THE END OF A SIEGE, A SILENT LOYALIST BECOMES A RELUCTANT PATRIOT: A LETTER FROM JOHN ANDREWS TO WILLIAM WHITE, DECEMBER 14, 1779

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WITH the spilling of blood at Lexington in 1775 the long-strained relationship between England and the colonies ruptured and most individuals cast their lot with either King or Congress. In the face of rapidly changing political and social conditions many Anglican clergymen remained loyal to George III but a significant number chose to support the rebels.1 A third, if rather anomalous, group of ministers tried to remain aloof from the events of the revolution. Ideally, these men hoped to carry on their normal clerical duties and to preach only on strictly non-political topics. This attempt at neutrality usually failed because its practitioners could not conduct a proper Anglican service without praying for the sovereign. Wherever the patriots controlled territory, such an outrage was not likely to escape notice. Once detected, a neutralist could attempt to change his residence and occupation, but in most cases he would abandon the effort and finally align himself with either the Tories or the Whigs.

As we shall see in the case of the Reverend John Andrews, such a decision might be both spiritually and physically distasteful and based purely on the pragmatic reasoning that a man has a responsibility to sustain and protect his family. The unobtrusive Andrews, while stubborn, had desired only to remain in the background of the conflict. His “surrender” came a full

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1William Manross, A History of the Episcopal Church (New York 1935), 172-175, states that the Anglican clergy in New England were nearly all Loyalists, that in the South many were revolutionaries, and that in the Middle Colonies Loyalists predominated. Individual state studies of the Church, such as Nelson Rightmyer, Maryland’s Established Church (Baltimore, 1956), 119-120, offer more complete statistical information on the loyalty of the Anglican clergy.
four years after the turbulent exit to England of many fellow clergymen, including the arch-Tory, Jonathan Boucher. In the letter reprinted below to his understanding friend and former classmate, a patriot preacher, William White, Andrews discussed his capitulation to the American cause.

John Andrews was born April 4, 1746, in Cecil County, Maryland. He undertook preparatory work in a Presbyterian institution and graduated from the College of Philadelphia in 1764. Prior to his London ordination in 1767 he had taught at a classics school and studied theology under an Anglican clergyman.

Before returning to the colonies, Andrews was appointed by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts as a missionary to Lewes, Delaware. Andrews remained at this post for three years until failing health induced him to settle in York, Pennsylvania. Here, in 1772, Andrews married Eliza-

2Boucher, the former tutor of George Washington's nephew and ward, before his departure to a safer shore, had preferred to preach more on politics than on the scriptures. Reverend Boucher became infamous in Maryland for preaching with two loaded pistols on his pulpit cushion. Ralph Emmett Fall, "The Reverend Jonathan Boucher," Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church, XXXVI (December, 1967), 323-356.

3This letter is found in the Manuscripts of the Reverend William White, Bishop of Pennsylvania, Vol. I, located in the Church Historical Society, Austin, Texas. In preparing the Andrews letter for publication the editor has transcribed the original manuscript to appear just as John Andrews wrote it.

William White was a classmate of Andrews at the College of Philadelphia. W. H. Rowe (ed.), Life and Letters of Bishop William White (New York, 1937), 51. White, the brother-in-law of financier Robert Morris, felt compelled to support the colonies in their struggle for independence. He served as chaplain to the Continental Congress and at one time was reported to be the only Church of England minister active in war-torn Pennsylvania. Raymond Albright, A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America (New York, 1964), 117. He did not, however, break with his fellow clergymen who supported the Crown nor did he condemn the political beliefs of any man. Manross, History of the American Episcopal Church, 187-188. After the war White played a key role in organizing the Protestant Episcopal Church in America and became the first Bishop of Pennsylvania.


5The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was established by Anglican authorities in England in 1701 in order to promote Christianity among the people in colonies and as a secondary aim to convert the natives. The Society financially supported missionaries until the colonies separated from England. Manross, History of the Episcopal Church, 49-52.
beth Callender, “a lady of fine domestic qualities and general excellence of character,” who blessed him with ten children. Because of his burgeoning family Andrews accepted a new position as Rector of St. John’s Parish, Queen Anne’s County, Maryland, where he also set up a small school. This was his situation until sometime after the Declaration of Independence.

Always skeptical about the expedience of separation from England, Andrews sought to remain in the background of the increasing hostilities. His lack of full sympathy for the patriots, however, forced him to give up both his congregation and his small private school and to turn to farming for an income. Later, the impoverished cleric removed his family back to York, where he opened another classical school. Political expediency finally compelled him to embrace, if ever so reluctantly, the position of the colonies.a

In spite of the misgivings expressed in this letter of 1779 over what the future might hold for him, Andrews’ post-Revolutionary career of thirty years proved most notable. Indeed, very little but honors and increasing stature in the community marked the remainder of his lifetime.

At war’s end he became involved in the religious and educational affairs of his young country, and any tarnish on his image disappeared.’ In 1782 Andrews assumed the Rectorship of St. Thomas Parish, Baltimore County, Maryland, and two years later served in the convention which organized the Protestant Episcopal Church in Maryland. The following year he assumed the headmastership of the Academy of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. When that institution merged into the University of Pennsylvania in 1791 Andrews became first vice-provost and directed classes in moral philosophy and classics. In 1810 he was elected provost of the University, but illness forced him to resign shortly before his death on March 29, 1813.

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aIbid.; Manross explains that “necessity” justified Andrews’ acceptance of the revolutionary cause.

Only many years after his death were Andrews’ pre-1783 activities discussed in print. Lorenzo Sabine’s classic work, The Loyalists of the American Revolution (2 vols., New York, 1964), 1, 165, includes Andrews in its listings along with the statement that he did not “partake of the patriotic spirit of the times.”
From ye Revd Mr Andrews [endorsement] York: Dec. 14, 1779

Dear Sir,

I received your letter of the 16th of October; and should have answered it sooner, but that I concluded I should have a good opportunity by the return of Mr Bell, which has been much longer delayed than I expected.6

Several letters were written & applications made to me, about the same time & on the same occasion: But it afforded me a very singular satisfaction when I found you so kindly interesting yourself in my welfare; and I was more than ever convinced of the strength of that affection which is still retained by me for my old companions at the college, - - and for yourself in particular. And perhaps it might be no improbable supposition, that in some compliments you have been pleased to pay me, you were not altogether uninfluenced by a partiality of the same nature. But, however that may be, it is not my intention to affect any modesty upon the occasion, or to decline those compliments to which my heart assures me, that I am in some measure entitled; so far I mean, as they relate to the uprightness of my intentions: For I am really conscious of intending no injuries of any kind, whether of a publick or a private nature and feel no desire more sensibly than that my life may be useful to the world, that so when the end of it approaches, I may not be found to be an unprofitable servant.

I am happy to find, that we agree in sentiment respecting the bad policy of persecuting men on account of their principles: A practice, which, however men may deceive themselves with regard to the motives of their actions, never yet sprung I believe from any other root than that of malice; and, whether the principles persecuted be religious or political, seldom fails to render men more obstinate in maintaining them. But I contend further, that it is not only a violation of sound policy, but as shameful a piece of tyranny & inhumanity as can well be imagined. For I have ever been of opinion that the sole object of punishment in civil society is the injury done to society; and that for such bad principles as men cherish in their bosoms but do not suffer to break out into correspondent actions, they are properly amenable to another tribunal. But [it will be argued that] every state has surely a right to provide for its own preservation and safety. I say so too—by as many penal laws as she shall judge proper. But if an honest & worthy man should not be able to view things in the same light in which they are viewed by his neighbours; if, out of a grateful attachment to a former government under which he has long lived happily or from some other prepossession or apprehension equally innocent, he should not be able to approve of a revolution that has taken place in the country he inhabits, shall no degree of innocence, no obedience, nor even usefulness in society be accepted of by his new governors unless, to gratify their ever-restless jealousy, he will think as they think and swear what they swear,—in a word, resign up

*Evidently this information refers either to Hamilton Bell or to Hamilton Bell, Jr., both Anglican clergymen in Maryland. Rightmyer, Maryland's Established Church, 121.
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...to them as lordly a dominion over his conscience, as they had already established, uninterrupted, over his person and property.⁹

For my own part I demeaned myself quietly; I was obedient to the laws; I was loudly acknowledged to be useful, if not as a preacher the benefit of whose labours but few seem to be fully sensible of, yet at least as a teacher: Yet for no other crime than a mere disapprobation in sentiment of the present revolution I was forced, when in Maryland to give up my congregation—to dismiss the school the profits of which in the subversion of the establishment, I had substituted in the room of my salary—and in addition to every other severity to submit to the imposition of a treble tax:¹⁰ I was constrained to give up in a great measure the comforts of life, & to encounter with [sic] difficulties to which till then I had remained a stranger. But still, being settled on a farm, I could supply my family with the necessities of life; and so long as I could do that, I did not suppose I should be justifiable in transferring, on the principle of necessity, my allegiance from the King to Congress. At length I removed to this town; hoping that from the mildness of the laws which had lately been adapted [sic] with regard to the non-jurors. But no sooner had I got comfortably fixed, than the Supplement to the test-laws made its appearance, which gave occasion to your letter; containing a clause thrown in, as many of my friends have alleged to me, on purpose to distress & disappoint me.¹¹ I had now deprived myself of the means of farming, and should I be restrained from Teaching by the severity of the laws as I had before been from Preaching by the Malice of the People, while at the same time the price of almost every necessary of life was advanced to a most enormous degree, I was sensible that no other consequence could ensue to my family than that of immediate ruin. I might dispose of my effects and of the few negroes I possess'd [sic] with a view to remove to New York:¹² But I was not

⁹ The Maryland Revolutionary Assembly on February 5, 1777, had passed "An Act requiring an oath of Fidelity and Support to be taken by all citizens, especially all holding positions of trust, all voting in any election, all transacting business in Maryland." Rightmyer, Maryland's Established Church, 121.

¹⁰ Prior to the Revolution taxes had been collected for the support of the clergy in Maryland. Under the Declaration of Rights, 1776, those clergymen who remained in their parishes and performed their duties were supposed to receive financial aid. Rightmyer, Maryland's Established Church, 117-118. The penalty for Anglican non-compliance with the regulations of the Maryland authorities was to pay a harsh tax or to leave the state. William W. Sweet, "The Role of the Anglican in the American Revolution," Huntington Library Quarterly, XI (November, 1947), 62.

¹¹ The First Test Act in Pennsylvania, passed in June, 1777, required an oath of allegiance to Pennsylvania and the Revolution on pain of being stripped of all rights of a citizen and made subject to arrest. In April, 1779, the act was strengthened to provide that non-jurors forfeit their goods and chattels to the state and be fined, imprisoned or exiled. Wayland F. Dunaway, A History of Pennsylvania (New York, 1935), 193-194.

¹² New York City was firmly in the hands of the British and would remain so throughout the war.
certain that I should be permitted to do so; neither for want of information was I able to determine what prospects there might be when there of obtaining relief. The Good that would be done to my family by my conformity was great & certain; the Good that might arise from my refusing to conform was uncertain and if certain yet probably but inconsiderable. Thus circumstanced I thought it my duty to surrender; after having stood a pretty severe siege of about three years.

I do not remember the conversation you allude to in your letter: But if such a sentiment as you allege did really drop from me, it is proof how inconsiderately men will sometimes throw out in the course of conversation sentiments which they they [sic] have not duly examined, suddenly suggested perhaps by their zeal for a party, and by which in a case of their own they would by no means be governed.

There are perhaps but very few men who entertain a greater reverence for the Church of England than I do; or who have felt a greater anxiety on her behalf since the commencement of the present troubles than I have done. Her fate is still in suspense [sic]; but I am of opinion that if by the Church of England be meant an Episcopal Church she will no longer, if the States should be able to maintain their independence, have an existence in America. At any rate it will not be in my power, I fear, to render her any very important services so long as I remain in my present way of business.

The length of my letter will stand in need, I doubt, of some apology; but I have a great confidence in your candour, and hope you will believe me to be most sincerely.

Your affectionate friend & brother,

John Andrews