

CHAPTER 2

PREACHERS IN THE SERVICE OF BISHOP JOHN CARROLL

After Antonio de Montesinos returned to Santo Domingo from the Carolina coast in 1526, no other Spanish Dominicans established missions along the Atlantic coast for more than two hundred years. Then in 1786, one friar led the way for many men and women of the Order of Preachers to follow him to the United States in unbroken continuity. That forerunner was John O'Connell of the Province of Ireland, who came from his post in Spain in 1786 to serve as chaplain for the Spanish legation in New York. His was a prestigious and unique assignment: to serve with Don Diego de Gardoqui, a man of talent and influence in Church and State.^[1] Don Diego introduced him to Catholic life in early New York as well as to the nascent American government. Gardoqui, a diplomat and treaty maker, was also a faithful Catholic. He helped the Catholics on Manhattan Island to build their first church of St. Peter on Barclay Street and encouraged O'Connell to give substantial assistance in ministry to their parish.

New York at this time was a city of about 30,000 people centered in Manhattan. Over the next decade, the population continued to increase as immigrants from Ireland, England, France and Germany streamed into its ports. Urban problems of housing, public health and education challenged its new leaders. Stop-gap measures provided for elementary schools, an office of public health, and a supply of fresh water for the principal streets. In 1789 citizens founded a social and political club called Tammany Hall, which in time became one of the largest political machines in United States history.

Following the Revolutionary War, Catholics, largely from Ireland and England, numbered about two hundred. Many were poor people who worked long hours to make a living. Many were lost to the faith because of the shortage of priests. Besides the small St. Peter's Church, Catholics had available the chapels of the French and Spanish Legation,^[2] the latter in care of John O'Connell. After three years of ministry in New York, O'Connell returned to Europe. Of him John Gilmary Shea wrote, "He was the first of the Irish Dominicans to serve in this country, and we may infer that he paved the way for the brilliant, able and good priests of the Irish province who subsequently labored in New York and Philadelphia."^[3]

In 1790 Catholics of the young nation welcomed their first bishop. He was John Carroll, a native of Maryland and a member of the Society of Jesus until its suppression by Pope Clement XIV in 1773. He was called by Pope Pius VI to be Bishop of Baltimore, and therefore of the whole United States. His diocese then reached to the nation's western boundary at the Mississippi River.

John Carroll knew the challenges that lay before him. He had been facing them for six years as superior of the Catholic mission in the United States, a realistic internship for assuming episcopal authority. He took comfort in the fact that he was named bishop on the

recommendation of his fellow priests.^[4] Nevertheless, the clergy as a body were his greatest challenge, owing to their inadequate number, their coming from varied lands and cultures, and the uneven quality of their ministry. Of this challenge Carroll wrote candidly to a friend in England,

You cannot conceive the trouble I suffer already & still greater which I foresee from the medley of clerical characters coming from different quarters & various educations & seeking employment here. I cannot avoid employing some of them, & they begin soon to create disturbances.^[5]

Most of the bishop's clerical "medley" were men of religious orders.^[6] The first to come from Maryland and eastern Pennsylvania were men of the English province of the Society of Jesus. When the Society was suppressed by the Pope in 1773, the members in the United States remained faithfully at their posts.^[7] The Jesuits were soon joined by other religious men from Europe. Augustinian friars came from Ireland; Capuchins, Friars Minor and Recollect Franciscans came from Ireland and Germany. At the time of the French Revolution, men of the Society of St. Sulpice came from France.^[8]

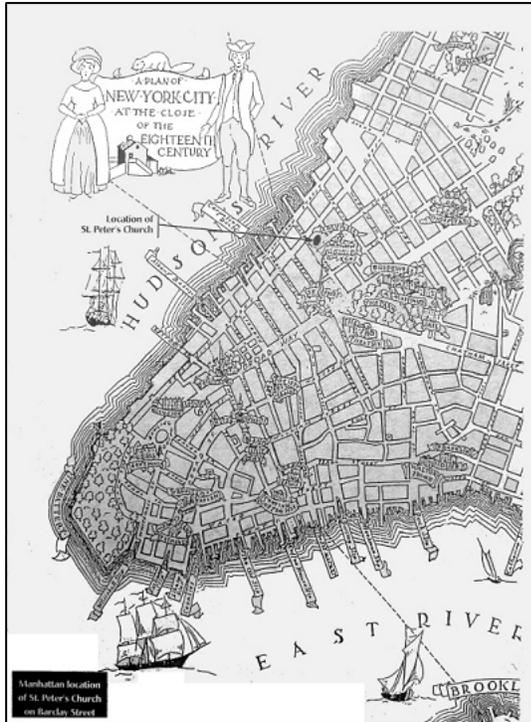
Many priests of religious orders from Europe came on individual missions without intending to make an American foundation. Some moved from place to place, perhaps deserving the label "strolling clerical fraternity" by the historian Guilday, who gave them only "a passing mention."^[9] Some caused trouble for the bishop in their parishes. However, most of the missionaries gave to the Church in the new nation their talent and good will, and some even their lives. They deserve more than a passing mention.

Many of the clergy were Irish. John Carroll was warned by an English Jesuit, Charles Plowden, against receiving any Irish priests, and especially friars. Plowden's letter is not extant, but its tenor is clear from Carroll's reply:

Your friends are alarmed at the introduction, or rather, at the arrival of Irish priests and fryars [sic] into our Country; but, my Dr. Sir, can I reject them if well recommended, and exclude numerous Xtians from every opportunity of receiving the Sacraments?

I know from my own little experience that they are a poor resource, not for want of knowledge (for they have proved, in general, men of much information) but for want of virtue, temper, & disinterestedness."^[10]

Whatever his experience, in 1787 the bishop was pleased to appoint an Irish pastor for the troubled Manhattan parish of St. Peter's on Barclay Street. He was William Vincent O'Brien, the Dominican who with John O'Connell was among the first of twelve friars to serve with Carroll. In the fall of 1787, O'Brien presented himself to the bishop for an assignment and easily passed the test of clerical ability. He brought gifts of zeal, intelligence and rich experience. He had entered the Order in the ancient Irish convent of San Clemente in Rome, then studied at Naples and the University of Bologna.^[11]



Location of St. Peter's Church on Barclay St.

The bishop appointed O'Brien pastor of New York's only Catholic parish, St. Peter's, which was gravely divided.^[12] So serious was the situation that Carroll made an arduous eight-day journey from Baltimore to install the new pastor. Facing the crisis caused by certain trustees and a former parish priest,^[13] he presented O'Brien to the troubled parishioners with these words:

My duty demanding of me. . .to provide a pastor for the care of your souls, I have invested with all necessary and requisite powers for that purpose the Rev William O'Brien, of whose zeal, virtues and talents for the work of the ministry I have received the most ample testimony and assurance.^[14]

The majority responded with good will to his plea for unity and to O'Brien's leadership. The bishop remained at St. Peter's into November. On returning to Baltimore he wrote to O'Brien,

I beseech you not to lose courage; for if you should, I candidly own that I do not know where to find the Clergyman in the U. States to replace you. I really consider your arrival in America, at so critical a period, as a providential designation of you to repair so dreadful scandals, & heal such dangerous wounds given to Religion at its first introduction into New York.^[15]

He thanked "the good Providence of God that at this juncture brought to America a priest of the Order of St. Dominic."^[16]

Portrait of Bishop John Carroll, (1736-1815)

In the entire State of New York there were no more than 2,000 Catholics, mostly of Irish origin.^[17] Some lived in Albany, but the majority in Manhattan. At this period the "papists"(not always a pejorative term) aroused little interest among other New Yorkers except when they were in trouble. Then the public was too ready to believe accounts of their misbehavior.

After leaving the city Bishop Carroll wrote that O'Brien's predecessor Nugent and his supporters were threatening dire recriminations against St. Peter's, fearing that the Catholics would not be spared open violence and bloodshed. He added,



I leave it to you to consider how harmful to our religion this regrettable affair must turn out, especially in a city in which [the Catholic Church] was established barely three years ago and in which Congress, and consequently many persons from each of the States, reside.[18]

In that year of 1787 the Constitutional Convention met in New York, with George Washington presiding.

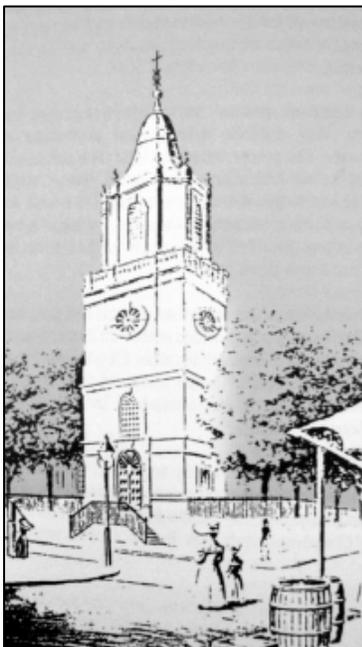
Despite the difficulties among the Catholics, William O'Brien was able to open at St. Peter's the first free school in New York City, which was also the first parish school in the State.[19]

During the yellow fever epidemics that struck New York in the closing decade of the century, the pastor encountered death daily in his compassionate rounds of the city. His life was spared, but failing health and increasing blindness curtailed his activity. The trustees complained to Bishop Carroll about the lack of ceremonies, especially High Mass and Vespers on Sunday.[20] In 1806 violence erupted again at St. Peter's, this time incited by a bigoted mob.[21] Afterward O'Brien's ill health and advancing age diminished his activity, but he had already served the Church of New York well. The historian Guilday wrote, "Father O'Brien kept order and harmony in the Catholic body of the city and State." [22]

On May 14, 1816, William O'Brien died at the age of seventy-six. He was buried in St. Peter's Church where the people placed on his tombstone an epitaph which said in part,

WHO IS THERE THAT HAS NOT HEARD OF HIS PIETY, HIS BENEVOLENCE, HIS CHARITY, HIS ZEAL DURING THE RAVAGES OF THE YELLOW FEVER IN THE MEMORABLE YEARS OF '95 AND '98 ? YES; "I WAS SICK AND YOU VISITED ME."(Matt. XXV; 36)[23]

St. Peter's in 1790



Long before the death of William O'Brien, Francis Antoninus Fleming, a professor in the studium at Lisbon, came to serve in the United States. Two Philadelphia Catholics had asked the bishop to bring Fleming to their parish, St. Mary's, and his cautious reply was,

If he be really desirous of coming to America, and will bring with him sufficient vouchers for his good conduct and ability, I will be exceedingly glad of his service, receive him with cordiality and give him employment suitable to his profession.[24]

The vouchers came without delay and were impressive.[25] Fleming was permitted by his Irish provincial to volunteer for the American missions and was recommended by the Nuncio at Lisbon.[26] In December 1789 John Carroll welcomed Fleming to Philadelphia. Initially he described Fleming as "a Gentleman of amiable manners & temper, & a very excellent scholar." [27] Later he wrote, "We have a great acquisition in an Irish Dominican from

Lisbon of the name of Fleming; . . . a well-informed, decent, & sweet-tempered man." [28]

The Irish Dominican found himself in a city far different from those cities he knew in Europe, although Philadelphia was the largest city of the new republic. In 1790 the first national census recorded a population of 42,000 counting natives, immigrants and free blacks. [29] The focus of American political life now moved from New York to Philadelphia, where George Washington began his term as president, and Thomas Jefferson returned belatedly from France to become Secretary of State.

Along with St. Mary's, Francis Fleming's pastoral responsibilities included the Chapel of St. Joseph in Willing's Alley and the distant rural outstations of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. The people welcomed their new pastor as a good preacher. Philadelphia Catholics and Protestants alike, noted John Carroll, seemed to have "scarce any other test to judge of a clergyman than his talents for preaching." [30] They preferred their pastor's "live" sermons to the mere reading of a prepared text, which was then a common practice. They so valued Fleming's sermon for St. Patrick's Day in 1790 that they had it published. [31]

Bishop Carroll named Francis Fleming one of his two vicars general and gave him care of the northern district of the Baltimore diocese, which embraced Pennsylvania, Delaware, the two Jerseys, New York and New England! As vicar, Fleming participated in the first synod of the diocese, which Bishop Carroll convened in November 1791. [32] He defended Carroll vigorously when he was accused of favoring former Jesuits and discriminating against German Catholics. [33]

After only three years Fleming's ministry was cut short by death in 1793 while caring for victims of yellow fever. The epidemic caused 4000 deaths in Philadelphia alone between August and October. Fleming's assistant, the faithful former Jesuit Lawrence Graessel, suffered the same fate. Concerning their loss Bishop Carroll wrote to Archbishop Troy of Dublin,

Your kind condolence on the loss suffered by the death of two of our most respectable and valuable ecclesiastical members... revived that remembrance of them which always affects me with the most lively grief, as well as deep concern for the well-being of my diocese. I can truly say that their loss is irreparable to me, for I have not, amongst the clergy here, any men capable of filling that void which their deaths have made. Your Lordship was acquainted with Mr. Fleming's merits, and they could not have been exercised anywhere more to the credit of religion than at Philadelphia, where he was universally loved and esteemed. [34]

Two friars who were students with Francis Fleming at Lisbon, Michael Burke and Christopher Keating, had followed him to the American mission in 1789. Burke was assigned to St. Peter's, New York, where, except for two years in Norfolk, Virginia, he remained until 1800. After courageous care of yellow fever victims, he drowned while crossing a river to attend the sick. [35]

As John Carroll was leaving for England in 1790, he wrote to Archbishop Troy, "Another of your brethren in religion, Mr. Keating from Lisbon, was just arrived when I left Baltimore. He is

much commended by Mr. Fleming and will be fixed near Philadelphi."[\[36\]](#) Christopher Keating ministered to scattered Catholics in Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey.[\[37\]](#) He was praised for his zeal and care of the sick and dying. During one epidemic Bishop Carroll wrote, "Mr. Keating exposed himself night and day with most exemplary charity, and gained the love and esteem of all."[\[38\]](#)

Keating loved Francis Fleming as a brother, who in turn treated the young man, as Carroll wrote, "with the tenderness of a father."[\[39\]](#) The yellow fever which took Fleming's life in 1793 also struck Keating. He finally recovered, but in his mourning for Fleming, he became an alcoholic. On learning this, the bishop wrote to him with firm kindness, suggesting a priest counselor.[\[40\]](#) To the regret of his Philadelphia parishioners, Keating returned to Ireland in 1795. There he died seven years later at the age of 39.[\[41\]](#)

Not all the Dominicans who served in the early Diocese of Baltimore were from Ireland. When John Carroll became bishop in 1790, two French Dominicans, Jean Antoine Le Dru and Gabriel Isabey, were at work in the Mississippi Valley. Each was unknown to the other, but both were in the service of Bishop John Carroll.

The first was French-born Jean Le Dru, whose ministerial adventures were bizarre and tragic.[\[42\]](#) He entered the Order of Preachers in 1772 in Paris, where he studied and was ordained at the historic convent of St. Jacques. The friars there were known in France as Jacobins; but when the French revolutionaries confiscated that priory in 1790, they also assumed for themselves the name given the Dominicans by the people.[\[43\]](#)

Following a grave illness, Le Dru was assigned in 1785 to the Island of Martinique to recover his health. When returning to France in the following year, he was shipwrecked on the Atlantic and brought by rescuers into Nova Scotia. There the Vicar General appointed him pastor of the Acadians at St. Mary's Bay.[\[44\]](#) Then began his many troubles in North America, ranging from the questioning of his priestly status to accusations that he was an American spy.[\[45\]](#) Late in 1788 he left Canada for Baltimore to request an assignment from John Carroll. He was asked for a recommendation from his provincial superior, but his request in early 1789 did not reach Paris before the French Revolution erupted there in May. No reply ever came.[\[46\]](#) John Carroll sent Le Dru to the French settlements in the Illinois country around Kaskaskia, which was now American, but the Bishop of Quebec claimed that it was still within his jurisdiction.[\[47\]](#)

Late in 1789 Jean Le Dru left the Illinois country for the Spanish territory across the Mississippi to accept a pastorate in St. Louis.[\[48\]](#) This dismayed John Carroll and seemed to confirm negative judgments he had heard from Canada. He thought Le Dru was an "apostate Dominican."[\[49\]](#)

After four years in St. Louis, Le Dru set out for Canada in 1794 to clear his name with Bishop Hubert of Quebec and then go on to Baltimore to see Bishop Carroll. He ministered to scattered French settlers along the way. On arriving at Mackinac Island in 1794, he was apprehended by the British commandant as an American spy and sent in custody through the Great Lakes from one British fort to another. His ship was wrecked on Lake Ontario and Le Dru was drowned, his life ending with the same kind of catastrophe that brought him to North

America in 1786.[\[50\]](#) But there exists now in St. Louis a marker to commemorate his ministry in the Mississippi Valley, placed there by Dominicans who are there today.

The second French Dominican who served with Bishop Carroll was Gabriel Isabey whose birthplace in France is unknown. Following the American purchase of Louisiana, John Carroll was named head of the vast Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas from 1805 to 1812. In the bayou country of southwest Louisiana, the tribal home of the Attakapas Indians, the exiled Acadians from Canada began to settle in 1755.[\[51\]](#) Their first chapel, which Longfellow memorialized in the poem "Evangeline," was replaced in 1765 by the church of St. Martin of Tours in St. Martinville. To that parish a French friar, Gabriel Isabey, was assigned as pastor in 1804.[\[52\]](#) How or when he arrived from France is not known. Possibly he came from Bordeaux with a fellow refugee of the French Revolution, Miguel Barriere, who preceded him at St. Martinville.[\[53\]](#) Isabey traveled throughout the bayou region in compassionate ministry to the Cajuns, descendants of the Acadians from Canada. He remained with them until his death in 1823.[\[54\]](#) Of Isabey's pastorate a Louisiana historian wrote, "This priest was greatly beloved. . . . His gentleness and amiability gained all hearts, and when he died there was general mourning."[\[55\]](#)

Soon after John Carroll became bishop, he expressed the hope that the Irish Dominicans would establish an American province of friars to give stability to their mission.[\[56\]](#) Conditions in Europe made this impossible at the time. Priests were sent on individual assignments while they remained members of the Irish province. Among these were the last four men from Ireland to serve in the Baltimore Diocese entirely within the time of Bishop Carroll. They were Anthony Caffry, Dominic May, Francis Bodkin and Bartholomew McMahon.

Anthony Caffry entered the Order of Preachers at Esker in Galway, making his profession in 1777.[\[57\]](#) On coming to America in 1794, he was asked to form the first Catholic parish in the City of Washington, then under construction as the new "Federal City" to which the national government would move from Philadelphia in 1800. The Irish architect, James Hoban, it was said, persuaded Caffry to come there for the sake of the Irish laborers who were working on the government buildings.[\[58\]](#) While those buildings were under construction, Anthony Caffry and his parishioners worked nearby on their modest frame church of St. Patrick.[\[59\]](#) The laborers' parish was poor and funds were needed to continue construction. The pastor asked Bishop Carroll for help, reminding him that he had saved Carroll's life in a recent epidemic.[\[60\]](#)

The bishop and his parishioners soon learned that Caffry could be difficult, as when he insisted to the Coadjutor Bishop of Baltimore, Leonard Neale, that the area of St. Patrick's Parish must include the entire expanse of Washington City![\[61\]](#) After ministering more than ten years in Washington, Caffry was assigned to New York, and returned three years later to Ireland. In 1811 he died unexpectedly in Dublin. On hearing this, Bishop Carroll lamented the decease of "my good-hearted friend Dr. Caffrey."[\[62\]](#)

During the summer of 1794, Dominic May, O.P., set out from Dublin for Philadelphia in the company of the Augustinian John Rosseter and a diocesan priest, Michael Ennis.[\[63\]](#) Archbishop John Troy had recommended the trio to Bishop Carroll, based on the judgment of the Irish Dominican provincial. Father May, he wrote, was "well-informed, exemplary and laborious."[\[64\]](#)

But his new ministry was hardly begun when, not three months after arriving, he was stricken with yellow fever. He died in Baltimore on October 2, 1794. The cathedral record described "a priest of the Order of Preachers, . . . lately from Ireland, deceased this day of a malignant fever, aged about 33 years." [65] Bishop Carroll wrote to Archbishop Troy,

I had no opportunity of experiencing the good qualities which all accounts concurred in attributing to Mr. May.... He arrived very sick at Baltimore where the fever then raged. I lodged him at my house, though I did not much apprehend the nature of his disease. But it soon manifested itself in so visible a manner that he died three days after. [66]

One more sorrowful loss for the young Church in America!

If any Irish priest deserved the epithet "wandering friar," it was Francis Bodkin, who came to the Baltimore Diocese in 1794. By his own testimony he had studied in Rome and Naples, ministered to a parish in Spain, and brought very ample credentials from England and Ireland. The only remaining evidence of his studies are his Spanish Bible and moral theology text. [67] Bishop Carroll announced his coming when he informed Archbishop Troy of the death of Dominic May. "Since his death," he wrote, "another Irish gentleman, and of the Order of St. Dominic, Mr. Bodkin, arrived from London, destined to live with a private family, but the arrangements were not made agreeably to the promises given in London, and he went to seek a brother in the West Indies." [68]

Carroll's words revealed that Bodkin was ready to begin his restless journeying, first to Kentucky and Louisiana, en route to the West Indies! In 1804 he wrote to Carroll from New Orleans about the historic transfer of that city and the vast region west of the Mississippi to the United States. He said, "I witnessed the Spanish, French, and now the American flag flying." [69] It was good history, but his ministry was not revealed. His travels led him finally back to Galway, where he died on September 27, 1822. [70]

A fourth Irish Dominican, Bartholomew Augustine McMahon, arrived in Philadelphia in 1799. Bishop Carroll sent him to St. Peter's in New York, but within months he became a victim of the rampant yellow fever and died there in July of 1800. [71]

TABLE OF FRIARS

FRIARS WHO SERVED WITH BISHOP JOHN CARROLL		
1786 – 1815		
Name	Ministry	Location
John O'Connell	1786 – 1789	New York
William V. O'Brien	1787 – 1816 (d.)	New York
Francis Fleming	1789 – 1793 (d.)	Philadelphia
Michael Burke	1789 – 1800 (d.)	Philadelphia; New York
Christopher Keating	1789 – 1795	Philadelphia
Jean-Antoine Le Dru	1789 – 1794 (d.)	Mississippi Valley
Gabriel Isabey	1793 – 1823 (d.)	St. Martinsville, LA
Anthony Caffry	1794 – 1808 (d.)	Washington, D.C.
Dominic May	1794 (d.)	Baltimore

Francis Bodkin	1795 – 1796	Maryland
Bartholomew A. McMahon	1799 – 1800 (d.)	Philadelphia; New York
John Ceslas Fenwick	1800 – 1815 (d.)	Maryland
<i>Note: The entry (d.) designates those who died while on mission to the United States.</i>		

The last Dominican welcomed by Archbishop Carroll was not an Irishman but an American, born in Maryland not far from the estate of the Carrolls. He was John Ceslas Fenwick whose nephew Edward Fenwick founded in 1805 the first province of the Order of Preachers in the United States. The two Fenwicks belonged to that eminent Maryland family whose progenitor Cuthbert came in 1634 with Lord Calvert's colonists from England.[\[72\]](#)

John Fenwick was born around the year 1759 at the family manor on the Patuxent River in St. Mary's County, Maryland. In 1773 he went to Belgium to study at Holy Cross College in Bornhem, conducted by the English Dominican friars in exile.[\[73\]](#) While John was there, the Revolutionary War took place and the colonies declared their nation's independence. At seventeen John became an American citizen, to the joy of all his family.

On October 14, 1777, John became a Dominican novice in Belgium, the first American to enter the Order of Preachers; but he could not make his religious profession until 1783. It was forbidden to youths under 25 years of age, not by the Order or the Church, but by the imperial intruder in Church affairs, Joseph II of Austria.[\[74\]](#) John continued his studies at Louvain, was ordained there in 1785 and then received the degree, Lector of Theology. He was assigned to teach at Holy Cross College where one of the students was his nephew from Maryland. After graduation in 1794, Edward followed his uncle into the English province of the Order of Preachers.

When the French Revolutionaries swept into Belgium in the summer of 1794, the Dominicans fled from Bornhem, forced to leave their property in the hands of the invaders.[\[75\]](#) They returned to England and soon reopened Holy Cross College in the Surrey village of Carshalton near London. John Fenwick taught theology there until about 1800, when he returned home to begin years of pastoral ministry with Bishop Carroll in his native Maryland.[\[76\]](#)

Early in 1804 John's nephew Edward began to establish an American province of the Dominican friars in Maryland. Knowing his uncle John to be "a worthy confrere of the Order and missionary,"[\[77\]](#) Edward wrote to Rome that "Father John Fenwick, my uncle.. . is in Maryland, and will, I suppose, joyfully join me."[\[78\]](#) When Edward and his co-founders were sent by Bishop Carroll to Kentucky, John did not go with them. He remained in the service of Carroll in southern Maryland, probably at Carroll's request.[\[79\]](#) In 1804 Bishop Carroll assigned John Fenwick to a cluster of Maryland missions where the Jesuits had been the only missionaries for many decades. The professor from Belgium and southern England now began eleven years of exhausting ministry on horseback or on foot. His base was Port Tobacco, Maryland, where he lived at St. Thomas Manor with erstwhile members of the Society of Jesus.[\[80\]](#)

John's nephew Edward knew the hardships of the Maryland mission. He had experienced them briefly before going on to Kentucky. In 1805 he wrote to Rome from Maryland,

The distress of the Catholics in this country... is beyond description. The scarcity of priests, the numerous and dispersed congregations, their desolation and pressing solicitations for spiritual succor should move stones, if possible, to compassion. Scarcely a missionary in Maryland who has not two, three and four congregations to serve, which are 10, 15, and 20 miles distant from one another.[\[81\]](#)

In 1808 the vast Baltimore Diocese was divided, and the Dioceses of Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Bardstown were carved from its vast expanse. John Carroll was named Archbishop and his diocese was reduced from nation-wide to more manageable size. Yet within its limits Catholic settlers and parishes were multiplying, while the number of clergy increased slowly and veteran priests grew older.

Among those veterans was John Fenwick, who continued his arduous ministry in Maryland. Conscious of his dual allegiance to the Order and the diocese, but also of his decreasing strength, he wrote in 1813 to Archbishop Carroll,

I have been long thinking of writing to you about retiring, which I mentioned to you before hearing of the intended journey [from Kentucky to Maryland] of the Rev. Mr. E. Fenwick. I waited his arrival. I have conversed with him, and think best to consult my superior [Samuel T. Wilson, of the new province] whether he would wish me to come to Kentucky or not. I now write to him, and shall leave myself in his hands. In the meantime I put my hopes in you, that you will grant me the place of retirement you mentioned to me, or any other more eligible. I wish now to give up immediately, or as soon as possible, as I find myself overpowered with hardships and difficulties, and wish to prepare myself for death.[\[82\]](#)

How the archbishop replied is not known, but Carroll was aware of Fenwick's overwork. He had written on November 11, 1812, to John Grassi that John Fenwick was "overpowered" at his post at St. Thomas, Port Tobacco.[\[83\]](#) But in the following year John Fenwick was assigned temporarily to one more Maryland mission, St. Joseph's at Deer Creek. There he must have expended all his remaining energy. His death occurred on August 20, 1815, not four months before that of John Carroll.

On hearing of "good Fr. John Fenwick's unexpected death," Archbishop Carroll wrote to Grassi, "The extent of his missions has been contracted since the Rev. Mr. Brooke has resumed the ministry; but yet it will be very difficult to replace his loss."[\[84\]](#) Grassi replied with details of John's death:

From the letter that I wrote to Father F. Fenwick. . . Your Excellency will have understood how true and too much is the sad news of the bitter loss of the Rev. John Fenwick. Father Francis Neale wrote me from St. Thomas that that praiseworthy man died Sunday, August 20, and was buried the Monday following. Good Father John became overheated going on foot from one place to another, bringing on the sickness that soon reduced him to extremity. Behold us at a new impasse, searching for a missionary to make up for such a loss.[\[85\]](#)

The final word to Archbishop Carroll came from John Carey, S.J., with whom John Fenwick lived at Port Tobacco. He wrote,

The unexpected & almost sudden death of our honoured & esteemed dwelling companion, the Rev. J. Fenwick, has undoubtedly much surprised your Lordship as it did all those who were acquainted with that amiable Missionary & knew the strength & habitual state of his constitution & his health. The nature of his first & last sickness is not perfectly known. However,[it] caused a dissolution of the whole system & from that moment rendered every medicinal art & remedy inefficacious.[\[86\]](#)

John Ceslas Fenwick was buried at St. Thomas Manor, Port Tobacco, among his deceased friends and co-workers of the Society of Jesus. It was ironic that while John remained faithful to his ministry in Maryland, his bishop had refused permission for his nephew Edward to establish a province in their home State, sending them instead to the Kentucky frontier.

Even a cursory review of the Irish Dominicans on mission in the American Church before 1815 reveals the significant role of two men who sponsored their coming and their ministry. They were John Troy and John Carroll, the heads of the Church in the country that sent the men and the county that received them. Before becoming bishops, both prelates had been members of religious orders, the first a Dominican, and the second, a Jesuit. Both kept before them, with vision and fairness, the good of the whole Church, and both were realists. No account of that period would be complete without a brief glance at the contributions of John Troy and John Carroll as collaborators. They formed a liaison of trust that bridged the Atlantic and lasted for more than a quarter of a century, from 1788 until Carroll's death in 1815.

**Grave marker of John Fenwick, O.P.,
in Jesuit cemetery, Port Tobacco, Maryland**



John Troy (1739-1823) was an Irish Dominican who studied at San Clemente, the Dominican studium in Rome. Later, as prior, he prepared the young students for the far-flung missions of the Irish Dominican province. During his ten years as Bishop of Ossory, beginning in 1773, Troy became known for his wisdom and impartiality concerning the clergy, both of the diocese and of religious orders. In 1786 the bishops of Ireland chose him to be the Archbishop of Dublin.[\[87\]](#) In that office he transformed the Church in Ireland [\[88\]](#) without losing sight of the Church elsewhere, especially in North America. His constant concern was to provide fully qualified priests, first for Ireland, where he helped to found the renowned Maynooth seminary, and then for the missions of Canada and the United States.

The concerns of John Troy were those of John Carroll as well, when he was named successively the superior of the American missions, then first Bishop, then Archbishop of

Baltimore. In collaboration the two Church leaders, each formed in the spirituality of his religious order, developed a friendship based on common ideals.

When John Carroll was made bishop, the two men had already begun their lasting correspondence. In 1778 Carroll had welcomed the first letter from Troy with these words"

I am happy in taking this occasion to open a correspondence with a prelate of your distinguished character, and hope your Grace will allow me to apply to you with confidence and liberty in all matters which may intervene between this country and Ireland relative to the welfare of religion.[89]

Their letters were marked by mutual confidence as both bishops wrote frankly about the qualifications or limitations of men from Ireland.[90] Characteristic of Carroll was his request to Troy to send priests "of unblemished morality, sobriety & of good knowledge." [91]

Troy showed no favoritism in recommending men of religious orders. They were sent in fact, not by him, but by their own superiors. Nevertheless, the Dominican archbishop gave Carroll full information and counsel, sometimes expressing regret that certain men he had recommended did not meet their standards.[92] The record shows that the majority of those placed through their collaboration were exemplary priests.

The relationship between Carroll and Troy was strained when John Connolly, O.P., was made Bishop of New York without the consultation owed to Bishop Carroll by Church officials; but Carroll's recommendations had never reached Rome.[93] Worse in Carroll's eyes was the nomination by Irish bishops of the controversial William V. Harold, O.P., for the Philadelphia bishopric. (See Chapter 3). Believing that Troy had promoted his nomination, Carroll told him with his usual candor, "Would it not be resented as a very improper interference, if we the Bps in the US should presume to fill the Vacant Sees of Ireland?" [94] Troy hastened to respond,

If I interfered in the appointment of a Bishop for Philadelphia by a direct recommendation of Revd. Mr. Harold, I must confess my having acted irregularly and improperly. But, if I recollect aright, I only stated the interference of others, for your Grace's information. However this be, I regret exceedingly that any irregular act of mine should afford a moment's uneasiness or anxiety to Your Grace.[95]

Troy's recollection was correct. His letter had mentioned Harold only in these words:

Revd. Mr. Harold Senr. has procured recommendations from the Archbishop of Bordeaux & other Prelates in favour of his nephew Revd Mr. Wm. Harold to be appointed to the See of Philadelphia, which have been forwarded to Rome. Your Grace's knowledge of him dispenses me from saying anything more of him." [96]

The basis for the lasting relationship of Archbishops Carroll and Troy was each man's respect for the wisdom and gifts of the other, supporting their common love and labors for the Church. Their relationship continued to the end of John Carroll's life, and benefited the Church as much as the labors of the missionaries who came to the new nation.

Few documents can be found to tell the story of the Preachers in the United States at the time of Bishop John Carroll. Those few reveal features of their mission which, though not unique, substantially benefited the American Church. First, the Dominican friars followed the example of St. Dominic in putting the mission of the Church before the founding of a new province for the Order. They worked zealously with priests and people of the diocese to realize that common purpose.

Another element of Dominican ministry expected and appreciated by the people was their devoted preaching. The preacher's weaknesses, in the tradition of the Order, were absolved through his preaching; and if his sins were public, he sought forgiveness for them through public proclamation of the Word.^[97] Another gift of the early missionaries to the faithful was their thorough study. They received excellent education in colleges and universities on the continent, from Rome and Bologna to Paris, Lisbon, Bilbao and Louvain. Some used this learning for writing, as did William O'Brien in writing the life of St. Paul, which provided substance for his sermons in the church of St. Peter's on Barclay Street.

The friars' preaching took another form as they gave days and nights to the care of the sick and dying. This was the ministry of William O'Brien which the people singled out in remembering his years of service among them. And in the same ministry the friars Francis Fleming, Michael Burke, Bartholomew McMahan and Dominic May gave their lives.

Although Bishop Carroll's mission was sometimes hampered by unstable clerics, most Dominican missionaries came to the diocese with the intent to remain. Of the twelve friars who came to the United States in Carroll's time, eight never went home. For most of them that time was very short, since death claimed them unexpectedly in the midst of their ministry.

To summarize the contributions of these friars is not to disregard their limitations and weaknesses. Rather, it should emphasize the good they did in working with John Carroll to lay firm foundations for the Church in the United States.

NOTES

1. Gardoqui negotiated treaties with John Jay and won the respect of leaders of the new nation and the Church. John Carroll especially appreciated his gifts. He wrote to Rome, "I have repeatedly consulted the very excellent Spanish Representative about the state of religion and its spread throughout the States." To Cardinal Leonardo Antonelli, Maryland, March 18, 1788, Archives of Propaganda Fide, Rome(APF) Am.Centr vol.2, 524r-527r.
2. The reader will find greater detail on the city of New York and its Catholics in the Profile of Bishop John Connolly.
3. John G. Shea, **The Life and Times of the Most Rev. John Carroll** vol.2 (New York: 1888) 268.
4. The election was described in the papal brief by which John Carroll was made Bishop of Baltimore. See John Tracy Ellis, ed., **Documents of American Catholic History**, vol.1(Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1987) 163.
5. Baltimore, Oct.23, 1789, Thomas Hanley, S.J., ed., **The John Carroll Papers**, vol.1 (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1976) 349. The **Carroll Papers** will be cited hereafter as CP 1, 2, or 3 designating the three volumes. Plowden, Carroll's confrere in the suppressed Society of Jesus, was a trusted friend to whom he could write of diocesan affairs in confidence, thus recording unintentionally the pulse of his episcopal ministry.
6. Among the 22 priests at the Baltimore Synod of 1791, there were three diocesan priests, three Sulpicians, and sixteen members of religious orders, of whom most were from the suppressed Society of Jesus. See the Synod

- Report in Peter Guilday, **The Life and Times of John Carroll** (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1954) 428-429.
7. See Gerald Fogarty, Joseph Durkin, R. Emmett Curran, **The Maryland Jesuits, 1634-1833** (Baltimore: Maryland Province, Society of Jesus, 1976). The Society was partially restored in 1805, and fully in 1815.
 8. These were the primary senders of religious men to the eighteenth-century United States. The Sulpicians, while not a religious order, served the Church admirably as missionaries and bishops as well as founders of seminaries, their chief work. See Christopher Kauffman, **Tradition and Transformation in Catholic Culture: the Priests of Saint Sulpice in the United States from 1791 to the Present** (New York: Macmillan, 1987).
 9. Guilday 504.
 10. To Plowden, Rock Creek, Maryland, May 26, 1788. CP, 1, 389.
 11. Hugh Fenning, O.P., **The Irish Dominican Province, 1678-1790** (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1990) 502. This is a richly documented source of information concerning the friars of the Irish province who came on mission to the United States.
 12. Andrew Nugent, an Irish Capuchin, was temporary pastor in New York. He encouraged parishioners to join him in resisting Carroll's authority. He also caused civil disorders for which he was tried in the civil court. Cf. Carroll to John Thorpe, New York, Nov. 7, 1787. APF Am. Centr. v. 2, 510rv; also Carroll to Plowden, Maryland, Mar. 1, 1788. CP 1, 272-73 et passim.
 13. Many trustees asserted the right of lay control over temporal affairs in the parish. See "Trusteeism" by Patrick Carey in Glazier, Michael and Thomas Shelley, eds., **The Encyclopedia of American Catholic History** (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997) See also Carey.
 14. Sermon given in the chapel of the Spanish legation, Oct. 1787. CP 1, 264. Nugent and some parishioners had blocked Carroll from celebrating Mass in St. Peter's Church.
 15. Baltimore, Dec. 8, 1787. CP 1, 271-72.
 16. To Cardinal Leonardo Antonelli, Maryland, Mar. 18, 1788. APF Am. Centr. v. 2, 524r. Carroll showed his confidence in O'Brien by sending him to Boston to deal with a schism there, and also consulted O'Brien concerning the need for an American bishop.
 17. Two years earlier the estimate was 1500.
 18. To John Thorpe, New York, Nov. 7, 1787, CP 1, 265-67.
 19. James Roosevelt Bayley, **A Brief Sketch of the Early History of the Catholic Church on the Island of New York**, 2nd ed. (New York: Catholic Publication Society, 1870) 65-66. Bayley noted that the school enrollment averaged 500. He was a nephew of Elizabeth Seton, who became a Catholic of St. Peter's parish in 1805.
 20. Hearing this, Bishop Carroll sent O'Brien a letter of reproof. Washington, July 5, 1796, CP 2, 184-85.
 21. Bayley 68-69.
 22. Guilday 427.
 23. Reproduced in Bayley 66.
 24. Carroll to parishioners of St. Mary's, Philadelphia, from Baltimore, July 21, 1788, CP 1, 321. Catholics often took the initiative in obtaining priests from their homeland. They sent inquiries, named possible recruits for Bishop Carroll's consideration, and requested his authorization for them.
 25. See Fenning, 541-546, concerning the qualifications of Fleming and related facts about his vocation.
 26. Charles Bellisoni to Carroll, Sept. 4, 1789. Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore (AAB) 8 A 35.
 27. To Plowden, Philadelphia, Dec. 24, 1789, CP 1 398.
 28. Carroll to Plowden, Rock Creek, Md., Feb. 24, 1790, CP 1, 431.
 29. The census takers often listed free blacks in nameless groups, as they did the slaves. The latter were counted as three-fourths of their true number. The 1790 census revealed that more than 95 percent of the nation's citizens lived in rural areas. But most of the immigrants, especially those from Ireland, chose to live then in the city. Populations of the chief urban centers besides Philadelphia were recorded in 1790 as follows: New York 33,000 Boston 18,000 Charleston 16,000 Baltimore 13,000. The national population was 3,930,000, of whom Catholics numbered about 35,000, or fewer than 1%. See Gerald Shaugnessy, S.M., **Has the Immigrant Kept the Faith?** (New York: Macmillan, 1925) 52.
 30. Carroll to Plowden, Rock Creek, MD Dec. 15, 1785, CP 1, 196.
 31. Fenning, 543. Very likely the publisher was their fellow parishioner, Mathew Carey, who was writer, patriot, bookseller and defender of the Church until his death in 1839. **New Catholic Encyclopedia**, 1967 ed.
 32. CP 1, 526 ff.
 33. Reported by the Apostolic Nuncio to Propaganda Fide, Lisbon, Jan. 20 and Feb. 3, 1791, APF Am. Centr. v. 3 11-15.

34. Baltimore, July 12, 1794, CP 2, 120. Just previous to his death Graessl had been designated coadjutor for the diocese.
35. Michael Burke was often called by his second name, Nicholas. See Fenning 569.
36. Posted from London, July 23, 1790, CP 1,452.
37. From baptismal records, St. Joseph's chapel, 1791-1795, kept by Keating for the outlying stations. Philadelphia Archdiocesan Archives(PAA).
38. To Troy, Baltimore, Sept. 28, 1795. DDA 116/6, no.93, as quoted in Fenning 563, n.194.
39. Carroll to Troy.
40. Baltimore, July 16, 1795, CP 2, 144.
41. Fenning 564.
42. See the unpublished study by Michael Ruthenberg, "By Way of Oswego; Jean Antoine Le Dru, O.P.," Aquinas Institute, St. Louis, 1988. This work, carefully documented, provides the facts concerning Le Dru.
43. The term "Jacobin" was also given to Dominicans beyond Paris. Their church in Toulouse where the tomb of Thomas Aquinas is venerated has been known for centuries as the Church of the Jacobins.
44. Le Dru to Bishop Jean Hubert, Mar. 29, 1790, Archives, Archdiocese of Quebec.
45. Although Bishop Hubert gave him full faculties as a "missionary curé" among the Acadians, Le Dru was accused by two Irish priests of pretending to be a priest. In Nova Scotia the British residents did not welcome anyone from France. Ruthenberg 7.
46. Just before religious orders were suppressed Carroll wrote that "the Jacobin priest" had not yet obtained a letter from his provincial. To Pierre Gibault, Baltimore, Jan.20, 1790, CP 1, 421. A footnote on p. 422 of CP 1 states that James McHenry, writing to Carroll June 12,1796, accused Le Dru of "undermining American interests against the English." But McHenry's letter includes no such accusation. AAB 5 D4.
47. See Carroll to Bishop Jean Hubert, Baltimore, May 5,1788, and Hubert's reply from Quebec, Oct. 6, 1788. Both are quoted in Guilday 296-298.
48. Ruthenberg, 15. Several missionaries among the French settlers left them because of lack of support, especially after widespread failure of their crops. In the Spanish colony they were assured at least of meeting the cost of living.
49. Carroll to Bishop Jean Hubert, Mar. 2, 1796. CP 2, 162. There is no evidence in Dominican records that Le Dru was an apostate. The inventory made by French revolutionaries in September 1790 lists him as an ordained Dominican of the Arras convent, which was closed in the following summer. Neither is there documentation concerning his alleged misdemeanors. Ruthenberg concludes that accusations were colored by anti-French prejudice among the clergy and people of Nova Scotia. Ruthenberg 6, 33 ff.
50. Ruthenberg, 36; 44-46. Victor O'Daniel, in his **Dominican Province of St. Joseph** (New York: Holy Name Society, 1942)129 states that Le Dru left the Order in France before coming to America, but the 1790 census of the Arras convent refutes this supposition.
51. Roger Baudier, **The Catholic Church in Louisiana** (New Orleans: Baudier, 1939) 171.
52. Roger Baudier 252, 266, 283.
53. O'Daniel 129-30.
54. M.A.C., "The Church of the Attakapas, 1750-1889," **American Catholic Quarterly Review** 14 (1889): 477-78.
55. Baudier 252.
56. Carroll to John Troy, Baltimore, Sept. 28, 1795. DDA 116/6, no.93, quoted in Fenning 563-64.
57. Fenning 561. There is some evidence that he studied at the Sorbonne. Bishop Carroll always identified him as "Dr. Caffrey."
58. Hoban's role is mentioned on the memorial tablet to Caffry erected on the grounds of St. Patrick Parish, but this is not documented. See "James Hoban, the Architect and Builder of the White House and the Superintendent of the Capitol at Washington," **American Catholic Historical Researches** 24 (1907): 35-52.
59. See the well documented study by William W. Warner, **At Peace with All Their Neighbors: Catholics and Catholicism in the National Capital, 1787-1860** (Washington D.C: Georgetown University Press, Oct. 1994) Ch.6.
60. Caffry to Carroll, Washington, Aug. 1800, AAB 8 A C 3.
61. Neale to Carroll, Georgetown, Jan. 27, 1804, AAB 5 P 5.
62. Baltimore, Jan.16, 1812. Spic. Ossor. 3, 533-34. Quoted in Fenning, 562, n.193. Caffry's name is spelled with an ay or ey in various documents. In his letters to Carroll he uses neither vowel in his signature.
63. Rosseter became a founder, with Matthew Carr, of the American province of the Augustinians in Philadelphia. The diocesan priest Michael Ennis has been mistakenly identified as an Augustinian, as in Hanley, CP 2, 143.
64. Dublin, Oct.18, 1794, AAB 8 M 1. In this letter Troy clearly identified Michael Ennis as a diocesan priest.

65. St. Peter Pro-Cathedral Internments 1794.
66. Georgetown, June 22, 1795, CP 2, 143.
67. According to Fenning, 565, "No evidence of his work, nor even of his presence in Ireland lies to hand."
68. June 22, 1795. CP 2, 143.
69. To Archbishop Carroll, New Orleans, Jan.3, 1804, AAB 1 T 8.
70. Fenning 569.
71. Guilday 626.
72. Cf. Victor O'Daniel, O.P., **The Right Rev. Edward Dominic Fenwick, O.P.**, (Washington, D.C.: **The Dominicana**, 1920) Ch.1. The Fenwicks, like the Carrolls. were families of faith who lived in St. Mary's County and were blessed from the beginning by the ministry of Jesuit missionaries from England. See Fogarty, Durkin and Curran.
73. Like the friars of Ireland, the English Dominicans conducted colleges and houses of formation in Belgium.
74. Victor O'Daniel, O.P., "The Rev. John Ceslas Fenwick, O.P," **Catholic Historical Review** 1 (1915): 20-22.
75. The English chronicler indicated the friars fled in disguise and barely escaped detection while crossing the English Channel.
76. O'Daniel, **Fenwick**.
77. Edward Fenwick to Luke Concanen, O.P., Carshalton, April 14, 1804, Archives General of the Orders of Preachers, Rome (AGOP) XIII, 03150, 65.
78. Fenwick to Concanen, London, Sept 1, 1804, AGOP XIII, 03150, 66.
79. So great were the needs in Maryland that Carroll persuaded Edward Fenwick and Robert Angier, one of the founding members of the American province, to minister there for a while before going on to Kentucky. Later Angier returned to the Maryland missions from 1816 to 1825. Cf. E. I. Devitt, S.J., "The Clergy List of 1819, Diocese of Baltimore", **Records** of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia, 22 (1911): 238-41.
80. O'Daniel, "John Ceslas Fenwick," **Catholic Historical Review**, 1 (1915): 23.
81. To Luke Concanen, Piscataway, Md., Aug.1, 1805, AGOP XIII, 03150, 73.
82. St. Thomas, Port Tobacco, Md., Dec.8, 1813. AAB 3 R 14. Thomas Wilson came from English Dominicans in 1805 to assist Edward Fenwick in establishing a Dominican province in the United States. See Chapter 4.
83. Jesuit Archives, 203, B 2, Maryland Province, Georgetown University Archives (GUA).
84. Baltimore, Aug. 25, 1815, CP 3, 356-57.
85. Aug. 28, 1815, place unknown. The extract given here is translated from the original Italian. AAB 4 B 2.
86. St. Thomas, Port Tobacco, Md., Sept. 11, 1815, AAB 2 J 4.
87. H.E. Peel, "John Thomas Troy," **New Catholic Encyclopedia**, 1967 ed.
88. Emmet Larkin, "The Dynamics of Leadership in the Irish Church in the Nineteenth Century, 1786-1921," **Humanities** 9 (1988): 17-19.
89. Baltimore, Aug. 11, 1788, CP 1, 327.
90. More than once the two men voiced their concern in such words as these by Troy: "I notice what Your Lordship remarks respecting Missionaries, whether Secular or Regular, going from hence to America, & shall endeavor, so far as depends on me, that they correspond to Your Lordship's expectations." To Carroll, Dublin, Aug. 13, 1796, AAB 8 M 4.
91. Notes, Aug. 24, 1791, AAB 9 A 11.
92. One example is found in Troy to Carroll, Dublin, Oct. 18, 1794. Troy regretted that he had erred in recommending a certain man, out of a desire to be fair to him. AAB 8 M 1.
93. Transatlantic ships carried the mails. Many were the delays and losses of messages going in both directions.
94. Carroll to Troy, July 22, 1815, AAB 9 T 3. Date given in Troy's letter of Sept. 8, 1815. AAB 8 B K 2. This was the last known letter from Troy to Carroll, who died on the following December 3.
95. Troy to Carroll, Sept. 8, 1815.
96. Dublin, Mar. 22, 1815, AAB 8 N 8.
97. Cf. Simon Tugwell, O.P, **The Way of the Preacher** (London, 1979) 51-53.