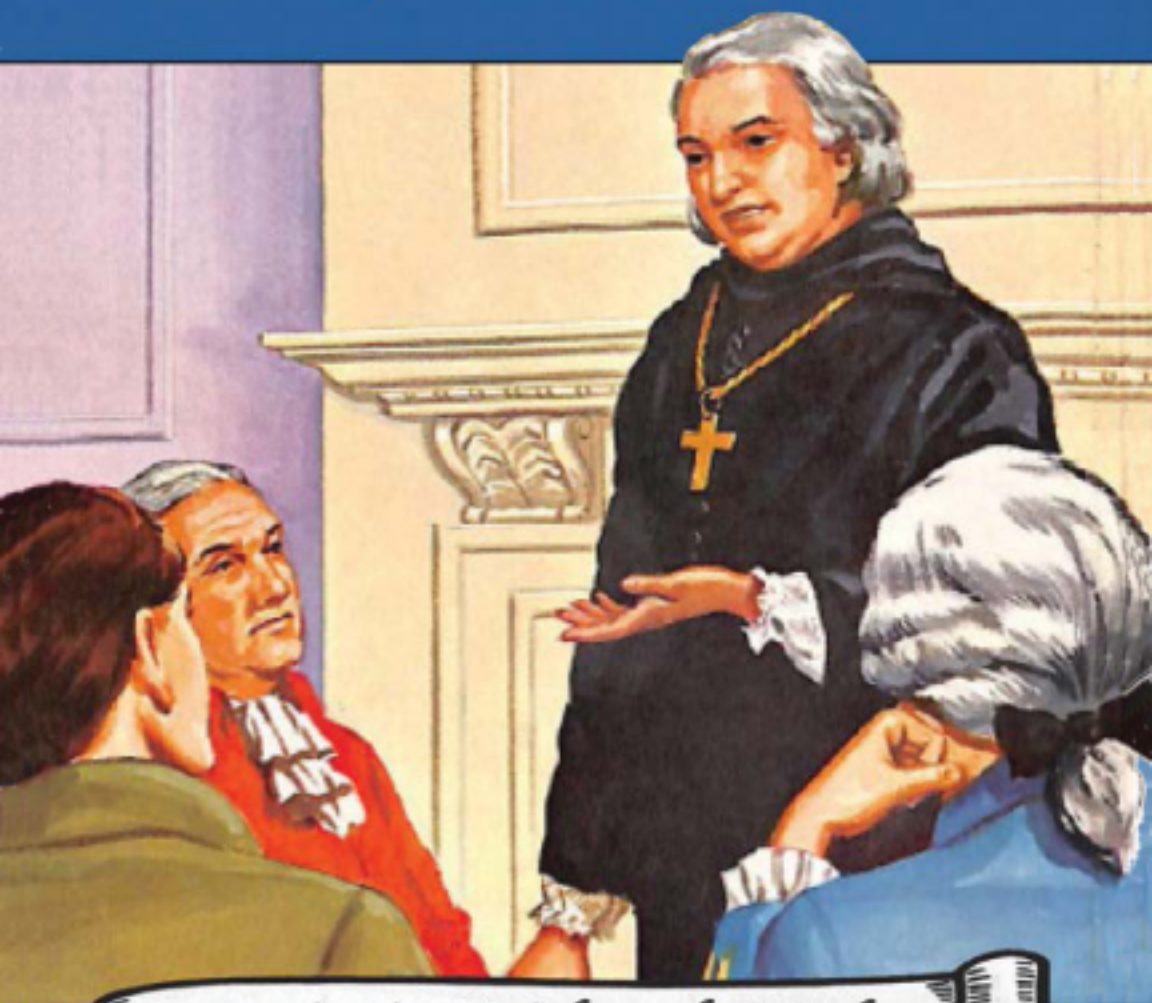


Priest, Patriot and Leader

The Story of Archbishop Carroll



Portraits in Faith and Freedom

Eva K. Betz

Priest, Patriot and Leader

The Story of Archbishop Carroll

by Eva K. Betz

Illustrated by Charles L. Dougherty

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Portraits in Faith and Freedom

SET 1: FOUNDING VOICES FOR FREEDOM IN THE U.S.

*Charles Carroll and the American Revolution
Priest, Patriot and Leader: The Story of Archbishop Carroll
Mathew Carey: Pamphleteer for Freedom*

Statement on Portraits in Faith and Freedom

Bethlehem Books is bringing back this series of biographies originally made available in the 1950's and 60's by publishers who wished to introduce young people to a wide range of arresting and faithful Catholic lives. Slightly edited now for the modern reader, these biographies present key people and events from the past that help us reflect anew on the meaning of freedom. They depict how powerfully men and women of faith have formed and influenced the world in which they live.

Web Resources

To access printable maps, a timeline, and other information, visit <https://www.bethlehembooks.com/priest-patriot-and-leader-story-archbishop-carroll-813>

About Usage of Outdated Terms

In republishing the books that form our *Portraits in Faith and Freedom* series, the editors considered whether it would be worthwhile to update the authors' usage of words like "Indian" and "Negro." The more current preference among many is "Native American" and "African American." The editors found, however, that changing the original terms often did not work well for the context of those times. The attitudes of respect and honesty that inspired these works—written in the 1950s and early 1960s—clearly conveyed the authors' positive meaning. In most cases, therefore, we have let the words stand.

Bethlehem Books

For

RIGHT REVEREND HENRY BECK

and

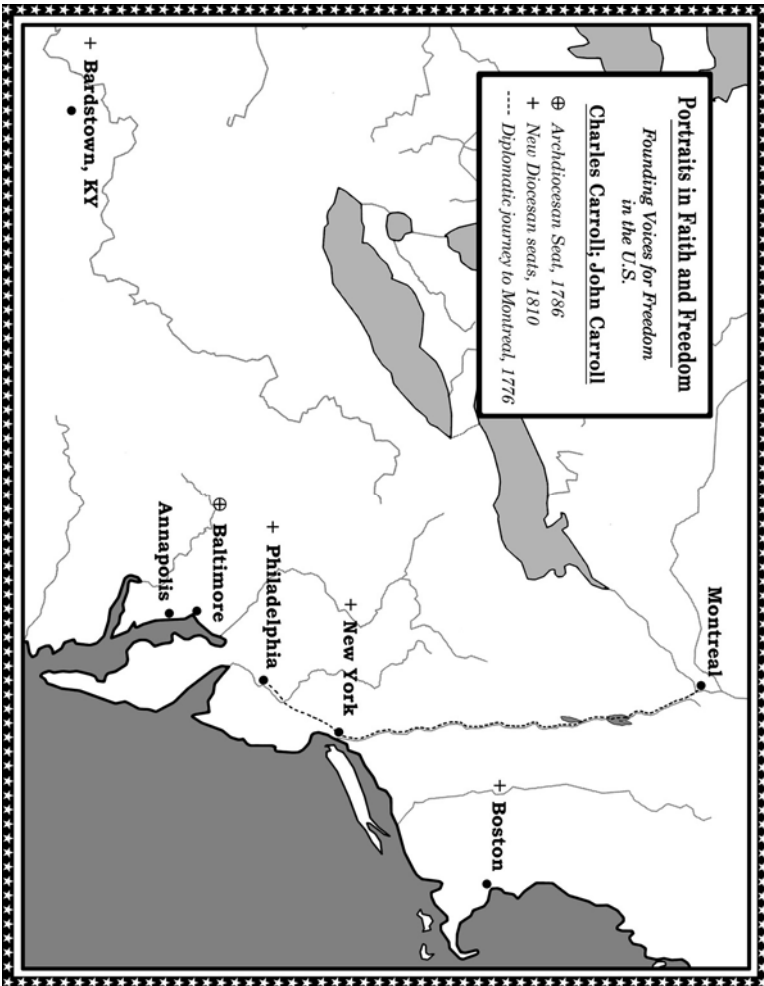
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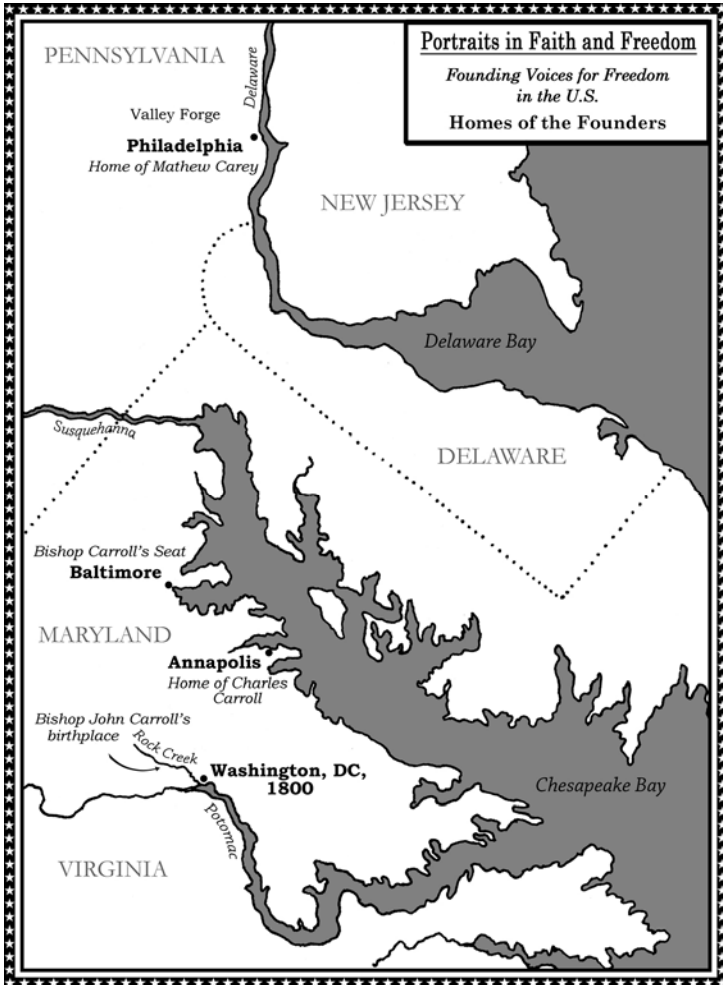
with thanks

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Maps





1. A Mission for Father Carroll

THE MARCH SUN, slanting through long windows, stippled the heavy carpet and gleamed on polished furniture in the room where Father Carroll was standing. Rock Creek was a gracious estate, and lovely at any time of year, but spring at this place was the priest's favorite season. He looked far out over the greening lawns to the fruit trees beyond and then turned his eyes closer, to the flower gardens that gave his mother and sisters such pleasure. He smiled as he thought of the busy traffic in seeds and slips carried on between the sisters—Mary and Elizabeth at Rock Creek and Ann and Eleanor, married and with homes of their own. His reflections were interrupted by a knock on the door.

In answer to his permission, the door opened and a white-haired Negro entered. He carried a small tray on which lay a letter.



“Yes, Willie?” said the priest.

“A soldier just brought this for you, Father John,” said the servant. “He said he came from Philadelphia—from the Continental Congress. He’ll be back in a couple of days for your answer.”

Father Carroll took the letter, opened and read it. Willie busied himself about the room doing unnecessary little tasks that served the purpose of keeping him near the man to whom he was deeply devoted. Born on the Rock Creek plantation, Willie had early be-

come the self-appointed guardian of “young John.” He continued in the role with “Father John” as far as was permitted.

There had been lonely years for Willie while John Carroll was in Europe getting the Catholic education forbidden by Maryland laws. But now, in March of 1776, all was well in his world. Father John was home again.

“It’s not bad news, is it?” he asked as the priest finished reading the letter and laid it on the table.

“Bad news? What do you mean?”

“Well, we all are Catholics and you are a priest. And the laws say—”

“I see your point.” Father Carroll smiled. “No, it’s not forbidding me to exercise my priestly duties nor taking my horse from me. The law prohibiting Catholics from owning a horse worth more than five pounds is rarely invoked, now.”

There was a short silence, broken at last by Father Carroll.

“Willie,” he said, “the Continental Congress is sending a commission—a group of men—to Canada, and they want me to be one of the party. This letter from my cousin Charles urges me to accept.”

“Why does he want you to go to Canada? You’ve been home here in Rock Creek such a short time! And your mama—”

“I know, Willie. We *both* know that she is old and not very well. I do not want to leave her. But General Washington and the Congress feel that I can be of help in making sure that the colonies have the friendship of Canada in the struggle that is surely coming.”

Willie had no advice to give, no answer at all. His world was limited by the boundaries of the Rock Creek plantation. He knew and cared very little about the world’s larger problems.

“You’ll do what’s the best for everyone, Father John,” he said confidently, and quietly left the room.

That evening Father Carroll prayed for guidance. He talked with his family and with guests in the house and the next morning rode over to consult with friends at a neighboring plantation.

“It seems to me,” he protested to his host, “that a priest who enters politics is as inept as any other man who plays with a profession other than that for which he was trained.”

“But your schooling, your command of four languages!” his friend replied. “They are important to the country in this crisis.

When you meet Bishop Briand of Quebec you will be able not only to speak French but, what is even better, you'll be able to *think* in French. You—”

“My cousin, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, and Benjamin Franklin and Samuel Chase are all capable, educated men,” Father Carroll objected. “They could manage very well by themselves.”

“But *you* are a priest, and Canada is an overwhelmingly Catholic country.”

Father Carroll smiled wryly.

“You're right! And as Catholics the people of Canada have no love for the colonies—feelings, you will agree, that are not without cause.”

There was a silence as the two men mentally reviewed some of the actions that had embittered Catholic Canada towards her neighbor to the south.

Early laws in many of the colonies had deprived Catholics of all civil rights—when they were permitted to live in the colony at all. Priests were ranked on a par with criminals, their very lives forfeit, in some places, if they were discovered. These laws were largely still on the books although generally they were not rigidly enforced.

Further, when the Quebec Bill was passed in 1774 recognizing Catholicism in Canada, a group of men from Boston and its vicinity had sent a vicious letter of protest to King George III. The letter had contained phrases insulting to Catholics. It described Catholicism as “a religion that has deluged your island in blood and disbursed impiety, bigotry, persecution and rebellion in every part of the world.” Alexander Hamilton said privately and in print that it made his blood run cold to think of “Popery” in Canada, and other men in the public eye were even more violent in their reactions.

Father Carroll broke the silence.

“Men from the colonies have attacked everything that the majority of Canadians hold dear,” he said. “Bostonians cry out against ‘Popery and slavery’ every chance they get. Canadian priests have been driven out of the northern colonies, and at this very moment our soldiers are fighting on Canadian soil.”

“Yet,” he continued, “here is the Congress planning to send a delegation to Canada to ask their aid—or at the very least their friendly neutrality in the coming struggle with Britain! And there

are many men in the colonies who approve the coming war only because they feel it will punish Britain for being too generous with the Catholics of Canada!” He laughed ruefully. “Odd, isn’t it?”

“It doesn’t seem to have been a carefully thought out move,” his host agreed. “But the Commission *is* being sent, and you might be of service.”

Without having come to any decision, Father Carroll took his leave and slowly rode toward home, pondering those final words as he rode.

“I *might* be of service with the Commission,” he said half aloud.

The horse flicked its delicate ears at the sound of the low musing voice.

“But all my life has been in paths so removed from politics,” the priest went on to himself. “Would I be a help or a hindrance if I go? I can’t decide.”

Nevertheless, when the young soldier returned for his reply a few days later, Father Carroll had come to a decision.

“If the Continental Congress feels I can be of help,” he wrote, “I will go to Canada with the Commission.”

He left Rock Creek on April 4 and visited with his friend Father Farmer at St. Joseph’s Church in Philadelphia. Since both priests were students and scholars, they usually found time, when they met, for discussions of literature, astronomy, mathematics. This visit, however, was given over to talks on their pastoral problems and to consideration of the trip on which Father Carroll was to embark.

On April 6 the party, consisting of Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Chase, Charles Carroll and Father Carroll, left Philadelphia. The coach in which they rode carried not only four men but also the hopes of the Continental Congress. Canada could, if only she would, be an important friend for the colonies in days to come.

Several horsemen rode beside them for some distance as they moved toward the Delaware River, which they had to cross to enter New Jersey. There were last-minute consultations to be held, ideas to be considered. Finally, the riders said good-bye and wheeled to return to Philadelphia, leaving one of their number to gallop to the river ahead of the coach. The travelers planned to use Patrick Colvin’s ferry up near Bristol, and it was necessary to make sure that his big flat-boat was ready.