

This reading consists of three letters. The first is from John Carroll, the first Bishop of the Catholic Church in the United States, to James Madison, then Secretary of State in the Jefferson administration. The second and third letters are Madison's reply to Carroll, one of which is an unofficial reply.

Carroll's letter is dated November 17, 1806. Madison's letters are dated November 20, 1806.

From Peter Guilday, *The Life and Times of John Carroll* (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1954).

Walsh wrote to Rome a long letter (April 12, 1805) informing the Holy See of the insubordination of one of the Capuchins, Father Anthony Sedella, parish-priest of New Orleans, who had defied Walsh's authority.¹⁸ Father Walsh withdrew the Capuchin's faculties and placed the parish church under a quasi-interdict. A schism ensued, in which Sedella was upheld by Governor Claiborne who "lent the whole influence of his position to break down the discipline of the Catholic Church and maintain in the Cathedral of New Orleans a man whose immoral character and neglect of duty were notorious, and who would in any New England village have been consigned to jail."¹⁹ Father Walsh died in the midst of these troubles (August 22, 1806), and the diocese was left without anyone to regulate it, until Dr. Carroll acted upon Propaganda's letter of September 20, 1805, and assumed jurisdiction.²⁰ Dr. Carroll was permitted to appoint an administrator to whom all powers, except those requiring episcopal character, were to be granted. He was urged to extinguish as quickly as possible the flames of the schism so that all scandal might be removed from the diocese. The following day, September 21, 1805, Propaganda wrote to Father Walsh, telling him that his powers as vicar-general had ceased and that faculties for the governance of the diocese had been conferred upon Dr. Carroll, to whom he would henceforth be subject. Father Walsh probably received this letter before his death. With the two administrators appointed by Bishop Peñalver

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, *Congregationsi particulari*, vol. 145, ff. 95-96.

¹⁹ *SABA, op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 590.

²⁰ Canon Hassett died in April, 1804, and on March 27, 1805, Father Walsh published a Pastoral (*Baltimore Cathedral Archives*, Case 11B-C3) calling upon all to recognize his own spiritual authority. On April 12, 1805, Castillon, president of the trustees of New Orleans, wrote to Carroll stating that they refused to accept Walsh's authority, on the score that it ceased with the transfer of Bishop Peñalver y Cardenas to the See of Guatemala in 1801 (*Baltimore Cathedral Archives*, Case 2183). Castillon wrote again on July 15, 1805, supporting Sedella in his insubordination. The news of Father Walsh's death reached Carroll by a letter from Louis Kerr, dated New Orleans, August 20, 1806 (*Baltimore Cathedral Archives*, Case 11B-L6; printed in the *Records*, vol. xx, pp. 280-281). "Understanding that you are charged with some superintendence over the ecclesiastical interests of this diocese," Kerr wrote to Carroll, "I take the liberty to add from myself, though you are possibly aware of it, that by the death of my respected friend the Church here is now without any legitimate head; a circumstance which may be attended by some pernicious consequences, in the present situation of our ecclesiastical affairs, respecting which you without doubt have been long since informed." The letter from Propaganda of September 20, 1805, placing Louisiana under Carroll's jurisdiction, was sent by Conanena on September 28. (*Baltimore Cathedral Archives*, Case 2-W3).

absent from the scene, the Church in New Orleans was a prey to the intriguing Sedella, who was known to many in the city as politically opposed to American interests.

In Propaganda's letter to Carroll, it was suggested that the United States Government be approached regarding church discipline in Louisiana; and, accordingly, on November 17, 1806, Dr. Carroll wrote to James Madison, then Secretary of State, repeating in part the letter he had received from Rome:

I was not so satisfied with the accounts of Louisiana, of the clergymen living there, as would justify a recommendation of any of them for the important trust, which requires not only a virtuous but very prudent conduct, great learning, especially in matters of a religious nature, and sufficient resolution to remove gradually the disorders which have grown up during the relaxed state of civil and ecclesiastical authority. I therefore directed my views to two others, who tho' Frenchmen, have been long resident in this country and steady in their attachment to it. But the removal of either of them to Louisiana was rendered impracticable, and circumstances have since occurred which perhaps make it unavoidable in the opinion of this government, to nominate for the bishop of that country any native of France or Louisiana. I therefore declined hitherto taking any concern in this business, tho' the situation of the church there has long required, and requires now more particularly a prompt interference, not only for the interests of religion, but likewise for quieting and composing the minds of the inhabitants. You will observe that my first commission to take a provisional charge of the diocese of N. Orleans was received long before the intermeddling of the Emperor Napoleon. This has been procured, as I am credibly informed from N. O. by a mission to Paris from a Mr. Castillon, who is at the head of the municipality, and an artful Spanish friar, Antonio de Sedilla, the intimate friend of the Marquis of Caso Calvo. This mission was entrusted to a certain Castanedo, who was furnished with \$4,000 to obtain a recommendation from the Emperor Napoleon for the immediate nomination of Sedilla to the bishopric; but the attempt has completely miscarried, as you will see by the duplicate copy of the commission sent to me, &c. To this commission allow me to subjoin an extract from a letter of Card. Pietro, prefect of the Congreg. de Prop. fide at Rome, which I received at the same time. . . . From which it appears, that the acquiescence of our government is necessary with respect to the measures to be adopted for settling the ecclesiastical state of Louisiana. Something, as has been mentioned, is immediately necessary, before I proceed to determine on the choice of a subject fit to be recommended for the future bishop. If a native of this country, or one who is not a Frenchman, tho' well acquainted with the language, cannot be procured, would it be satisfactory to the Executive of the U. S. to recommend a native of France who has

long resided amongst us, and is desirous of continuing under this government? In the mean time, as the only clergyman in Louisiana, in any degree qualified to act with vigor and intelligence in restoring order in the Cath. church, is a French emigrant priest, far from any attachment to the present system of his country. May he be appointed to act as my vicar, without the disapprobation of our Executive? I have many reasons for believing that this person rejoices sincerely in the cession of that country to the United States.¹⁸

Madison replied, on November 20, to the effect that the American Government would welcome an end to the religious strife which was distracting the city of New Orleans. Sedella was regarded as an artful conspirator, and the appointment of an exemplary priest as head of ecclesiastical affairs would be highly satisfactory:

Right Reverend Sir,

I have had the honour to receive and lay before the President your letter of the 17th inst, enclosing a duplicate of the commission which places under your care the Roman Catholic Church in New Orleans and requesting the sentiments of the Executive on certain discretionary points affecting the selection of the functionaries to be named by you.

The delicacy towards the public authority and the laudable object which led to the enquiry you are pleased to make, are appreciated by the President, in the manner which they so justly merit. But as the case is entirely ecclesiastical it is deemed most congenial with the scrupulous policy of the Constitution in guarding against a political interference with religious affairs, to decline the explanations which you have thought might enable you to accommodate the better, the execution of your trust, to the public advantage. I have the pleasure, Sir, to add, that if that consideration had less influence, the President would find a motive to the same determination, in his perfect confidence in the purity of your views, and in the patriotism which will guide you, in the selection of ecclesiastical individuals, to such as combine with their professional merits, a due attachment to the independence, the Constitution and the prosperity of the United States.

I enclose the document which you requested might be returned, and pray you to accept assurances of the perfect respect and esteem with which,

I remain,

Your most obt Servt

JAMES MADISON¹⁹

¹⁸ *Baltimore Cathedral Archives*, Case 4-E-7; cf. SIZA, *op. cit.*, pp. 591-592.

¹⁹ *Baltimore Cathedral Archives*, Case 5-E-7; printed in the *Records*, vol. xx, pp. 62-63. On March 3, 1807, Carroll wrote to his nephew, Daniel Brent, who was then in the State Department: "He [Mr. Madison] may be assured that if any

With this letter came a private answer from Madison, treating the matter more in detail:

You will find by the enclosed letter that an official answer to the enquiries in yours of the 17th, has not been given. The reason for declining it does not however forbid my saying in a private letter that nothing being known concerning Mr. L'Espinasse except from your account of him in which all due confidence is placed, no objection can be against the use you propose to make of him: and that in general it affords satisfaction to find you, as might well be presumed, so fully in a disposition to admit into the stations for which you are to provide as little of alienage of any sort as will consist with the essential attention and duties of them. Of the Spanish Friar Antonio di Sedella the accounts received here agree with the character you have formed of him. It appears that his intrigues & his connections have drawn on him the watchful attention of the Government of that Territory.

Altho' I am aware that in the arrangements committed to your discretion & execution, considerations operate very different from those of a political nature, I will not conceal my wish that instead of a temporary subordination of the R. C. Church at N. Orleans to the General Diocese, the subordination had been made permanent, or rather that it had involved a modification of some proper sort leaving less of a distinctive feature in that quarter already marked by sundry peculiarities. I am betrayed into this expression, or rather intrusion of such a sentiment by my anxiety to see the union and harmony of every portion of our country strengthened by every legitimate circumstance which may in any wise have that tendency.

The letter from Mr. Portales had been forwarded hither in several copies from N. O. where it has excited the sensations likely to result from it. This foreign interposition, qualified as it is, was manifestly reprehensible, being in a case where it could be founded neither in any political nor ecclesiastical relation whatever. It is probable, at the same time, that the step was produced less by any deep or insidious designs, than by the flattering unjust importunities of the parties at N. O. & by a tenderness towards a people once a part of the French nation, and alienated by the policy of its Gov't not by their own act. The interposition will be made by our Minister a topic of such observations, as without overcharging the wrong, may be calculated to prevent repetitions.²⁰

Dr. Carroll appointed as his vicar-general, Father John Olivier, the brother of the venerable missionary at Post Vin-

clergyman acting there under my authority should ever betray dispositions or countenance measures unfriendly to the Sovereignty of the United States; or, if ever he should hold correspondence of a suspicious nature with a foreign nation, he shall be deprived of any commission from me and of the care of souls." (*Catholic Archives of America*, Notre Dame University.)

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Case 5-E-8.