

Turning Papist: Anti-Papist Rhetoric in New England, 1754-1781

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Introduction

On May 29, 1754, during the outset of the French and Indian War, Massachusetts minister Jonathan Mayhew appealed to New England's Protestant majority when saying "Do I see Christianity banished for popery!" in his election sermon.¹ This fear of "popery" referred to their Catholic French enemies. Colonial America was called to "fight for King George" against the French, who were "no less Enemies to God... Liberty, and the pure Worship of the Gospel than to us."² Twenty-four years later in May 1778, Phillips Payson preached to Massachusetts in his election service "how wonderful that God... should dispose his Most Christian Majesty, the King of France" to support the rebelling colonies.³ Around the same time, Thomas Paine accused England's King George III of being of "a low papistical design" in his 1775 anti-monarchical pamphlet *Common Sense*.⁴ Why, in the span of twenty-four years, did patriotic colonists' characterization of the French change from a papist threat to a blessing from God, while the English Crown's reputation took the opposite turn?

The 1750s through the early 1780s was a trying time for Catholics in and around colonial and revolutionary New England, where this analysis is set. They did not enjoy much, if any, freedom in these northern colonies. Yet Catholics both in the thirteen colonies and abroad played a crucial role in the American Revolution. While many American Catholics were sympathetic to the patriotic cause, the most significant Catholic contribution came from France, which signed an alliance with the newly formed United States of America in 1778. Due to reliance on Catholic assistance throughout the war, both French and American Catholics were

¹ Francis D. Cogliano, *No King, No Popery: Anti-Catholicism in Revolutionary New England* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), 15.

² *Ibid.*, 15.

³ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 35.

granted newfound tolerance, even in the vehemently anti-Catholic areas of New England.⁵ Yet, as French army chaplain Abbé Robin noted about Bostonians in 1781, “the people in general retain their old prejudices.”⁶ Indeed, though tolerated to some extent, Catholics continued to struggle in New England as fringe members of society, and anti-Catholic sentiment did not disappear.

The purpose of this paper is not to examine anti-Catholicism in general, but rather to narrow the focus to anti-papist rhetoric in New England in the years between the start of the French and Indian War and the end of the American Revolution. “Anti-popery,” a system of beliefs that ascribes to its targets specific negative traits associated with Catholicism, manifested itself in rhetoric deploying terms such as “popery” and “papist” and served as a political tool in colonial and revolutionary America. The language connoted tyranny, the overthrow of true Protestantism, the loss of liberty, and the inability to think freely – all traits ascribed to Catholics. In this analysis I aim to show how the usage of anti-papist rhetoric evolved as New England’s relations with Britain, France, and Quebec shifted during the period from the French and Indian War through the American Revolution. I argue that anti-papist rhetoric in New England was used to denounce multiple and shifting political opponents over the 27 years spanning from 1754 to 1781. While the targets of the language changed, the rhetoric was consistently used to denounce the enemies of New England, both religious and political, who were thought to display ascribed negative Catholic traits.

Used to convey fear of Catholic threats to Protestantism and also fear of tyranny, anti-popery in New England during the first half of the eighteenth century was directed toward France. However, after the French and Indian War ended in 1763, the New England colonies no longer had a colonial competitor to label as papists. The general understanding among New England colonists was that King George, having defeated his Catholic enemy, would eradicate Catholicism from the formerly French colony of Quebec. The King, however, defied expectations: in 1774 he passed The Quebec Act, affirming the right of the Quebecois to practice Catholicism in the Canadian colony.⁷ Many New England colonists began to perceive King George as tyrannical and sympathetic to popery. These associations prompted colonial patriots to label their English King as a dreaded papist, and this trend continued into the revolutionary era. Three years after war broke out between the colonies and the British Crown in 1775 and two years after American independence was declared in Philadelphia in 1776, the patriots allied with their former French enemies.⁸ New Englanders who

⁵ Thomas H. O’Connor, *Boston Catholics*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 12.

⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁸ Ibid., 12.

welcomed the alliance largely refrained from directing anti-papist rhetoric toward their new partners, while those opposed to allying with France often denounced the agreement as an opportunity for popery to spread in America. Anti-Catholic sentiment remained despite new religious toleration for Catholics, but anti-popery was used against a different political enemy.

Approaches to the History of Anti-Catholicism and the Rhetoric of Popery in America

Much research has been conducted on anti-Catholicism during the colonial and revolutionary eras, but these analyses do not focus primarily on the shifting nature of the rhetoric used during the time period. Instead, in most previous scholarly work anti-papist language serves only as one of many indicators of larger anti-Catholic sentiment in the American colonies. Multiple works have made claims about what exactly the rhetoric signified, but they treat the rhetoric as unchanging and fail to analyze how the language targeted different political enemies over the twenty-seven years prior to and then during the American Revolution.

What then did anti-papist rhetoric signify? Scholarly literature concerning American Catholics in the late colonial and revolutionary period has suggested a few answers. Michael S. Carter considers the rhetoric in his 2013 article titled "A 'Traiterous Religion': Indulgences and the Anti-Catholic Imagination in Eighteenth Century New England." He claims that:

The term anti-popery is useful and more apt as it indicates that the anti-Catholicism of the early-modern English-speaking world rarely had anything to do with actual Roman Catholics or with Catholicism itself. Rather, it was an opposition to imagined Catholic beliefs, practices, and political realities that developed a life of its own, as England and its possessions became ever more distant from its own medieval past.⁹

To Carter, anti-popery and anti-Catholicism are two distinct ideas. The former did not serve to represent hatred toward Catholics, but rather toward the ideas and political principles that Catholicism was thought to stand for. This idea will serve as a basis for my concrete analysis of New England during a time period when the colonies had multiple, shifting political enemies, some of whom were Catholic and some of whom were Protestant.

Other historians have also commented on anti-papist rhetoric. Maura Jane Farrelly analyzes Maryland in *Papist Patriots: The Making of an American Catholic Identity* and claims that "popery," in the minds of the colony's Protestants, was synonymous with 'tyranny,' 'slavery,' 'ignorance,'

⁹ Michael S. Carter, "A 'Traiterous Religion': Indulgences and Anti-Catholic Imagination in Eighteenth Century New England," *The Catholic Historical Review* 99, no. 1 (2013): 52. doi: 10.1353/cat.2013.0006.

and ‘corruption’.” Farrelly goes on to say that “‘popery’ and ‘arbitrary power’ were one and the same,”¹⁰ a theme that echoed in revolutionary New England. Perhaps the most overarching idea about anti-papist rhetoric was delivered by Mary Augustina Ray in her 1936 book, *American Opinion on Roman Catholicism in the Eighteenth Century*. Ray claimed that popery had become a closet monster, one that “reache[d] out its tentacles to draw all good Protestants to destruction.”¹¹ Furthermore, she believed popery “catered to political, racial, and religious antipathies.”¹² Ray’s topic was vast, and her claims about anti-Catholicism throughout all American colonies were broad. Nonetheless, her insights will prove helpful in my analysis of the language. During times of conflict New Englanders often utilized the rhetoric to denounce opponents who they believed had tried to take away their liberties.

My approach is to focus solely on anti-papist rhetoric in late colonial and revolutionary New England. This region was vehemently anti-Catholic and presented a different social and political situation than Maryland or the colonies as a whole in that any actual Catholic presence was scarce, if not completely absent. In fact, missionaries and priests were forbidden in Massachusetts by law, for the first time in 1647 and again in 1700.¹³ Carter’s claim that popery embodied imagined Catholic ideals proves useful in this context because “popery” and “papists” ascribed negative ideals to Catholicism in an area that was virtually void of any actual Catholic presence.

As Carter notes, anti-popery and anti-Catholicism were often two different entities. It is easy to think of anti-popery as hatred towards Catholics, and the connotations behind the rhetoric certainly had their basis in Catholicism. However, the language began to take on a life of its own and came to target any person who displayed the negative traits ascribed to Catholics, even if he was Protestant. The absence of any meaningful or welcomed Catholic presence in New England until the American alliance with France in 1778 provided a setting in which anti-papist rhetoric was used frequently. A fear of anybody who displayed supposed negative Catholic traits ran rampant throughout New England in the three decades leading up to and continuing through the American Revolution.

This analysis of anti-papist rhetoric is limited to terms that explicitly reference the pope or the papacy. Thus the terms “popery,” “popish,” and “papist” will dominate my argument while other words that denote Catholicism but not the pope, such as “Romish,” are left alone. The

¹⁰ Maura Jane Farrelly, *Papist Patriots*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), accessed August 18, 2015, <http://site.ebrary.com.ezp1.lib.umn.edu/lib/uminneso-ta/detail.action?docID=10518270>, 241.

¹¹ Mary Augustina Ray, *American Opinion of Roman Catholicism in the Eighteenth Century*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 394

¹² *Ibid.*, 394.

¹³ Cogliano, *No King, No Popery*, 13.

reason for this will be addressed in subsequent sections, but it will suffice for now to say that rhetoric specifically referencing the papacy implied ascribed papal qualities such as tyranny and arbitrary power, which is beyond what any “Catholic” or “Romish” term ever intended to convey.

The sources used for this paper primarily come from two online databases that provide scans of published documents. I rely mainly on newspapers, published sermons, and published discourses. *America's Historical Imprints: Series I, Evans 1639-1800* allowed me to view published public speeches and discourses such as Jonathan Mayhew's 1754 election sermon and a discourse titled *A Caveat Against Popery* from Baltimore in 1691. This database holds scans of books, notably one titled *The French Convert: Being A true Relation of the happy Conversion of a Noble French Lady, From the Errors and Superstitions of Popery, to the Reformed Religion, by Means of a Protestant Gardiner, her Servant*. The database *Early American Newspapers* gave me access to articles from the *New England Chronicle*, the *Essex Journal*, the *Boston Evening Post*, the *Boston Gazette*, the *New Hampshire Gazette*, the *Boston Post-Boy and Advertiser*, and the *Massachusetts Spy*. I also referred to Yale University's Avalon Project, which provided me access to official government documents such as The Quebec Act and the 1778 Treaty of Alliance with France. In the databases I searched for usage of anti-papist rhetoric that interests me in the documents by using the keywords “popery,” “papist,” and “papists.” While these terms were sometimes used without much thought or weight behind them, I will primarily focus on instances when the rhetoric ascribed negative Catholic traits to its targets, such as tyranny and disloyalty to any leader besides the pope.

Origins of Anti-Papist Rhetoric

The origins of anti-papist rhetoric date back to the sixteenth century. One of the earliest instances of anti-papist rhetoric appears in John Foxe's 1563 *Acts and Monuments*, commonly known as the “Book of Martyrs.” As an account of Protestant martyrs under Catholic persecution, the book is rife with references to the papacy and paints Catholicism as an evil enemy. In “The death of Joyce Lewes at Lichfield,” Lewes “bewail[ed] the tyranny of popery” and “wish[ed] for the abolishment of Papistry.”¹⁴ The book also said that shortly before “Queen Mary died, and the tyranny of English Papists with her,” five “Christians,” John Cornered of Wortham, Christopher Browne of Maidstone, John Herst of Ashford, Alice Snoth, and Katherine Knight, “[suffered] the violent malice of the Papists” at the stake.¹⁵ Foxe claimed that Englishmen had been given a mission from God to protect the “Church of Christ, namely the Church of England,”¹⁶ from

¹⁴ John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, ed. G.A. Williamson, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), 402.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 427.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 458.

“popery.”¹⁷ Examples of torture and death of non-Catholic Christians, whom Foxe sometimes called Protestants and other times members of the Church of England, were rife in the book.¹⁸ This work, exceptionally widely printed and influential for its time, painted Catholics as tyrannical at best and demonic at worst. By forcing others into obedience, submission, or death, papists tyrannized all citizens outside of their religion.

Furthermore, the derogatory words played on an obvious theme: loyalty to the pope. By associating the derogatory rhetoric with the pope, Foxe insinuated that Catholics were bound to a religious leader in Italy, not to their Anglican political leader at home. Rather than being loyal Christian subjects, Catholics were believed to be dutiful followers of a tyrannical foreign leader. They were blindly obedient to the pope and Church hierarchy; therefore, they were unable to think freely for themselves and so supported tyranny. Foxe’s book led to an aura of suspicion of Catholics in England throughout the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century.

The wildly influential book also had political implications. Anglicans defended the Queen of England, who was both the head of the Anglican Church and the political ruler. By denouncing popery as an enemy, Foxe united the members of the Anglican Church against Catholicism and helped create a distinct English Anglican national identity that was based on the hatred of popery.¹⁹ This all took place in the context of greater Elizabethan church reform, which established the Queen as “the supreme governor over the Church” in the 1559 Act of Supremacy and solidified the split with the Catholic Church and the pope.²⁰ These events increased the divide between untrustworthy papists and good English citizens who supported the Crown. Such prejudices crossed the Atlantic Ocean in the seventeenth century with English Protestants settling in New England.

French Papists Around New England

The main targets of anti-papist rhetoric in early colonial New England were the French and Quebec, their Canadian colony. The French Empire had been a nuisance to the British colonies since the seventeenth century. The dislike of Catholics led the Massachusetts Bay Colony to ban all papists, especially trying to keep out “popish missionaries” as early as 1647.²¹ The effort, however, proved futile. Three decades later, in 1676, “Jesuitian priests” became the scapegoat for the colonists’ problems with the Native Americans.²² Silvanus Davis, a resident of Maine who spent

¹⁷ Farrelly, *Papist Patriots*, 123.

¹⁸ Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, 402, 427, 458.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Claire Cross, *Church and People: England 1450-1660*, 2nd ed., (Oxford, United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999), 111.

²¹ Coglian, *No King, No Popery*, 13.

²² Owen Stanwood, “Catholics, Protestants, and the Clash of Civilizations in Early

years in a Quebec prison during the War of the League of Augsburg, utilized the rhetoric to condemn the French-Canadians by saying in 1690 that there was “a papist designe against the protestant Interest in New England.”²³ The explicitly anti-papist sentiment served to portray the colonies’ French-Canadian enemies as a threat to Protestantism and English colonial freedom. This fear manifested itself in a 1700 law that reinstated Massachusetts’s 1647 ban of “divers Jesuits, priests, and popish missionaries.”²⁴

Davis used this anti-papist rhetoric to stir up emotion for a cause. He certainly held disdain for the French-Canadians; he had fought against them and was a prisoner in Quebec for multiple years. To say that Davis singlehandedly aroused anti-papist sentiment against the Canadians would be an overstatement. Nonetheless, as Owen Stanwood points out in his article, “Catholics and Protestants in Early America,” Davis’s opposition was part of a much larger anti-Catholic movement at the time. The rhetoric conveyed fear of an attack on Protestantism. Although the French and Quebecois were in large part Catholic, Davis’s use of anti-papist rhetoric was meant to denounce an opponent of New England in a political, rather than religious, sense.

The French and Quebecois became a common enemy for the majority of New Englanders. The French held many North American and Caribbean colonies close to British territory, and they continued to pose a threat to the British colonies into the eighteenth century. The two empires fought against each other in the War of Spanish Succession (1702-1713) and again in the War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748) before their major conflict in the French and Indian War (1754-1763). Throughout this period, anti-papist rhetoric served as a means for American colonists to denounce this common enemy of the colonies.

The French and Indian War (1754-1763) was the second to last major conflict between France and England in the New World. During this period, anti-papist rhetoric flourished and anti-papist sentiment directed at the French in the colonial era peaked.²⁵ Anti-papery propaganda was utilized to rally the New England colonies against the Catholic French. In his 1754 election speech, Jonathan Mayhew described a major divide between the English Protestant colonies and the French Catholics, exclaiming, “Do I see Christianity banished for Popery!”²⁶ This suggested that Protestantism, or “Christianity” in Mayhew’s words, was the target of French aggression. Just as Foxe insinuated in the sixteenth century, Mayhew framed Catholicism as a religion that worshiped the pope instead

America,” in *The First Prejudice*, eds. Chris Beneke and Christopher Grenda (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 227.

²³ *Ibid.*, 230.

²⁴ Cogliano, *No King, No Popery*, 13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

of Christ. This allowed the minister to create a threat to all Protestant beliefs. With their political system also under attack, however, threats to the New England colonies went beyond religion. Anti-papist rhetoric framed Catholicism as a threat to the entire colonial system, both religious and political. A win for the French meant not only a loss for the Protestants against the Catholics, but also a loss of their liberty and colonial system. As the war lengthened, the anti-papist language continued to represent and denounce the French as a political and ideological opponent.

The French and Indian War, though, was just one of many conflicts between the Protestant British and their Catholic opponents. Britain and France were at odds, if not at war, for the majority of the first half of the eighteenth century. Anti-papist rhetoric circulated throughout the conflicts not only in politics and public forums but also in popular culture. For instance, a popular book was anonymously published in Boston in 1708 that chronicled a lady's conversion to a Protestant religion. The book, printed in America during the War of Spanish Succession, laid out what Thomas Kidd characterizes as "several archetypal figures in colonial New England culture," including the antagonist, a priest who offered a woman absolution in exchange for sex.²⁷ Anti-papist rhetoric is clearly invoked in the book's subtitle, which claimed the lady had escaped "from the errors and superstitions of popery" by converting to a Protestant religion.²⁸ The nationality of the main character was laid out clearly in the title, *The French Convert*. The book was reprinted many times in Boston: prominent editions were printed in 1744 and 1746, during the time of a British and French conflict in the War of Austrian Succession, and another wave of reprints came through in 1758, 1762, and 1766, around the time of the French and Indian War.²⁹

The rhetoric in the title of *The French Convert* used religious language and the familiar accusation of popery to attempt to forge a political identity centered on English Protestantism. The struggle in the plot centered on the battle between the religions of Protestantism and Catholicism, and the protagonist's homeland created an association between the French and the "errors and superstitions of popery."³⁰ Michael S. Carter claims the popularity of the book drew on "anti-French sentiment that... intensified during the French and Indian War."³¹ Written decades

²⁷ Thomas S. Kidd, "Recovering *The French Convert*: Views of the French and Uses of Anti-Catholicism in Early America," *Book History* 7 (2004): 105-106. doi: 10.1353/bh.2004.0018

²⁸ *The French Convert: A True Relation of a Noble French Lady from the Errors and Superstitions of Popery, to the Reformed Religion, by Means of a Protestant Gardiner, her Servant*, Published by John Phillips, (Boston, 1725).

²⁹ Kidd in *Book History*, 105-106.

³⁰ *The French Convert: A True Relation of a Noble French Lady from the Errors and Superstitions of Popery, to the Reformed Religion, by Means of a Protestant Gardiner, her Servant*.

³¹ Carter, "A 'Traiterous Religion,'" 69.

earlier, though, *The French Convert* did not directly acknowledge France's aggression toward the British colonies. Yet, it would be unwise to ignore the prominent re-printings during times of conflict between Britain and her arch-rival, which suggest the book appealed to British colonial nationalism by condemning the French and their popery. Like other sources, *The French Convert* used religion to aid in the construction of France as a political enemy.

Similar uses of anti-papist rhetoric were frequent in the New England colonies during the French and Indian War. A 1756 Boston newspaper article told clergy to spread the warnings about "the Horrors of Popery" and "animate [their listeners] with... the ardent Love of Liberty."³² That same year the *Boston Evening Post* called the French "our enemies," attributing "Tyranny, Perfidy, and Cruelty" to the "mongrel Race of French Papists."³³ In 1759 the *New Hampshire Gazette* published an article claiming France's "established religion is Popery, which grows stronger every Day, through the Authority of the King."³⁴ A 1759 Boston article questioned that "in the present quarrel with France... Whether Reformed Religion shall yield to Popery? Whether liberty shall yield to arbitrary power? And, whether our colonies and commercial interests shall be given up to France?"³⁵

These examples served not only to denounce the French as an evil papist empire, but also to once again call upon the negative connotations traditionally associated with Catholicism and popery. The rhetoric had condemned France for the majority of the eighteenth century in places such as *The French Convert* and had also found its way into newspapers during a time of great upheaval that threatened the colonies. Thus, while the rhetoric applied literally to the Catholic French, it still served a further political purpose of creating British settler solidarity in the face of a colonial opponent. This would not last, however, as the large threat of Catholic France greatly diminished after the British victory in the French and Indian War in 1763.

English Popery

Shortly following the French and Indian War, the rhetoric found a new political adversary in a familiar old friend. With French influence drastically diminished, that long-time enemy became but an afterthought in colonial New England. Jonathan Mayhew, who had equated the French with popery in 1754, gave a 1765 discourse in Cambridge, Massachusetts,

³² "The Virginia Centinel, No. IX," *Boston Evening Post*, October 11, 1756, 1.

³³ "The Virginia Centinel, No. I," *Boston Evening Post*, June 28, 1756, 1.

³⁴ "France," *The New-Hampshire Gazette Extraordinary*, August 8, 1759, 2.

³⁵ "From the Monitor, June 2," *Green & Russell's BOSTON Post-Boy & Advertiser*, August 20, 1759, 1.

titled “Popish Idolatry.”³⁶ Mayhew, then pastor at the West-Church in Boston, delivered the speech at Harvard College on May 8.³⁷ While he had been a great advocate of anti-papist rhetoric toward the French, Mayhew’s 1765 speech primarily attacked the practices of Catholicism; he made no mention of France or any French person in the 52-page document. Only one reference targeted a specific non-religious group, marking the early beginnings of a new papist enemy for New England. Mayhew named this new adversary near the end of his talk when he claimed, “Popery is now making great strides in England.”³⁸ Despite being overtly Protestant, England became the target of the majority of anti-papist rhetoric from the mid-1760s to the end of the American Revolution.

How could New England’s long-time colonial rulers, who had helped the colonists defeat another papist enemy only a decade prior to Mayhew’s speech, be labeled as papist? The King of England was the head of the Anglican Church of England, a Protestant religion. Non-Anglicans in New England slowly began to see the Church of England as something that resembled the Catholic Church. Mayhew, a leader of this early charge, ascribed an infamous Catholic trait to the Anglican Church when he said it had an “enormous hierarchy,” and the colonies were now seeing “bishops fixed around [them].”³⁹

In this case, we see a blend of different uses for the rhetoric. By voicing concern about the enormous hierarchy, Mayhew introduced the possibility of tyranny erupting throughout the Anglican Church. While it would be a stretch to suggest that anti-papist rhetoric in Mayhew’s speech equated solely to tyranny, he imagined that it was likely the end result of such a hierarchy. Such an event would inevitably threaten New England’s particular Puritan and Protestant identity, and thus was a political as well as religious threat. Therefore, during this time of peace, the idea that English tyranny was associated with popery and was a threat to the good Protestants’ way of life began to emerge in the New England colonies.

Anxiety over this Anglican hierarchy grew in the mid-1760s as did anti-papist rhetoric directed at the King. John Adams, in a 1765 article titled “A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law” published in the *Boston Gazette*, claimed that the antithesis of liberty was the Catholic clergy and their hierarchy.⁴⁰ He insinuated that a similar hierarchy could definitely expose the colonies to the threat of tyranny if such a religious system was imposed in America. This fear became increasingly real when King George sent Catholic bishop Jean-Olivier Briand to Quebec in 1766. Andrew Eliot, pastor of the New North Congregationalist Church in Boston, believed the appointment to be a plot by the Anglican Church. Even though

³⁶ Coglianò, *No King, No Popery*, 15.

³⁷ Jonathan Mayhew, *Popish Idolatry*, (Boston, 1765), Title.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁹ Coglianò, *No King, No Popery*, 44.

⁴⁰ Carter, “A ‘Traiterous Religion,’” 73.

Briand was Catholic, Eliot considered the position a starting point for the Anglican bishops to force their way into the colonies and establish their own hierarchy. Eliot wrote in 1767 that “they first, contrary to all law, policy, and religion, send a bishop to encourage the inhabitants of this newly conquered country in their fatal superstitions... and then argue from thence that the [Anglican] hierarchy must be established in other Colonies. Was not that the main thing they had in view in sending this popish bishop?”⁴¹

Following the appointment of Briand, fear abounded about the Anglican Church's relationship to the Catholic Church. A 1768 Boston news article referred to the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and claimed, “the Church is in danger, was a notable cry... when the very persons who raised it and kept it up, were laboring to introduce popery, the Pretender, and arbitrary power” before going on to say that “we may expect to hear the old cry ‘No Bishop No King,’ revived.”⁴² Colonists believed that those who had saved England and its colonies from a papist King in the 1688 Glorious Revolution had introduced their own papist measures in the colonies. Catholicism's new bishop in Canada paved the way, in colonists' minds, for Anglicans to set up a similar hierarchy in the American colonies, and such a movement was active in the early 1760s and 1770s.⁴³

These accusations of King George's popery were happening within the context of increasing strife between the American colonies and Britain. The Stamp Act Crisis in 1765 fueled animosity toward the British government, and colonists began to harbor antagonistic feelings towards their colonial ruler.⁴⁴ The anti-papist rhetoric aimed at him coincided with a blossoming political animosity between the King and the colonies. It was therefore politically savvy to direct the rhetoric towards King George and England. Accusing anyone of popery, even a Protestant, had been a political tactic in New England since at least the 1680s when governor George Cranfield was accused of popery in New Hampshire. In the 1760s colonists utilized this same tactic often in the wake of new animosity toward the head of the Anglican Church, whom New England colonists feared would take away their liberties. Increasingly, however, it did not matter whether the opponent was *actually* Catholic. Anti-papist rhetoric served as a political tool to turn public opinion against any adversary who was accused of displayed negative traits ascribed to Catholicism, regardless of their actual religion.

In 1773 the *Massachusetts Spy* published an advertisement for Antonio Gavin's *A Master Key to Popery*, a book about supposed Catholic rituals. The sale of the popular book is unsurprising. Interestingly, however, the advertisement claimed, “popery has lately been greatly encouraged, by

⁴¹ Ibid., 47.

⁴² “The Gentinell, No. II,” *Supplement to the Boston Evening-Post*, April 18, 1768, 1.

⁴³ Kenneth R. Elliot, *Anglican Church Policy, Eighteenth Century Conflict, and the American Episcopate*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011), 6.

⁴⁴ Edmund S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The Univeristy of North Carolina Press, 1953), 119.

the higher powers in Great Britain,” which aimed to take “every liberty, civil and religious, which is dear to a rational being,” and thus the book should be read by “everyone who has the least sentiment of humanity or freedom in his breast.”⁴⁵ The fear of popery in England was undoubtedly growing among New England colonists, but the King did nothing to attempt to slow or stop New Englanders’ anti-papist attacks against him.

The attacks became more frequent in 1774 when the King passed the Quebec Act. The official document stated in Section V that “it is hereby declared: That his Majesty’s Subjects, professing the Religion of the Church of Rome of and in the said Province of Quebec, may have, hold, and enjoy, the free Exercise of the Religion of the Church of Rome, subject to the King’s Supremacy.” Furthermore, the Act provided that “the Clergy of the said Church may hold, receive, and enjoy, their accustomed Dues and Rights, with respect to such Persons only as shall profess the said Religion.”⁴⁶ The Act did not formally establish the Catholic Church in Quebec, but most New England colonists expected a ban on the Catholic religion. Instead, the Quebec Act permitted a toleration of Catholicism in the Canadian colony as long as the colonists still respected the authority of the King (a caveat likely thrown in to lessen the chance of direct papal influence and consequently the possibility of papal tyranny), giving Catholic clergy and their hierarchy a place on the new continent. Such tolerance was not well received in New England.

While only technically a legalization of Catholicism, American colonists widely viewed the Quebec Act as an establishment of that religion in the Canadian colony. The Act served to confirm their papist suspicions about King George. After the Act had passed, Samuel Sherwood, a Congregational pastor in Fairfield, Connecticut, claimed, “By this act... Popery is established and provision is made for the legal support of popish clergy.”⁴⁷ Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts agreed, writing that “the king of Britain [is] aiding the advancement of popery.”⁴⁸ A 1775 issue of the *Boston Evening Post* suggested, “popery... has been prepared for the colonies.”⁴⁹ While this was not necessarily the viewpoint of all colonists, there was undoubtedly “[alarm] at the Establishment of Popery and Arbitrary Power in one Half of their Country.”⁵⁰

The fear of popery and use of arbitrary power in English dominions became widespread in New England after the Quebec Act. In

⁴⁵ *The Massachusetts Spy* (Boston, Massachusetts), February 12, 1773, 214.

⁴⁶ British Parliament, “The Quebec Act,” October 7, 1774, Accessed April 3, 2015, Yale Law School, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/quebec_act_1774.asp.

⁴⁷ Cogliano, *No King, No Popery*, 48.

⁴⁸ Stanwood in *The First Prejudice*, 240.

⁴⁹ “A Dialogue between General WOLFE and General GAGE, in a Wood near Boston,” *The Boston Evening Post*, January 23, 1775, 2.

⁵⁰ Stanwood in *The First Prejudice*, 239.

1774 a Boston article claimed that the Quebec Act “[established] popery and arbitrary power in British dominions.”⁵¹ Another article worried that “the spirit of liberty, in some of our colonies, has given so much trouble to Government, it was resolved to cherish the spirit of slavery in others,” with “the French laws and Popery [upheld by England in Quebec] being most conducive to this end.”⁵² Less than a month later, yet another Boston article claimed, “it is amazing, that a Bill should be brought into Parliament for establishing Popery and Tyranny, under the reign of a Prince of the House of Hanover, to whom the people of England gave the Crown for the very purpose of preserving them from Popery and arbitrary power.”⁵³ Elsewhere in Massachusetts, a 1774 article from Newburyport stated that the Act “hath established popery and tyranny in a large part of the British Dominions.”⁵⁴

Even beyond the Quebec Act, New Englanders were still concerned with popery in their colonies. In 1775, the New England Chronicle published an opinion piece that said, “popery and lawless power characterize the present reign.”⁵⁵ A *Boston Gazette* article claimed that popery, tyranny, and taxation were “*the true interests of the BRITISH EMPIRE*.”⁵⁶ The Quebec Act was only part of the anti-papist rhetoric that had been used to criticize the King for the past decade.

King George, in the eyes of many New England colonists, had gone further than simply tolerating a corrupt religion - he was, they believed, attempting to bring the corruption into the American colonies. Perhaps just as important, however, was the fact that with Catholicism tolerated in Quebec, New Englanders once again had a papist enemy in Canada whom they opposed. One New Englander claimed that Lord North had said:

[Britain] must raise some regiments of Papists in Canada – we may also recruit our army there – they will be glad to cut the throats of those heretics the Bostonians. – A Popish army is by much the fittest for our purpose – they will obey the commands of the crown without hesitation – they have been trained in the principles of passive obedience.⁵⁷

⁵¹ “London,” *The Massachusetts Gazette, and the boston post-boy and advertiser*, August 15, 1774, 2.

⁵² *The Massachusetts Gazette, And The Boston Post-Boy And Advertiser*, August 22, 1774, 1.

⁵³ “London, June 15,” *The Massachusetts Gazette, And The Boston Post-Boy And Advertiser*, September 5, 1774, 2.

⁵⁴ *The Essex Journal And Merrimack Packet*, September 14, 1774, 1.

⁵⁵ “The Crisis. No. 1.,” *The New England Chronicle: Or, The Essex Gazette*, May 18, 1775, 4.

⁵⁶ “Errata, Notes, and Queries,” *The Boston-Gazette, And Country Journal*, November 6, 1775, 2.

⁵⁷ Cogliano, *No King, No Popery*, 48.

While it is unclear if Lord North actually ever made such a remark, the papist enemy came to life through this quote. Claims that Canadians would obey the Crown with “passive obedience” served to reinforce colonists’ worry that tyranny, an idea that had long been ascribed to Catholicism and popery, was encroaching upon their liberty. Furthermore, a papist army reinforced the idea of a powerful political enemy that posed a legitimate threat to the well-being of Protestant New England.

Lord North’s supposed quote painted the King as a type of pope, and many colonists began to see King George as such and thus an inherent enemy who threatened Protestant domination. An unknown source wrote to the “Freemen of Massachusetts” in 1776 saying that Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth had “got rid of one Pope, indeed, but at the same time set up another.”⁵⁸ Insinuating that the King was a pope served to equate the Anglican Church and all of England with popery. Anti-papist rhetoric had thus created not one enemy, but two. Just like during the French and Indian War (1754 to 1763), the colonies were fighting not only their papist neighbors to the north, but also the empire in control of Canada. However, instead of France, in 1775 it was their own English empire that they thought supported popery. No longer did they have the resources of the British to back them up in a fight against a papist world power. This time the colonists would have to go into the fight alone.

It is interesting to note that on October 26, 1774, the First Continental Congress tried to appease their northern neighbors by adopting an “Address to the Inhabitants of Quebec.” The proclamation made many claims that Britain’s Quebec Act was a “violation of your rights” because “natural and civil rights” are endowed by God.⁵⁹ While the document was void of any explicit anti-papist rhetoric, the letter did implicate the King as a tyrant. Unsurprisingly, the Canadians’ religious tendency was only mentioned once and there was no reference to the pope. The Congress instead called the Canadian religion “Roman Catholic.” This document marked the first call toward Catholics during the revolutionary period, a trend that would continue as the Revolution progressed. On May 29, 1775, another letter from Congress was adopted and sent to the Canadian colony. This follow-up was titled “Letter to the Oppressed Inhabitants of Canada” and it reiterated much of the contents from the Address sent seven months earlier. This letter, like its predecessor, had only one direct reference to Catholicism and excluded anti-papist rhetoric from the document. The

⁵⁸ “Massachusettsensis to the Freemen of Massachusetts,” Salem, April 30, 1776. Northern Illinois University, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776, document ID: S4-V5-P01-sp19-D0032.

⁵⁹ Continental Congress, “Continental Congress to the Inhabitants of the Province of Quebec,” October 26, 1774, in ed. Phillip B. Kurland and Ralph Lerner, *The Founders’ Constitution*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), accessed April 15, 2015, <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/>.

Canadians' religion was referred to merely as "catholic."⁶⁰

It is interesting to note that the Americans avoided using anti-papist rhetoric when trying to befriend a Catholic group. It would have been unwise, if not downright foolish, to attempt an appeal to a Catholic territory utilizing derogatory anti-papist rhetoric. This situation supported the same political notion of the rhetoric but was the opposite of what had been documented thus far. The terms did not serve a political purpose when looking for support from any group. Even overtly Catholic groups were not labeled papists, but rather were referred to as Catholics in order to appease and court them to the American cause.

The appeals to Quebec provide a new perspective on the anti-papist rhetoric by presenting a new type of source. Previously, the analysis had looked at primarily social, unofficial sources. By looking at official government sources the research deviates, albeit briefly, from its previous method of analysis and venturing beyond the ideas of solely New Englanders. This is not to provide evidence for the complete absence of anti-papist rhetoric in New England - that was hardly the case. Anti-papism still existed in unofficial sources, but it was politically expedient to abandon this sentiment when conversing with potential allies. These Congressional letters are evidence of methods that became increasingly important during the American Revolution. The significance is in the absence and not the presence of the rhetoric, which highlights its political nature.

Quebec, however, did not ally with the Americans against the British. Anti-papist rhetoric aimed toward Quebec, then, certainly did not disappear during this time because many colonists still opposed their northern neighbors. Joseph Towers referred to the Quebecois as "papists," but the reference was reserved for a private letter.⁶¹ Thus, derogatory views of Canadians were not gone. Rather, Congress omitted the rhetoric from official diplomatic addresses to Quebec because it was no longer politically expedient to utilize it while trying to court the Quebecois. Officially, Congress "perceived the fate of the protestant and catholic colonies to be strongly linked together."⁶² Unofficially, however, Peter Oliver, a former Massachusetts court justice, viewed the "Address to the popish Inhabitants of Canada" as "dissertations upon Popery."⁶³ Thus, while anti-papist rhetoric was omitted in official Continental Congress correspondence with Quebec in 1774 and 1775, it still flourished in private corridors, where the Canadians were often viewed as enemies.

Interestingly, during this courtship of Quebec, Congress also

⁶⁰ John Jay, "Letter to the Inhabitants of Canada," May 29, 1775, Accessed April 3, 2015, Yale Law School, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/contcong_05-29-75.asp.

⁶¹ Charles P. Hanson, *Necessary Virtue: The Pragmatic Origins of Religious Liberty in New England*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 90.

⁶² Jay, "Letter to the Inhabitants of Canada," from The Avalon Project.

⁶³ Hanson, *Necessary Virtue*, 66.

decided to launch an invasion of the Canadian colony in 1775. Political tactics to court the Quebecois were thus far unproductive, so the colonies invaded their neighbors as a way to force Canadian support against England. Troops rallied around anti-papist rhetoric, screaming “No King! No Popery!” on the trek northward through New England.⁶⁴ During the invasion, anti-papist language was used in military camps to rouse support for the attack. Unsurprisingly, then, the use of anti-papist rhetoric was beneficial in stirring up hate for an adversary. However, Quebec was not a military opponent for long, as the invasion “ended in disaster,” and the papists continued their presence north of the thirteen colonies.⁶⁵

Alliance with the French Catholics

As the American Revolution gained steam, Congress attempted to court allies to help defeat the British. Support came in 1778 in the form of an old enemy. Previously the French had been labeled as “a papist designe against the protestant Intrest in New England” who tempted Americans to “turn *Papist*.”⁶⁶ Yet the American cause required the colonies to alter their view of France and embrace the former papists as new friends. Unlike in the previous attempt to ally with Canadian Catholics, Congress’s appeal to France ultimately proved successful. The agreement was cemented on February 6, 1778, in The Treaty of Alliance with France. Signed most prominently by Benjamin Franklin, the document consisted of 13 separate parts and made seven references to religion. Not surprisingly, the treaty did not mention popery or papists. The very first words contained in the body of the treaty named King Louis XVI by his official title, “the most Christian King;” that title was repeated three more times in the document. Another title, his “most Christian Majesty,” appeared three more times in the text.⁶⁷ It proved useful for the colonists to abandon anti-papist sentiment when diplomatically addressing the French in order to appeal to Catholics who were desperately needed allies for the Americans. Anti-papist rhetoric with regards to the French had to be abandoned diplomatically in order to appease potential Catholic friends. The desertion of the derogatory terms, like had been previously attempted with Quebec, was obligatory to court a political ally. The French would not have taken kindly to insults directed at their religion and nation. Even though the French Empire was overtly Catholic, the word was no longer officially applied to King Louis XVI out of political necessity.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 38.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 61.

⁶⁶ Stanwood in *The First Prejudice*, 230.

⁶⁷ C.A. Gerard, Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane, and Arthur Lee, “Treaty of Alliance,” Paris, February 6, 1778, Accessed April 3, 2015, Yale Law School, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fr1788-2.asp.

It is worth noting that the official title “most Christian Majesty” refuted the very definition of the derogatory terms popery and papist. These terms were used because Catholicism was seen as a religion worshipping the pope instead of Christ.⁶⁸ The label “most Christian Majesty” conveyed a new view of Catholics. No longer were they dutiful servants to the pope, but rather they became part of the larger Christian community to which Protestant New England belonged.

The unofficial reaction to the alliance was mixed, and anti-papist language did not entirely disappear. In 1781, three years into the alliance, Reverend William Gordon of Roxbury gave a sermon in which he explained a harsh criticism of “the erroneous tenets of Popery.” However, he followed that with a caveat: that such a criticism was “not only consistent with a political alliance with ‘Popish powers’ but actually contributed to the stability of such an arrangement.”⁶⁹ A similar quote appears in Zabdiel Adams’s election sermon of 1782. He said that when “Papists and Protestants live intermingled together” they become “a mutual check and spy upon each other.”⁷⁰ As Protestant ministers, the two now had to compete against Catholicism within the realm of Christianity and thus likely considered Catholicism their spiritual enemy. By lambasting “the erroneous tenets of Popery,” the ministers condemned ascribed Catholic beliefs. Yet, on a secular level, both quotes were used positively in support of the American alliance with France. Gordon used the rhetoric to justify the alliance, while Adams welcomed the presence of French papists. Thus, while still not agreeing with popery, the two ministers saw the necessary benefit of the alliance.

Some of the sources show an even more positive response to the French alliance. An unknown source hailed Louis XVI “as ‘the protector of the rights of mankind,’” far from the tyrannical king he had typically been seen as in the 1750s.⁷¹ As more soldiers interacted with Frenchmen, Americans realized that the French were “the very antithesis of the ‘ignorant, bigoted Papists’” that Americans previously imagined them to be.⁷² Some colonists, then, were able to see the French as separate from popery. That is not to say that colonists saw the French separate from Catholicism, however, but they were able to separate the negative ascribed ideals of Catholicism from the French.

There was also, however, a group of patriots who did not accept the French alliance, and continued to target the French with anti-papist rhetoric. In Congress Robert Sherman and Robert Treat Paine opposed the appointment of a French officer because he was a “papist.”⁷³ Calvinist

⁶⁸ Steven Waldman, *Founding Faith*, (New York: Random House, 2009), 5-6.

⁶⁹ Hanson, *Necessary Virtue*, 158.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁷¹ Ray, *American Opinion of Roman Catholicism in the Eighteenth Century*, 346.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 346.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 309.

clergy denounced the alliance and said the colonies had succumbed to “French tyranny and popish superstition.”⁷⁴ Those who denounced the French and their alliance necessarily justified their opposition, as they had for over a hundred years, by an anti-papist demonization of the French. Rather than accept the French Catholics and gain their support in the war effort, these colonists chose to continue to view France as a papist enemy. Thus, although the colonies had made an official alliance with France, a group of colonial patriots still viewed the French as a tyrannical and spiritual enemy and gave them the papist label.

Opponents of the patriots during the war, the Tories began to employ anti-papist rhetoric in hopes of condemning the American revolutionaries. Reverend Mr. Inglis believed the French alliance allowed “the door [to be] thrown wide open to receive Popery” in the new colonies.⁷⁵ Peter Oliver wrote that the colonies had merely “pretended to be such warms Sticklers against Popery” but now wanted to “squeeze any Advantage from it.” Loyalist James Warren said the alliance with France allowed, “the danger of Popery [to be] held up to [the colonies].”⁷⁶ Although Protestantism dominated the entirety of the new nation, the agreement with Catholic France provided loyalists with an opportunity to pounce on anti-papist sentiment.

During the American Revolutionary period Catholics and Protestants were both attacked using the rhetoric of anti-papism. Patriots accused King George of popery, while Tories accused Congress of the same for allying with the French. Some patriots criticized their own government for joining with a papist ally. Nonetheless, while the targets of the rhetoric depended on the group, each employed it to ascribe negative Catholic traits to their enemies in an attempt to validate their own position.

Conclusion

The history of anti-papist rhetoric in New England is long and complex. Indeed, its origins date back to the sixteenth century, when John Foxe’s popular 1563 “Book of Martyrs” introduced the language into thousands of homes throughout England. Not only did the terms denote Catholicism itself, but the words also cemented new derogatory connotations of the religion. Popery came to signify tyranny, disloyalty to the Crown, loss of freedom, lack of free choice, and other negative traits ascribed to Catholicism that had the potential to destroy Protestantism.

The anti-papist rhetoric and all of its negative connotations crossed the Atlantic Ocean and was also utilized in the New England colonies. At first, anti-papist rhetoric was used to denounce New England’s main enemy – the French. After the French and Indian War, however, anti-papist

⁷⁴ Ibid., 340.

⁷⁵ Hanson, *Necessary Virtue*, 95.

⁷⁶ Cogliano, *No King, No Popery*, 80.

rhetoric was used against a new target. Popery had long connoted tyranny, and King George's policies began, in the minds of New Englanders, to resemble tyrannical power. Many New Englanders worried that the placement of Catholic bishop Jean-Olivier Briand in Quebec was the beginning of plans for the establishment of an Anglican hierarchy in their own colonies. When the 1765 Stamp Act Crisis unfolded, New Englanders believed their secular liberties were being stripped away. As a result, King George III became the target for anti-papist rhetoric in the second half of the 1760s. The papist denunciations against the King intensified in 1774 when the Quebec Act legalized Catholicism in the Canadian colony, putting papists on the New England border. King George, who had previously been a staunch defender of the Protestant faith against Catholic France, was now often viewed as a dreaded papist.

It was in the context of the American Revolution that the rhetoric shifted. While the American colonies attempted, but ultimately failed, to recruit their Catholic Canadian neighbors to a fight against England, anti-papist rhetoric was abandoned in an official context. The 1778 American alliance with France turned a former rival, and the main target of anti-papist rhetoric for the previous seventy-five years, into an invaluable ally. This alliance created a unique situation for the language: those who supported the alliance no longer saw France as papist but rather as a Christian friend. The alliance was not unanimously welcomed, however, and patriots who opposed the alliance considered it an inexcusable tolerance of popery. Tories, too, used anti-papist rhetoric to attack Congress's decision to unite with their new Catholic allies, but their opposition stemmed from support of Britain in the war.

The period between 1754 and 1781 presented a unique situation for anti-papist rhetoric. Shifting alliances, some of which crossed new religious and political barriers, led to changing targets of anti-popery. The French, who had been a papist enemy in New England for a century, now became necessary allies of the patriots. On the other hand, New England's longtime colonial ruler, with whom the colonists had fought against papist France, was frequently attacked by the rhetoric after the end of the French and Indian War in 1763. Because of these shifting alliances, it is impossible to find a single target for anti-papist rhetoric from 1754 to 1781. It can only be said that anti-papist rhetoric was constantly shifting during the time period. It connoted tyranny, the overthrow of true Protestantism, the loss of liberty, and the inability to think freely - all negative traits ascribed to Catholics. It attacked many multiple and shifting targets. Yet the fact always remained that it was aimed at any enemy of New England, religious or political, who was thought to exude negative qualities of Catholicism.

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