

6 - Records of the Suppression and Restoration

Background on the Suppression and Restoration of the Jesuits

The suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773 by Pope Clement XIV profoundly shaped the foundation of the Catholic Church in the United States. Even during this time, however, the mission in Maryland and Pennsylvania continued, and former Jesuits remained committed to their work. Between 1773 and 1783, former Jesuit John Lewis served as the mission's Superior, reporting to the Vicar Apostolic of London. Prodded by John Carroll, Lewis and former Jesuits formed the Select Body of Clergy at White Marsh in June 1783. Anticipating the end of the Revolutionary War, they discussed how to divest their mission from European control, as well as how to maintain ownership of the properties, including plantations, that had belonged to the Jesuits before the suppression. Responding to the Select Body of Clergy's wishes, the Prefect of Propaganda Fide in Rome designated John Carroll as its Prefect Apostolic in 1784.

In November 1786, the Select Body of the Clergy resolved to seek a Bishop in the United States, explore the possibility of incorporating their property in the state of Maryland, and establish a school to educate youth and nurture future clergy. In May 1789, the Select Body of Clergy recommended John Carroll as Bishop of Baltimore, a selection approved by Pope Pius VI on November 6. That same year, Carroll founded Georgetown College. In August 1790, Carroll was consecrated as Bishop in Dorset, England. In late December 1792, the General Assembly of Maryland chartered the Corporation of Roman Catholic Clergymen to manage the property of the former Jesuits.

As Bishop of Baltimore, John Carroll relied upon émigrés from the French Revolution to help establish parishes throughout the United States. In particular, the members of the Society of St. Sulpice helped minister many churches, including those established by the Jesuits in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Sulpicians also institutionalized Catholic education, establishing St. Mary's Seminary & University in Baltimore in 1791, serving on the faculty and administering Georgetown College in the late 1790s, and establishing Mount St. Mary's Seminary in 1808.

By the time the former Jesuits began to reorganize, their property interests and vision had intermingled with the Archdiocese as a whole. Soon after learning that Pope Pius VII authorized the reformation of the Society of Jesus in Russia in 1801, former Jesuits began seeking re-entry into the Society. In 1805, Russian Superior Gabriel Gruber, S.J., recognized the independence of the Mission of the American Federation, admitted six former Jesuits and nine new members, and appointed Robert Molyneux, S.J., as its Superior. By the time Pope Pius VII fully reconstituted the Society of Jesus in 1814, the Mission of the American Federation had established Georgetown College as a Jesuit institution, attracted European Jesuits to help re-establish its missions throughout Maryland and Pennsylvania, and founded a mission in New York City.

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