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Power for Mind & Soul

Transatlantic Catholicism: The Calverts, Carrolls, and Tactics for Parenting

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During the Stuart monarchies, Catholic families in the British empire had a range of options for passing along both their wealth and their faith to their children. As they navigated the revolutions, the expanding empire, and the religious tensions of the 17th and early 18th century, both the Carroll and the Calvert families had to decide how important Catholicism and its toleration was to their identity. This paper explores the ways the parents in these two families attempted to educate their children in the Catholic tradition, how well they accomplished this, and how they connected this faith identity to their consolidation and expansion of their wealth. As the Calverts (as Lords Baltimore) became more vital to the Atlantic empire, each generation had to negotiate how important Catholicism was to their family. The Carroll family became wealthy because of the Atlantic slave economy, but as with the Calverts, educating their children in Catholic schools on the European continent was vital to maintaining both their status and their faith. Ultimately, these families took different paths to maintaining power, but the struggle to parent under persecution forged their family identities for more than 150 years.

In the 17th century, there was no sense of “parental custody” as we have in the modern era. Only heirs had a clear legal subordination to parents—but masters had rights over people, including children. “Guardians” were only for heirs, otherwise there was no sense of guardianship over children.¹ Masters had their authority by contract, whereas there wasn’t a “contract” between children and parents, so the law didn’t come into it. And there was no sense that a child needed someone legally to nurture them—and even less that they “belonged” to their parents. According to Holly Brewer’s study of this topic, the law didn’t care about children’s welfare, “but about their land and money.” “Parents had no formal claim even to keep their children with them, let alone control their labor, except, of course, in the case of heirs.” This was most significant in the case of the Poor Laws when children could be forced to

¹ Holly Brewer, *By Birth or Consent: Children, Law & the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority* (Chapel Hill: University of NC Press, 2005), 231-233, 236, 244.

labor. This is the context for Catholic parents dealing with control over their children's education and faith nurture.

Under Elizabeth, most of the enforcement of penal laws against Catholic families and attempts at controlling Catholic education came from the crown rather than Parliament. The taking away of minors and giving them in wardship to Protestant relatives or powerbrokers in the region was based on the feudal right of the monarch.² With the accession of the Stuarts, there was an increasing concern that the monarchs weren't sufficiently committed to stamping out Catholicism, so in 1625 Parliament forced a petition on the king for the enforcement of the penal laws, especially against sending children abroad for education.³ Scotland's parliament did the same. To make it even more clear, in 1628 "the Commons passed... a Bill. . . 'to restrain the passing or sending of many to be Popishly bred beyond the seas'."⁴ The penalty for Catholic parents could extend to losing their lands and goods and being "disabled" from engaging in lawsuits, which allowed the gentry to consolidate their inheritance for their children.

Parliament was frustrated that the king and the judges did not enforce these laws well enough. In 1635 the Privy Council engaged in suppression of Catholic schools by using spies and trying to identify clandestine education within the US and looking at the permits to go abroad.⁵ While the Civil Wars raged, the Commons targeted royalist Catholics in order to raise income and to prevent the extending of that faith to the next generation, with Bills such as "An Act for the Breeding of Recusants' Children in the Protestant Religion."⁶ Eilish Gregory's study of *Catholics During the English Revolution* argues that the financial needs of Parliament during the Interregnum increasingly fueled their laws regarding Catholics, but that they were fairly challenges with enforcement.⁷

² A.C. F. Beales *Education Under Penalty: English Catholic Education from the Reformation to the Fall of James II* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 59, 60.

³ Beales, 97.

⁴ *Commons Journal*, i. 873-4, cited in Beales, 98.

⁵ Beales, 100; Scott Sowerby, *Making Toleration*, (??), 262.

⁶ *Commons Journal*, ii. 523; iv, 332, cited in Beales, 101, 102.

⁷ Eilish Gregory, *Catholics During the English Revolution, 1642-1660* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2021), 33, 34, 62, 80, 117.

During the Restoration, laws for nonconformity were enforced less on Catholics and more on Protestant Dissenters until the mid-1670s when an uptick in anti-Catholicism led to a spate of laws regulating education and office-holding.⁸ During the Popish Plot, Lord Shaftesbury and the Whigs tried to pass the most stringent law yet, closing the loopholes they saw in earlier laws. The "Popish Recusants (Children's Education) Bill" fined parents 1000 pounds (half to the king and half to the person prosecuting) for any woman or any boy under 21 being sent abroad in the care of a Catholic. The boy or woman themselves had to forfeit their inheritance to the nearest of kin who was Protestant. If they were too poor to pay the fine, they had to serve 7 years in prison. "All popish recusants were to register the names, ages and places of education of all their children, once every year, at general and quarter sessions." The law passed its second reading in the Commons and Catholics were saved by Charles dissolving Parliament (because of the Bill excluding the Duke of York).⁹

Again, after the Glorious Revolution there was a step up in the penal laws. In 1689 a Bill was brought to Parliament to disarm papists, prohibit them from owning horses of value, and by 1700 there was a fine for sending students abroad, prison for life if you were found keeping a Catholic school and a 100-pound reward for informers on people saying mass. Heirs were disinherited if they didn't convert to Anglicanism by the age of 18.¹⁰ These laws had real consequences for children and their parents. Spies were sent to intercept children at the ports who were going abroad and each trip had the potential to end with children being placed with Protestants.¹¹

Parents had to try to find ways to pass along their faith, encourage their children to identify as Catholics, while trying to retain their estates. Because of the challenges with doing this, Catholic elites had an advantage in options for passing along their faith compared to those without resources for arranging marriage or paying large fines in order to keep their property within their families. The last half of this paper will focus on two different families who handled this difficulty in two different ways.

⁸ Beales, 111, 112

⁹ Beales, 113, 114.

¹⁰ Beales, 261; Sowerby, 262, 263; Gabriel Glickman, *The English Catholic Community, 1688-1715* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2009), 57, 58.

¹¹ Glickman, 102.

Calvert Dynamics and Choices

In 1624 Sir George Calvert who had been secretary of state retired into private life so he could practice his faith. He traded his offices for protection from recusancy a peerage in Ireland and the colony of Maryland. His understanding with the Jesuits involved them coming to his colony and he sent his kids to their school. But he couldn't do everything they wanted because he had to allow the Protestants full practice and only allow Catholics personal toleration. He died in 1632 and his sons continued his ideas and the Jesuits thought he and the secular priest who was converted who ran things (John Lewger) in Maryland were really Protestants. During Cromwell's reign he petitioned and got his land back. During the popish plot the 3rd Lord Baltimore fled to Maryland.

Things took a different turn when In 1713 Benedict Leonard Calvert, 4th Lord Baltimore from whom Maryland had been removed in 1689 left Catholicism and was given back Maryland.¹² At that time, four of the Calvert boys were at St. Omer. As part of his change in religion, he wrote to St. Omer asking that the sons be sent home. It was clear that the eldest would also be asked to convert to Anglicanism in order to inherit. The boys' grandfather, who was still devout, attempted to stymie their return by asking the priests at St. Omers to delay sending them back because they were so young he worried their faith hadn't had time to cement. But the training the boys had received stood them in good stead. They expected to be martyrs and upon their eventual return home, they refused to convert. The oldest, Charles was reported to have said he would sooner be disinherited than lose his religion. The intergenerational conflict these sorts of restrictive laws engendered can be seen here, including the fact that the boys were kept from seeing their grandfather on their return to England.¹³

The Calverts worked hard to play all sides and to retain their independence. For them, maintaining their position was most important, and their short stint with Catholicism and their pivot to the colonies made them a particular kind of Catholic family.

¹² JCH Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe: The Catholic recusants in England from reformation to emancipation* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1976), 126, 136, 137, 178, 217, 247, 258.

¹³ Lewis Sabran. *The Letterbook of Lewis Sabran, S.J.* Geoffrey Holt, S.J., ed. (St. Albans, UK: Catholic Record Society, 1971), 26-28, 54; *The Stonyhurst Magazine* Vol. 480 Autumn 1985, 112.

Caryll Dynamics and Choices

The Carylls were a Sussex family who had close ties to another influential English Catholic family, the Petres. They were part of the group of Catholics who conformed often enough or had friends that did that they often escaped prosecution as recusants, as was the privilege of a wealthy family. Even though the Roman church didn't want them to be involved in their local Anglican parish, the Carylls still presented a living to the Anglican priest and played their traditional roles. They were fans of the Jesuits and aligned against Catholic families who were against the Jesuits, and they took some risks in being open about their Catholicism.¹⁴

Michael Questier describes them as being in and out of conformity but never slipping into it permanently in the way that the Protestant state hoped. The other Catholic families might have wanted to lose them as part of the community, but they never did leave Catholicism fully behind. The English Catholic church and many of the missionary priests were wracked by what conformity meant and what was allowed to be done and people positioned themselves against each other in order to convince the Stuarts that they were the "right" kind of loyal subjects who should be tolerated. The Carylls remained loyal to the Stuarts and many of them ended up serving with James II.¹⁵

While they became Jacobites after 1688 and spent time in France and held office with James II, they maintained their lands in Sussex till the 18th century. After all that maneuvering to keep their inheritance, it was debt and legal entanglements that forced them to sell their lands and move to Belgium (the young women into Benedictine convents). In the meantime, they practiced their Catholicism under constant threats, paying heavy fines, and sending sometimes the majority of their children to become priests and nuns on the Continent.¹⁶

They managed to remain Catholic while keeping their status through multiple generations partly because so many of their children allied with religious communities and had emotional ties to the church. For instance, the British

¹⁴ Michael Questier, *Catholicism and Community in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2006), 50, 51, 56, 52, 53, 55.

¹⁵ Michael Questier, *Catholicism and Community in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2006), 479, 508.

¹⁶ <http://www.bigenealogy.com/familychests/carylls-of-sussex.htm>

Library has a large collection of letters from 1709 to 1711 outlining vigorous marriage arrangements that were going on with John Caryll using go-betweens to try to achieve a good match for his heir. At least once when there was a strong possibility the arrangement was stymied because the young woman was considering becoming a nun.¹⁷ The conversations in these letters reveal how much the older generation had to take into account the religious commitments of the younger generation and how successful they had been in passing along their faith.

Such care to allow the young to develop their own faith shows up in the will of the first John Caryll in 1680 when he took care to support his granddaughters in their pursuit of a religious calling, explaining that he didn't want their parents to meddle in their affairs. Allowing the daughters to choose a religious life, while it didn't contribute to greater numbers through procreation still maintained the strong religious commitments and cultivated an engaged Roman Catholic community in the county.¹⁸

In fact it is also clear from the county records that the Carylls almost singlehandedly contributed to maintaining a consistent Catholic presence in their county. The numbers grew from about 8% of the population in the 17th century to almost 15% in the early 18th century. After they sold their lands and left in the 1770s, the numbers declined again.¹⁹

Their family was more successful in passing along their faith, even though they felt very comfortable engaging in dissimulation and occasional conformity for the long-term benefits they achieved. For them, it was personal and moral failings which led to the decline of their families and status in their counties.

Both families allied with Jesuits and other religious orders that allowed them to have independence from the Roman structures. Their relationships with other Catholic families and abilities to make connections across confessional lines

¹⁷ Letters to John Caryll June 1709 and June 1710 British Library Add MS 227 Vol 1, ffn75, 76, 86, 87

¹⁸ Will of John Caryll Oct 17 1680 BL Add Ch 10018 B

¹⁹ A P Baggs, C R J Currie, C R Elrington, S M Keeling and A M Rowland, 'West Grinstead: Roman Catholicism', in *A History of the County of Sussex: Volume 6 Part 2, Bramber Rape (North-Western Part) Including Horsham*, ed. T P Hudson (London, 1986), pp. 102-104. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/sussex/vol6/pt2/pp102-104> [accessed 17 July 2023].

were always top concern. But they also had to find ways to disciple their children within the church while making sure they didn't lose control of their land or their status. In the end, they represent how there was no inevitability to how Catholic parents might do this, nor to how successful such outcomes might be.