single breath, Thomas Paine could both defend “the free exercise of religion” and arouse his readers’ anti-Catholic views. In denouncing political abuses, Paine wrote, “the phrase Parent or Mother Country hath been jesuitically adopted by the King and his parasites, with a low papistical design of gaining an unfair bias on the credulous weakness of our minds.” In his “utterly conventional Enlightenment sentiments,” Thomas Jefferson could, similarly, defend toleration and despise Catholicism. Samuel Adams argued that no state should tolerate this subversive religious system that threatened “life, liberty, and property” and foreshadowed “the worst anarchy and confusion, civil discord, war, and bloodshed.” The Enlightenment, after all, not only valued religious freedom and equality, but also sought to destroy the evils flowing from despotism and entrenched dogma. Among colonists, there was no inconsistency in toleration and continued anti-Catholicism. Paine, in fact, would go on to pen *The Age of Reason*, denouncing all that smelled of superstition and authoritarianism in religion. In the meantime, American subjects, like those in England, were concerned with the political manifestations of Catholicism.⁴

Whenever Catholics were politically disarmed, their place in majority British societies involved numerous inconsistencies. More immediately threatened and theologically justified than subjects in Britain, New England's Puritans also harboured far stronger anti-Catholic feelings than other colonists. Congregationalist ministers identified the Catholic Church as the Antichrist as the French and Indian War began and as New England troops prepared to take Acadia, where bigotry legitimized various depredations. The ultimate outcome, expulsion, was practicable in those territories. As British forces won the surrender of New France in 1760, however, colonial authorities had to contend with, and adjust to, a population overwhelmingly French and Catholic which would not be displaced – only, perhaps and over time, assimilated. In a series of small precedents to the Quebec Act, Governor James Murray expanded traditional British liberties to gain the support of the clergy and ensure Canadian loyalty. Though they suffered some civil and religious disabilities, the French of the St. Lawrence valley were spared the Acadians' fate.⁵

According to Jefferson, the Quebec Act of 1774 replaced the open and fair English legal system set forth in Britain's Constitution with an arbitrary administration. In what appeared to be the British Ministry's designs for the entire continent, Quebec was now in the hands of a governor, unchecked by an elected assembly, and the Catholic Church. The recognition of the latter was the main problem for opponents. The Act stipulated that Canadians might now freely practice "the Religion of the Church of Rome" and that their clergy could "enjoy their accustomed Dues and Rights," so long as this did not prove injurious to Protestants. The re-establishment of French civil law further threatened the Thirteen Colonies' interests with the extension of Quebec's boundaries into territories claimed by Pennsylvania and Virginia.⁶

The Quebec Act was more than an act of statesmanship and much less than the reflection of Enlightenment feelings in Britain. The Act was the product of lobbying in London by Governor Guy Carleton, Murray's successor. Murray had distanced himself from Quebec's "British Party," marked by zealous anti-French and anti-Catholic feelings. Seeking to strengthen colonial power, Carleton went further. Late in 1773, he could argue that a quick resolution to the challenges of governance in Canada would enable the men of Westminster to devote greater attention to the crisis in the Thirteen Colonies. And, to echo the cynical view of Michel Brunet, the ambitious Carleton would emerge aggrandized from the reaffirmation and the geographical expansion of his authority. This meant

alienating the British of Quebec, who deplored the absence of representative institutions, the endorsement of “papistry,” and the formation of an aristocratic pact sealed by Carleton and Canadian allies against their mercantile interests.⁷

American colonists, for their part, felt besieged. A single stroke of the King’s pen seemed to negate their struggles through the French and Indian War. With the return of “ecclesiastical and civil tyranny,” Congregationalists altered their language: the Antichrist was not merely Rome, but any power that violated Christian freedom and compacts between subjects and their government. More secular figures no less saw the imminent introduction of despotic rule. To Alexander Hamilton, the Act established a “Nation of Papists and Slaves”; truly it was an “instrument” for “the subjugation of the colonies, and afterward that of Great Britain itself.” Yet, if anger greeted the news of the Act in the Thirteen Colonies, George III was not ascribed conspiratorial designs. The language of the Continental Congress, which assembled shortly thereafter, was quite moderate. In its first session, Congress did not question the King’s authority or character. This is consistent with Brendan McConville’s depiction of a “royal America,” a fiercely proud bastion of Anglo-Saxon Protestantism whose colonists “expressed an intense admiration for the monarchy.” The King came to be the sole connection between metropole and colonies, to whose benevolence provincials might always return. It is in this context of political dispute and intense royalism that the sovereign’s image underwent a major transformation.⁸

The American press tied the Act to Tory ideas and challenged the “forwardness of the present Ministry.” To one observer, the Quebec Act was “of the same stamp, as if [the minister] had advised his Majesty to introduce an army of foreign soldiers into the nation, in order to tyrannize over and enslave his people.” “The Bill is indeed,” a Boston outlet noted, “High Treason against the Constitution of England; and if the Minister be not impeached . . . there can be no spirit or virtue in the nation.” It further appeared that “the friends of the abdicated Family now hold the reins of power.” The upper house, too, was indicted, as a Philadelphia sheet asked, “[w]here were my Lords the Bishops?” In other words, far from the King being part of a popish plot, the assault on the Protestant establishment had Carleton, Prime Minister Lord North, and a corrupt Parliament as its architects. Through 1774, George III remained a father to his American people. Redress, if unlikely through Parliament, was still possible through him.⁹

Congress's expressions of hope contained internal contradictions destined to collapse. In their condemnations of Parliament and North, the colonists ignored their ruler's position as king-in-Parliament, at whose pleasure the government served. George III was the apex of both the legislative and executive branches who, when signing the bill, declared that the bill would resolve problems of governance in Quebec and, "I doubt not, have the best effects in quieting the minds and promoting the happiness of my Canadian subjects." In London, people gathered to the cry of "No Popery, no French government." The sovereign had compromised himself as head of the Church of England and defender of the Protestant faith. The colonists, still, continued to lament the influence of "designing and dangerous men" over the King, appealing to him directly as in times past. As no redress came, the contradiction was exploded: the King had facilitated this breach of the Constitution and should suffer the consequences, if only in the colonies.¹⁰

From Redress to Revolution

The seeds of the King's later image as a friend of popery were thus sown in 1774, and some immediate responses foreshadowed subsequent attacks. In eastern Massachusetts, subjects evoked the memory of "our fugitive parents" who had been "persecuted, scourged, and exiled." The Quebec Act recalled persecution under the Stuarts, the implication being clear. Traditional associations between Catholicism and despotism, as well as the King's twin authorities (political and religious), meant that once branded with tyranny in either sphere of his power, George III would soon see the other unravel, as it had been with the last Stuart. And as the contradiction collapsed, all accusations until then reserved for Lord North and Parliament would be refocused. In the Thirteen Colonies, the press was far ahead of Congress in developing that case.¹¹

American publications from the early months of 1775 were sufficiently ambiguous as to leave open the possibility of reconciliation with the King. Colonists' grievances still lay with North's Tories, who were labelled the "corrupt, Frenchified party in the nation." One radical tract blamed "a vindictive, arbitrary, and rapacious Minister and his Adherents," as well as "the most venal and corrupt Parliament that ever yet disgraced the British Annals." In April, New Englander Isaac Backus, a Baptist minister, preached from the pulpit "that George the third violated his coronation-oath which he had solemnly taken before God and his

people in establishing popery in Canada.” This strong indictment did not preclude a restoration of Protestant ascendancy through the King, for the source of corruption was not the Crown itself, but the group of men who advised it and who dominated Parliament. Indeed, it was the House of Commons, not the monarch, which had refused to receive an American petition during the winter.¹²

In the spring of 1775, Congress departed from its appeals to prepare for more urgent concerns. Whatever North and Carleton’s objectives might be, it was of foremost importance to protect the colonies against aggression, likely to come from Quebec. The American radical press, however, continued to mobilize the Protestant-constitutional myth in the interest of both financial gain and revolution. One “Simon,” pushing the lines of debate, spared his readers Congress’s dance around the King’s position. “Pray,” he wrote, “what was it that justified the [Glorious] Revolution and the expulsion of the Stuart family? Was it not an attempt to introduce Popery and arbitrary power into the Kings [sic] dominions? If so, I hope, as the homely proverb says, what was sauce for the goose will be sauce for the gander, upon a like occasion.”¹³

Historians have debated the decline of “royal America” between 1770, when the rise of the North Ministry signalled the declining influence of the American lobby, and 1775, when self-styled Patriots began terrorizing Crown sympathizers. Persuasively, Brendan McConville sees in the imperial crisis, in the decade leading up to the Quebec Act, “a flight to the king’s love and justice.” By 1773, only “faith in the king” subsisted; with the Act his position in America quickly diminished. Through the transitory years of 1774-76, colonial leaders laid blame elsewhere for the imagined ascent of Catholicism. Surely the Protestant monarch, through “that compact, which elevated the illustrious house of Brunswick to the imperial dignity it now possesses,” would intervene on behalf of the British Americans. The delegates reaffirmed their allegiance.¹⁴

When Americans did step into the realm of treason, it was, paradoxically, by abiding by the Protestant Constitution that the King had violated. Beginning in 1775, pushed by the press, Congress’s language underwent a transformation that would later serve its anti-monarchical rhetoric. In an address to British subjects in Quebec, it warned that “a wicked or a careless king” might “concur with a wicked ministry in extracting the treasure and strength of your country.” Within a year Congress would turn that language explicitly against the sovereign. The Quebec Act, drawing on British traditions, would be used to whip reluctant

Patriots into revolutionary (and Protestant) service. Certainly, the most radical of Protestants in the Province of Quebec, who were more immediately threatened by the Act, matched the great men in Philadelphia in challenging the King's intents. Many merchants had come to Canada directly from the American colonies and, accordingly, shared well-entrenched prejudices. These members of the "British Party," Thomas Ainslie wrote, "have on all occasions taken infinite pains to inflame the minds of the Canadians against Government . . . Some of these Grumbletonians are friends to the Constitution but are highly incensed against the Quebec bill." Their attempts at redress, like those of Congress, failed, and the Act came into effect, as planned, on 1 May 1775. On the morning of that fateful day, the people of Montreal awoke to find the King's bust, in the city centre, blackened with paint. The vandals had placed around its neck "a rosary made of potatoes" and given the figure a cross that identified the King as "Canada's Pope and England's fool."¹⁵

That such a reaction would occur in a colony so dependent on the economic support and good will of the metropole reflects an attachment to traditional liberties among all subjects of British descent. Donald Creighton has argued that the men who had come to Canada since 1760 were "merchants before they were Britons, Protestants, or political theorists" and on that account took the path of loyalty. The Montreal merchants would have placed themselves at a disadvantage by committing themselves to the American policy of non-importation. But there was more to their identity, as seen in the bust incident and avowed support for American forces, in 1775-6, in some quarters. The subjects who migrated from the metropole or other colonies to the Province of Quebec saw the British constitutional system as a whole whose constituent parts were mutually supportive. The return of French civil law and the Catholic faith appeared to weaken the imperial edifice and give further evidence, after the tax controversies, of a decline in traditional liberties. Those British subjects who remained loyal still continued to lobby against the Act until 1791, though public manifestations of discontent receded.¹⁶

The limitations of the Quebec Act as a weapon in the revolutionary arsenal were not apparent immediately. In the spring of 1775, as congressional delegates prepared for a second session, Samuel Adams and Joseph Warren recommended John Brown, of Boston's Committee of Correspondence, to the Protestants of Canada, hopeful that their colleague would capitalize on local opposition to the Quebec Act. In Montreal, Brown made contact with rebel sympathizer Thomas Walker. Himself formerly

of Boston, Walker was, like many others, incensed by the Act. But it would not suffice to appeal to the two thousand settlers of British descent in Canada. The invasion of Quebec, later that year, forced a change in approach and in rhetoric.¹⁷

Patriots and Canadians: Religious Encounters

The invasion was in keeping with recent events outside of the colony, from Lexington and Concord through the capture of Fort Ticonderoga – clearing the Lake Champlain axis – to the Battle of Bunker Hill, all in the spring of 1775. The Continental Congress sought to protect the Thirteen Colonies from armies that would serve as the heavy arm of despotism. While the rebels might, by seizing Quebec, deprive the British of a point of entry and “liberate” Canadians, they would also capitalize on the merchants’ dissatisfaction with the recent implementation of the Quebec Act. The invasion would reveal anti-Catholicism to be a political or more precisely a constitutional concern, rather than a social one.

As Congress courted Canadians – and as Colonel Benedict Arnold advanced against Quebec – General George Washington, the commander-in-chief, forbade the celebration of Guy Fawkes Day within the ranks. The decision was made explicitly so that Catholics would not be so alienated as to turn against Congress’s efforts. In John Tracy Ellis’s view, the prime concerns of security and independence lessened public and often well-entrenched manifestations of an anti-Catholic spirit. It is doubtful that the feelings of Protestant colonists towards Catholicism changed over such a short period. Yet it was all to the colonies’ advantage to alter the terms of the debate. Religious rhetoric was either reformulated to elicit sympathy for the Patriot cause or silenced (as with the long-standing 5 November ritual) according to the immediate, strategic imperatives of the Revolution.¹⁸

There is little in the diaries and memoirs of American soldiers who served in Quebec that would indicate profound sectarianism. Certainly, there was no immediate hostility; numerous soldiers commented on the kindness and material support of Canadians in the late months of 1775. About 160 locals took up arms for the Patriot cause under Colonel James Livingston, an insurgent from the Montreal area. Colonel Arnold and several others were quick to depict French Canadians as gentle savages: ignorant by virtue of religion, and slaves to British power, but not, in their hearts, enemies to “the cause of liberty.” In a letter to the commander of

Quebec, Arnold lamented British efforts “to make innocent Canadians instruments of their cruelty, by instigating them against the Colonies, and oppressing them on their refusing to enforce every oppressive mandate.” The *habitants* were pawns of British authority and in this, for Arnold, the Quebec Act had likely appeased Canadians and brought together the levers of political and religious oppression. Yet in most parishes there were Canadians who provided aid or expressed support for the American force, showing that the British ploy would not triumph over liberty.¹⁹

American soldiers discovered French-Canadian culture, as well as a form of Catholicism that was very different from the dark, diabolical designs presented to them during the French and Indian War. In some slight way, the minds of the soldiers were opened. At Pointe-aux-Trembles, John Joseph Henry found “a spacious chapel, where the ceremonies of the Roman Catholic religion were performed with a pomp not seen in our churches, but by a fervency and zeal apparently very pious, which became a severe and additional stroke at early prejudices.” One James Melvin wrote a terse diary, preoccupied with little more than weather, but still stopped to describe the last rites given to a Canadian and, six months later, with evident curiosity, a priest’s ceremonious visit to a dying person. Caleb Haskell of Rhode Island was sincerely religious and, no doubt intrigued, chose to attend Catholic Mass in Beauport on St. Patrick’s Day, 1776. Private Simon Fobes would recollect, many years after the fact, working as a prisoner on a British store ship. He remembered the boatswain losing patience with a Catholic priest leading the burial of crewman on shore, cursing at the “Papist friar” and telling the man “he would hear no more of his ‘*Paternoster*’.” Fobes himself displayed little hostility in his writings.²⁰

For his part, Arnold’s surveyor, John Pierce, when ill, was taken into a Canadian home. “I Slept between two Frenchmen,” he wrote, “it was very odd to hear them at their Devotion.” He recognized the strong religious feelings of the local population and seems to have delighted in exploring this new culture. In Sainte-Marie, Pierce was “very well entertained” by a French priest; farther down the Chaudière River, he met another clergyman, through whom he witnessed a Catholic baptism. His remarks made Canadians to be gentle and childlike in their secular and religious celebrations. Struck by the ubiquity of crucifixes, Pierce found that “[t]he French . . . Appear to be very ignorant Worshipping their images,” he explained. “In the [aisles] of their mass houses Chapples and Temples they have their Saints Placed as big as the Life which they Bow

down to and worship as they Pass them when about their worldly Business.” Following the failed assault at Quebec, Pierce’s language shifted slightly. He considered the “mischief” caused by priests who organized the Canadians against the invaders and worked as British spies.²¹

Throughout, Pierce was representative of his peers in expressing no enmity towards the Catholic population, as opposed to Catholic institutions. Perhaps because they saw in Canadians a yearning for liberty, a people oppressed, or yet because they did not find zealots seeking to destroy American Protestantism, New England’s soldiers did not echo the militant anti-Catholic rhetoric that had surrounded colonial wars and the Quebec Act. They were further cognizant of the need to rally the local population to their cause, much as the Patriots would discard the most virulent religious discourse as an alliance with France was struck in 1778. Motivated by military necessity, Arnold had sworn to protect Catholic clergy and to leave houses of worship undisturbed as he approached the colony’s capital. No doubt, nevertheless, that these soldiers easily associated Catholic power with British tyranny, together stifling the winds of freedom.²²

In 1776, in lieu of reinforcements, Congress sent three of its own and a Jesuit priest to mollify Canadians. Through Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Chase, and Charles Carroll, Congress promised freedom of religion and no interference in clergy’s “possession and enjoyment of all their estates,” an unlikely scenario if Canadians were to judge by Boston publications. Carroll, his cousin Father John Carroll, and the printer who followed them to Montreal, Fleury Mesplet, were all French-speakers who might appeal to clergymen and *seigneurs*. To his wife Abigail, John Adams wrote of Charles Carroll as a Catholic, “yet a warm, a firm, a zealous Supporter of the Rights of America, in whose Cause he has hazarded his all.” “Your Prudence,” Adams added, “will direct you to communicate the Circumstances of the Priest, the Jesuit and the Romish Religion only to such Persons as can judge of the Measure upon large and generous Principles, and will not indiscreetly divulge it.” Secrecy was necessary to prevent a backlash at home. In the end, it was a moot point: the commissioners’ efforts failed, in the spring of 1776, as the military situation deteriorated. Lacking reinforcements and fearing the mass arrival of British troops in New York City, American forces retreated from the St. Lawrence valley.²³

From these forces’ time in the Province in Quebec, it is apparent that Catholicism and anti-Catholicism remained political issues more than

cultural ones: there were few Catholics in the Thirteen Colonies, precluding in most areas difficult questions about pluralism and the rights of non-Protestants. If Catholicism were to be a threat, it would come imposed by hostile political forces from above or beyond, making slaves of Americans, much as Catholic power in New France had turned its faithful there into ignorant creatures ready to be manipulated into gross outrages. Catholicism was primarily a constitutional problem, or one of public policy. American revolutionaries preoccupied with civil and economic liberties expressed concern over complicity between Anglican or Catholic authority and the Crown, seen in the reign of James II. Thus there was ultimately little contradiction between anger over the Quebec Act and the limited attention given to the culture of Catholicism in a neighbouring province. In any event, from political liberty, religious “enlightenment” might follow in Canada.²⁴

Independence and the Exigencies of War

Beyond 1776, it became more difficult for disgruntled colonists to sustain the rhetoric of anti-Catholicism in their claims for emancipation. The reaction to the Act of 1774 found an uneasy place in the context of war, especially as Congress sought to woo Catholic Quebec and Catholic France. But centuries of anti-papery were not suddenly swept away: the mistrust of all things Catholic was rechanneled or silenced in the interest of victory, especially in the upper organs of the revolutionary movement. Among loyalists, that anti-Catholicism was re-appropriated thanks to the alliance with France and the possible restoration of Canada to France. Tories turned the tables on their opponents and tarred them with the broad brush of papist sentiments. New York’s *Royal Gazette* noted, “Congress are very willing to make us the instruments of weakening the best friends, and of strengthening the most powerful and ambitious enemies of the reformation.” The *Gazette* held out the prospect of a new “Saint Barthelmi [sic] massacre.” Americans ought to seek the protection of the Glorious Revolution’s royal heir. The *Gazette* then asked: “Is America unacquainted with the tenets of Popery? Is there a Popish country in the world, where the Protestant religion is tolerated?” Its editors remarked on the hypocrisy in Congress’s about-face. Evidently, religious discourse was malleable and varied according to the flow of circumstance, as did the images of the British monarchy and the traditional enemy, France. Loyal subjects on both sides of the Atlantic could now legitimately appeal to the

memory of 1689.²⁵

In Britain, subjects did so when the King assented to the Catholic Relief Bill, the very year of the French alliance. The measure, which removed some legal impediments on Catholics, was introduced to draw the Irish into the army, presumably for service in America. Protest was immediately organized in Britain and the circumstances of the Quebec Act recurred. When Lord North refused a petition for repeal of the Relief Act, Lord George Gordon appealed directly to the sovereign. Expressing interest in toleration, the King would not commit to the petition. As prorogation again loomed, Londoners rioted. On 18 June 1780, American-born Edmund Jenings, now in England, related to his friend John Adams the tumults over the Relief Act. The King, it seems, hoped to use Catholics for his “Arbitrary purposes.” “James, the second, who did from Principle and Conscience was a better Man,” Jenings wrote. “If George is actuated by the same Motives . . . He is unfit for the Throne of England. He is either a bad protestant, or bad King.” Public religion, the source of frustration in Britain and its colonies over the course of six years, does not alone explain the break with the Crown, then. Among the merchants of Montreal and radicals in London, outrage over the place of Catholicism in the public realm matched that of American insurgents. Yet, in Quebec and at home, George III “could still be king.” Anti-Catholic rhetoric, ever flexible, served as a valuable arm of revolutionary mobilization, but receded when the constitutional conversation was expanded to include other interests.²⁶

Conclusion

In depicting revolutionary anti-Catholicism as constitutional, continental, and contingent, this study seeks to broaden the conversation about American independence beyond its conventional bounds. It also brings much-needed nuance to recent works on the emergence of a tolerant spirit in the revolutionary period. Neither the defeat of New France nor the Enlightenment struck a definitive blow to anti-Catholic sentiments. Responses to the Quebec Act are clear evidence of this and further highlight the importance of the religious factor in the early days of the American Revolution. George III was warned that he might meet the Stuarts’ fate on account not of taxation, but of religious policy. The Act radicalized colonial Protestants. Paradoxically, it also led them to appeal to a Hanoverian king as they had in times past. In this, the Glorious Revolution offered colonists both the prospect of redress and grounds for

protest. When appeals failed, subjects again resorted to revolution. Of course, colonists could construct a case for separation from the Crown on purely secular grounds, and ultimately did. In Quebec, loyal Protestant subjects continued to object to the dispositions of the Act of 1774, but separated this grievance from the larger struggle at hand. Among those who remained after the retreat of the American force, there was little question as to their loyalty once the Franco-American alliance was concluded and the menace of a French takeover became reality.²⁷

Consideration of the invasion of Quebec – rather than exclusive focus on the Thirteen Colonies – likewise adds nuance to standard narratives of eighteenth-century anti-Catholicism and revolutionary strategy alike. Religious discourse pertaining to Catholicism was generally framed in political or constitutional terms. The band of New England Patriot soldiers who marched against Quebec did not abuse the local population on religious grounds. They saw the local population to be very much like them, aspiring in their hearts to liberty, but held back by the double arm of ecclesiastical and political tyranny. The institution of Catholicism was at fault; certainly the profound piety of Canadians was not the issue. These views, likely quite sincere, were reinforced at the top of the chain of command as Arnold and General Richard Montgomery sought to conciliate the population. In Quebec and at the time of the French alliance, the rhetoric of anti-popery would be rechanneled so that political and military objectives might be met.²⁸

That this rhetoric was, at best, temporarily hushed, is seen in the subsequent history of the Anglo-American world. While a new myth supplanted the Glorious Revolution as a reference point in the interconnectedness of religion, public institutions, and liberty, Catholics' relationship to the Protestant mainstream would change little under Americans' new constitution. And, as some American states placed restrictions on Catholic office-holding following independence, the era of the Test Act continued in Britain. Only with the Emancipation Act of 1829 would Catholic office-holding become possible in Britain and in the colonies that are now Atlantic Canada. As for the Canadians, where the Quebec Act came as a political necessity, they too would in time face intransigence on the part of colonial authorities and Westminster, though not on religious grounds. The themes of the American Revolution would return as radicalized French-Canadian reformers, the *Patriotes*, sought to democratize structures against the aristocratic and mercantile interests of "Tories." Again, the upper Catholic clergy, fearful of American ideals, would

support the British establishment. And though those ideals would be loudly echoed by the *Patriotes*, there would be no Montgomery, no Arnold to fly to Montreal and Quebec City as rebellion erupted. Americans had had their revolution and would now leave it to the Catholics on their northern border to fight for their own rights and their own political emancipation from Britain.²⁹

Endnotes

1. George A. Rawlyk, *Revolution Rejected 1775-1776* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 9-10; Robert Emmett Curran, *Papist Devils: Catholics in British America, 1574-1783* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2014). The present paper echoes in many respects Charles H. Metzger's classic survey, but substitutes for Metzger's attention to the Middle Colonies the bastion of North American Catholicism that was Quebec. See Metzger *Catholics and the American Revolution: A Study in Religious Climate* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1962).
2. Joseph J. Casino, "Anti-Popery in Colonial Pennsylvania," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 105, no. 3 (1981): 279. This paper rejoins Francis D. Cogliano on New England's "anti-papal persuasion." See Francis D. Cogliano, *No King, No Popery: Anti-Catholicism in Revolutionary New England* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995).
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17. Stanley, *Canada Invaded*, 19-20; Lewis H. Thomas, "Walker, Thomas (d. 1788)," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* 4 (On-line: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1979-2015); Fenton, "Petitions, Protests, and Policy," 313.
18. John Tracy Ellis, *Catholics in Colonial America* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1965), 395-96.
19. "Col. Arnold's Letters," diaries and memoirs of Henry Dearborn, Return Jonathan Meigs, Isaac Senter, John Joseph Henry, George Morison, and Abner Stocking, all in Kenneth Roberts, ed., *March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition* (New York City: Doubleday, Doran, 1940), 77-84, 89-90, 110, 118, 140, 143, 186, 189, 220-21, 348, 536, 557. See also Gayle K. Brown, "The Impact of the Colonial AntiCatholic Tradition on the Canadian Campaign, 1776-1776," *Journal of Church and State* 35, no. 3 (1993): 559-75; Michael P. Gabriel, ed., *Quebec During the American Invasion, 1775-1776: The Journal of François Baby, Gabriel Taschereau, and*

Jenkin Williams (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005).

20. Henry, James Melvin, Caleb Haskell, and Simon Fobes, in *March to Quebec*, 361, 443-44, 452-53, 492, 599-600.
21. . Numerous priests refused absolution to Canadians who collaborated with the invaders and later provided information on treasonous activities to a commission of enquiry in 1776. See John Pierce in *March to Quebec*, 670-75, 677-79, 709-10; Cohen, *Canada Preserved*, 73-74, 89; Gabriel, *Quebec During the American Invasion*; Brunet, *Canadiens après la Conquête*, 240-44; on the part played by the Church and individual clergymen, Gustave Lanctot, *Canada and the American Revolution, 1774-1783* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 120-23.
22. Among the important exceptions is David Wooster, the Puritan general who interfered with Catholic worship in Montreal. See Gabriel, *Quebec During the American Invasion*, xxxix; Fobes, in *March to Quebec*, 584; Brown, "Colonial AntiCatholic Tradition," 567.
23. Communications with France and Silas Deane's sending of French officers to America also remained closely-guarded secrets. See Brantz Mayer, ed., *Journal of Charles Carroll, 1776* (New York City: New York Times – Arno Press, 1876), 27; and Lanctot, *Canada and the American Revolution*, 127-36; Thomas, "Walker, Thomas (d. 1788)"; John Adams to Abigail Adams, 18 February 1776, in Adams Family Correspondence, Vol. 1, *Founding Families: Digital Editions of the Papers of the Winthrops and the Adamses*, ed. C. James Taylor (On-line: Massachusetts Historical Society); Gaines, *For Liberty and Glory*, 45, 65-66.
24. John Tracy Ellis estimates their number to be twenty thousand out of 2.5 million subjects in the Thirteen Colonies. See Ellis, *Catholics in Colonial America*, 395.
25. Ellis, *Catholics in Colonial America*, 408-9; Stanley, *Canada Invaded*, 145-46. See also *The Royal Gazette*, no. 178 (13 June 1778): 3; *The Royal Gazette*, no. 213 (14 October 1778): 2; "A New York Exile," "To Mr. Rivington," *The Royal Gazette*, no. 237 (6 January 1779): 2, all in Historical Newspapers.
26. Christopher Hibbert, *King Mob: The Story of Lord George Gordon and the London Riots of 1780* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1958), 34-7, 47, 50, 72; Edmund Jenings to John Adams, 18 June 1780, in Taylor, *Adams Family Correspondence*, Vol. 9; Jenings to Adams, 5 March 1780, *Adams Family Correspondence*, Vol. 9; York, "George III, Tyrant," 460.

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27. See, on the alternative claims about tolerance, Michael Meyerson, *Endowed by Our Creator: The Birth of Religious Freedom in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 43-93; and Chris Beneke, "The 'Catholic Spirit Prevailing in Our Country': America's Moderate Religious Revolution," in Beneke and Grenda, *The First Prejudice*, 265-85.
 28. This undoubted influence of religion in eighteenth-century constitutional struggles provides grounds for a reinterpretation of the age of revolution first presented by Robert R. Palmer and Jacques Godechot and recently reconceptualized with attention to Canada in Michel Ducharme, *The Idea of Liberty in Canada During the Age of Atlantic Revolutions, 1776-1838* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014).
 29. Faragher, *Great and Noble Scheme*, 454.

