Ours is the age of the computer, the evidence of which is everywhere. History, as with other disciplines remote from the marketplace, has adopted many of its ways. The historian often makes excellent use of computer methodology to rediscover the past by uncovering for the first time facts about the historical experience which could be read only from a print-out. In consequence, fresh and exciting interpretations become increasingly common. Yet this is an age in which there may still be a place—and a useful place at that—for historical inquiry which begins with fragments of letters, diaries, and other records but which, at the crucial phase in the investigation, is carried forward by no force other than informed speculation. History thus considered is not scientific; but it is intensely human. What it lacks in scientific verifiability it makes up for in human awareness. As long as history remains in some sense an art, the Muse is honored by the effort to explore corners of the past alien to computer science. Failure to acknowledge the uses of such history may be as unfortunate as claiming too much for it.

In taking up an account of the response of Robert Harding, S. J. (1701–1772) and Robert Molyneux, S. J. (1738–1808) to the movement for American independence thoughts about the speculative possibilities of history seem appropriate.¹ This is especially so

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since their response rests upon an hypothesis which, with investigation, may lead to a thesis about the "Jesuit as patriot." The hypothesis is simply this: a large proportion of eighteenth century Englishmen, at home and in the colonies, had a strong preference for the Whig philosophy of government. Even George III had a touch of the Whig about him; if his claim be taken seriously that prior to the American Revolution he was attempting to return English government to that state of balance between King and Parliament which had been prescribed by the Settlement of 1690. Irrespective of background, training, experience, of religion, education, or vocation, scratch an eighteenth century Englishman and like as not he would be a Whig. The attitudes of Harding and Molyneux toward American independence when taken in combination may be a case in point.

Fathers Harding and Molyneux were successive pastors of Saint Joseph's Church, Willing's Alley, Philadelphia, located but a short distance from the State House (Independence Hall). Altogether the church was in their charge from 1749 when Harding arrived, down to 1785, Molyneux having been pastor from 1772, the date of his confrere's death. They were witness to momentous events associated with the movement toward independence, residing as they did in the first city of British North America and enjoying the friendship of several of those who took prominent parts in revolutionary activity. At the core of their response to the cause of independence was their commitment to natural rights as these obtained under secular government and man-made law.

Because they were Catholic, Harding and Molyneux had a Catholic conception of the natural order. Their view was derived from the natural rights school associated with the medieval schoolmen in general and with thinkers like Thomas Aquinas and Marsilius of Padua in particular. These philosophers, admittedly dominated by the doctrines of the ancient Church, upheld individual rights based on the natural condition of man. Harding and Molyneux, furthermore, were eighteenth-century Jesuits, trained in the style of the universities of Europe and thoroughly knowledgeable in

2. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) interests embraced the political order. See especially De regimine principum.

3. Marsilius of Padua (d. ca 1342) argued in Defensor Pacis that all political power came from the people and that the ruler therefore was merely a delegate of the people.
the teachings of such earlier Jesuits as Bellarmine and Suárez. Bellarmine wrote in justification of mixed governments as a check on tyranny. Suárez, whose treatises on law exhibited concessions to voluntarism unusual in contemporary Catholic literature, also championed popular sovereignty. Typical of the instruction received by Harding and Molyneux in their continental schools were the lectures of Thomas Ellenker at the Jesuit College in Liége. In his Tractibus Theologica de Jure Et Justitia Ellenker not only presented the views of Aquinas but those of the radical Jesuit thinker, Luis Molina, who held that God’s grace depended on man’s free acceptance. Ellenker’s purpose was not so much to refute as to acquaint his students with traditional and contemporary notions as to the nature of man. Such exposure was sure to have had a pronounced influence on Jesuits in the making.

Harding and Molyneux were, moreover, Englishmen born and bred. In a sense they were English before they were Catholic or Jesuit. They were in some measure nurtured on Locke; life, liberty, and property; and the whole Whig tradition. Bernard Basset in his study, The English Jesuits From Campion to Martindale, relates how the Jesuits resisted the authority of the Crown in the days of Elizabeth I: Campion’s brag led on to Tyburn’s tree. In contrast, he makes no mention of any such subversive activity after 1721, the implication being that the English Province of the Society of Jesus acquiesced in the political order. The era of resistance had waned. The time of accommodation, despite the formality and in a way the actuality of penal laws against papists, had set in. Mere “acquiescence” and “accommodation” are not likely to transform hypothesis into thesis, however. It must be realized, instead, that the lessons of Bellarmine and Suárez nicely complemented constitutional monarchy and rule by law which increasingly made up the way of political life in

4. Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), in De Potestate summi pontificis, developed many ideas regarding temporal political prerogatives.
5. Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) taught in De Defensione Fidei that kingly power came from the body of men, and thus opposed divine right kingship.
6. Ellenker was an eighteenth century Jesuit teacher-philosopher. An unpublished manuscript of his lecture on law and justice is in Ms B.v, Stonyhurst College Archives.
7. Luis Molina (1535–1600) was a Spanish Jesuit theologian who tried to reconcile God’s power and man’s freedom. His Concordia was the strongest Catholic statement of his day supporting the individual in God’s scheme. His De Justitia et Jure, in which he was both moralist and economist, may have been Ellenker’s model.
Great Britain in the eighteenth century. It is likely that Harding and Molyneux as Englishmen were conditioned to accept constitutional government and as Jesuits they were persuaded of its values by mentors who held with Bellarmine and Suárez.

The New World environment intensified Whig convictions among people living in the colonies. The pluralism of American society was well advanced by the eighteenth century and that fitted in with constitutional rule. Men came to an awareness of natural rights, for example, in various ways: Judaeo-Christian beliefs, rationalistic propositions, lessons from history, frontier hardships. If Jefferson's appeal in the Declaration of Independence was a general one: "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal . . .," he cast so wide a net because there were various fish to catch. Irrespective of why men believed in equality, Jefferson appears to have wanted them all on his side. The philosopher and the propagandist were astutely blended in the patriot. Among the variety of Americans were some Catholics who craved religious freedom as much as any sect, and for whom religious freedom, once experienced, became the first of the several natural rights expressions they would take up and defend. This is another way of saying that in the "Maryland tradition" the Church of Rome—certainly strongly disposed to be authoritarian in the Old World and holding stiffly to that same line in Spanish America—had softened its stand on the subject of tolerating other faiths in British America. There has been no end of telling how the Puritan Mind was eroded by a remorseless wearing away due to the pressure of New World realities. Much the same thing happened to an equally hard nut, the Catholic Mind, once it faced the day to day demands of the frontier. The common denominator of the American Puritan and the American Catholic Minds was that these diverse sectaries were British in origin. As James I is reputed to have observed, Jesuits are nothing but Puritan-papists. The British factor is central for appreciating the response of the two Jesuits, Harding and Molyneux, to the Revolution.

9. Interestingly enough Jesuit copyists in Maryland in the seventeenth century spent much time in making multiple copies of the Maryland charter, interpolating such comments as Maryland established "for the propagation of the Christian Faith and the enlargement of our Empire and Dominion by the transplantation of an ample colony of the English nation." Province Notes, Folder 4 Wl, Georgetown Universities Archives. For a critical yet sympathetic statement of the "Maryland tradition" consult Thomas O'B. Hanley, Their Rights and Liberties The Beginnings of Religious and Political Freedom In Maryland, (Westminster, Md., 1959).
What, more exactly, was the "Maryland tradition," which worked such an influence on Catholics in colonial America? The Calverts who founded Maryland intended it to be a colony of religious toleration. Charles M. Andrews has pointed out that Cecil Calvert's instructions of 1633 "disclose better than any formal document of authority the deep-lying desire of the proprietor to erect a colony free from religious animosity and contention in which Protestants and Roman Catholics might live together in peace and harmony."¹⁰

The first Jesuit priests arrived in the colony in 1634, lodged themselves permanently in Maryland, and became elemental to the "Maryland tradition." Almost from the start there occurred a practical application of the theory of toleration. Priests who were property owners, for example, might be excused from attendance in the Assembly according to law and not by the favor of some medieval clerical immunity.¹¹ One William Lewis, to cite a different kind of evidence, who was a lay overseer of Jesuit estates, was fined for proselytizing Protestant indentured servants. His employer, Father Thomas Copley, S. J., rebuked him for his "contumelious speeches and his ill-governed zeal."¹² Such testimony may serve to illustrate the principle that at first in Maryland only those who attempted to carry over into America the conflict practices of the Old World ran afoul of the law.

The early history of the colony further demonstrated that the "Maryland tradition" included a code of laws which emphasized natural rights and liberties guaranteed by Magna Carta as a means of protecting freedom of individual conscience. The church's place became that of an autonomous spiritual society. Thus when a dispute arose between the Proprietor and the Jesuits over the ownership of land, the argument was resolved by the General of the Jesuit Order. He took the side of the Proprietor, making the point that Maryland was not Europe. He further advised his men to claim no right they would not have claimed in England itself. "I should be very sorry indeed," wrote Father Vitelleschi, the Jesuit General, "to see the first fruits which are so beautifully developing in the Lord, nipped in their growth by the frost of cupidity."¹³

The situation in the Maryland province changed after mid-seventeenth century with an influx of Puritans, reducing the Catholic population to a minority. Catholics were severely put upon, at least down to the time of Queen Anne. In spite of vicissitudes, Maryland Catholics once again came to enjoy freedom to practice their faith in the eighteenth century, a development which traditionalized religious liberty as founded on natural rights. In summing up the "Maryland tradition" no single individual illustrated it more convincingly than Charles Carroll of Carrollton, one of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence. Educated abroad in the Jesuit colleges in Flanders and at the College Louis le Grand in Paris as well as studying law at Westminster and the Temple, he was a man of the Enlightenment. His Jesuit tutors had introduced him to Locke and Montesquieu. In 1763 he wrote his father with typical enthusiasm that he regarded Jesuits to be "men of Republican principles who will not fail to inspire the youths with a love of liberty." 16 As priests, Father Harding and Molyneux were not primarily concerned with public matters. But their subconscious political attitude, as with their basic education, tended to resemble very much that of Carroll, with whom they were one in mind and spirit and faith.

Robert Harding was born on 6 October, 1701, in Nottingham, England. He was educated at first privately. Entering the Society of Jesus young Harding was sent to the Jesuit college at Liege for formal training in literature as well as in philosophy and theology. As Liege was judged to be a more liberal institution than, for example, the Jesuit college at Bruges, he probably imbibed something of its freer spirit. Harding was chosen for the Maryland Mission after ordination as a priest and arrived in America in 1732. 16 It was not until 1749 that he was assigned to the Jesuit parish of Saint Joseph's in Philadelphia. Because of repercussions from the Jacobite uprising in 1745, Catholics became somewhat suspect in Philadelphia as elsewhere in the colonies. Their credibility as loyal British subjects was again challenged by the French and Indian War in the 1750s. During that war there was heard talk of a "Popish

15. Ibid, p. 133.
16. Whether Harding volunteered for the mission or was chosen is unclear. In any case, Harding found America and Philadelphia congenial.
plot" in Pennsylvania and indeed some evidence exists that a certain individual or individuals, identities unknown, supplied false letters to the Duke of Devonshire and others which were intended to incriminate Catholics in treasonable actions.

Possibly such moves were undertaken to stir up agitation against Catholics, especially in Maryland where their strength lay, which might have led to a sequestration of their property. Property rather than subsidy might have been the reward given the marplots. But these rumors of treason came to naught. Nonetheless pamphleteers were busy pointing out the danger of a Catholic community possibly in league with the French enemy. One such defamatory tract, by Rev. William Smith, and entitled *A Brief Statement of the Province of Pennsylvania*, argued that the French, by means of "their Jesuitical Emmissaries," were seeking to win the German population of Philadelphia away from the British "in multitudes." The colony might be in grave peril in consequence. When copies of Smith's fusillade were distributed in the city Harding was quick to protest and to set forth his own views respecting British authority. He paid a visit to Dr. Thomas Graeme and in the words of Graeme's letter to the Proprietor, Thomas Penn, made a strong case for his loyalty. In part the report read:

Doctor, says he [Harding], I am an English Man and have an English heart. I don't know if I shall be believed when I tell you and assure you that I should be extremely concerned ever to see the French possessed of a foot of English America, that though I may like something about them, their Government I should never desire to live under.

In any event Harding's reputation for loyalty to the English system of rule appears to have gained a firm foothold. When some French settlers in Illinois country asked General Gage for a priest to minister to their needs Gage in turn requested Harding to recommend a candidate, one "well attached to His Majesty's person and government."

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19. Province Notes, Folder 4 WI, Georgetown University Archives.
In much the same vein in 1768 Father Harding presented to John Dickinson the thanks of the Roman Catholics of Philadelphia upon the latter’s authorship of *Letters From A Pennsylvania Farmer*. Dickinson had been forthright in his disagreement with British policy especially because that policy seemed to fly in the face of British liberty. In that light Harding’s endorsement of Dickinson’s argument is understandable. In the same year, 1768, he was also elected a member of the American Philosophical Society, Franklin’s organization for promoting useful knowledge. It may be presumed that Harding was acceptable on learned as well as other grounds and that his political convictions were not inconsistent with that of the Society’s membership generally. Harding was indeed a pious as well as an erudite man. He was renowned as a preacher. Ezra Stiles, the noted Congregation clergyman who was later president of Yale College, attended his chapel to hear him speak. In 1771 Harding in the name of the Catholic community assured the new colonial governor that “our acts and behavior shall be the best proof of the sentiments we express on this occasion.” The year he died Harding acted as one of the founders of the Society of the Sons of Saint George. Jacob Duché’s estimate of Father Harding stands as an apt summary of his work and reputation. “A decent, well-bred gentleman,” Duché had found him, “much esteemed by all Christians in this city, for his preaching, his moderation, his known attachment to British liberty, and his unaffected, pious labors among the people to whom he officiated.”

As Robert Harding died in 1772 the question can not be definitely answered whether or not he would have been a patriot once war came. It is well to keep in mind that much revolutionary fervor before 1776 was fanned by the constant refrain that the colonists were only demanding their rights as Englishmen. Harding’s attachment to British liberty therefore becomes a persuasive factor in any speculation about his possible attitude in 1776. He was, furthermore, so close a friend of George Meade that the latter was a witness to Harding’s last will and testament. Meade himself was a staunch Catholic and a convinced patriot. Given his sensitivity to the cause of British liberty, might Harding not have followed the lead of certain of his friends like Meade when it came to making a commitment regarding the cause of American liberty?

Robert Molyneux was also a north of England man. Born at Formby, Lancashire, 24 July 1738, he was the son of a distinguished North Briton cavalier family with close ties to the Catholic Church and the Jesuit Order. Over the years the Molyneux family had given numerous sons to the service of the Church. After private schooling at home Molyneux attended St. Omers and thereafter the Jesuit College at Bruges. Of St. Omers the American Tory, Daniel Dulaney, observed in exasperation that it was “the best seminary in the universe of the champions of civil and religious liberty.”

The influence of St. Omers on Molyneux at so formative a stage in his development is hard to measure but difficult to ignore.

Father Molyneux arrived in America in 1771 and almost at once succeeded Harding as pastor in Philadelphia. He was both a bookish and a priestly man, habits which stood him in good stead in the war years ahead. During the Revolution Molyneux showed himself a moderate patriot. With the British in occupation of Philadelphia he resorted to his worthwhile collection of books—“a library well fitted up in the choir of the old chapel” at Saint Joseph’s—and it was there he buried himself in order to avoid association with the occupation forces. Molyneux had taken the all important oath of allegiance to the State constitution, the crucial test for differentiating loyalists from supporters of independence. As the leading Catholic clergyman in the city he had, in a sense, identified his congregation with the patriot cause. During his pastorate at Saint Joseph’s Church he welcomed members of the Continental Congress to requiems for foreign envoys and had occasion to instruct the Chevalier de la Luzerne in the English language. When Don Juan de Mirailles died in 1780 a funeral Mass was offered at the Jesuit church. Father Molyneux officiated at the requiem attended by de la Luzerne, members of the Continental Congress and army officers. Toward the close of the war Molyneux signed the petition praying for the return of Congress to Philadelphia and on March 1, 1781 a Te Deum was chanted at the church in Willing’s Alley to celebrate the ratification of the adoption of Government Under The Articles of Confederation. Though primarily a priest with only peripheral interest in politics Molyneux’s various actions and attitudes justify characterization as a patriot. Steeped in the “Maryland tradition” he was worried that religious

liberty might well be eclipsed if political freedoms were denied by
the mother country. That same “Maryland tradition” helps to
explain his sympathy for the Revolutionary cause.

Having considered the postures of Harding and Molyneux,
attention must be given to a seemingly extraneous development
which may serve to throw additional light on “the Jesuit as American
patriot.” In 1773 the Society of Jesus was suppressed by Papal bull.
This event had been a long time in the making and had come about
as the result of machinations in high political places. The govern-
ments of both France and Spain had worked to clip the wings of the
Society and no Jesuit could remain unaware or indifferent to the evil
effects of unrestrained political power. Suspicions of the excesses of
governmental authority, crucial to American p otroit feelings, were
likely elements in Jesuit thinking, rendering them hostile to the idea
of unchecked power wherever it might be identified. 24 Further, as
English Jesuits, they had to live with the constant possibility of
running afoul the English penal laws—another sign of dangerous
government authority. It is true that as the eighteenth century
progressed religious toleration for Catholics became more common.
But it is well to remember that into the 1720s summaries such as
The Penal Laws Against Papists and Popish Recusants were still published
while the Gordon riots of 1780 demonstrated the continued anti-
Catholic feelings among the English people. 25 Given the circum-
cstances surrounding the suppression of the Society of Jesus and
official British religious intolerance, men like Harding and Moly-
neux had special reason to support the patriot cause.

At least one important corollary follows from suppression of the
Society of Jesus. Jesuit priests became free agents, so to speak. Very
probably they felt less need for caution in what they might say or do
because they would be acting only for themselves as individuals
and would not be associating the Society with their views in any
way. The Society was defunct, and could not come under attack for
what its members, or more precisely, ex-members, might undertake.
Molyneux, who appears to have been less confident of himself as a

is near at hand . . . the date of our destruction has been fixed . . . our friends hope in
nothing but the interposition of providence.” Maryland Volume, Archives of the
English Province of the Society of Jesus.

25. In England Catholics made this distinction: religion is a matter of conscience,
patriotism is a matter of loyalty. Ms. Anglia IV, 31, Stonyhurst College Archives.
public man than was Harding, could well have responded positively to this sense of freedom.

By way of summary speculation the Harding-Molyneux response to American Independence was composed of abstract and practical ingredients. Harding, it can be argued, exemplified the English Catholic in America who believed profoundly in the concept of English liberty. Molyneux, for his part, stood forth as the Englishman who, disposed to liberty, was swept along by events and the circumstances in which he found himself. Both ingredients had a share in generally determining men’s loyalties and ultimately the achievement of independence. For Catholic priests like Harding and Molyneux the teachings of Bellarmine, Suárez, and other Jesuit philosophers provided a unique additive. Moreover each man had lived long enough in the New World to be persuaded that the scope of liberty, including freedom of religious conscience, should be enlarged beyond the habits of Europe. It would be unwise to deny that in their respective outlooks there was something frontier-related, something American. It would be no less wrong-headed to overlook the English inheritance. The attitudes of Fathers Robert Harding and Robert Molyneux in sum appear to illustrate the American and the English elements in the large movement toward independence. John Adams undoubtedly had some such judgment in mind when he mused that the Revolution was in the hearts and the minds of the people. Whether Adams, as a contemporary, would have subscribed to the thesis of “the Jesuit as American patriot” is dubious, rendering the thesis itself more provocative but no less likely true.

26. John Adams was not unfamiliar with the Catholic Church in Philadelphia. In October 1774 Adams in the company of Washington attended a Vesper service at St. Mary’s Church, the daughter parish church of Saint Joseph’s located on South Fourth Street. Father Molyneux officiated in all probability. Reflecting on his experience Adams wrote both his wife and in his diary of his impressions, observing in his diary: “The scenery and music are so calculated to take in mankind that I wonder the Reformation ever succeeded.” L. H. Butterfield, editor, *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), 2:150.