

Mathew Carey's Douay-Rheims Bible

by Nicholas Mario Bruno¹

Penniless and exiled, a young printer, disguised as a woman to avoid arrest by the English, sailed to Philadelphia with the Marquis de Lafayette. When the ship arrived in Philadelphia, Lafayette introduced Carey to George Washington and other influential Americans who lent him \$400 to set up a printing shop.

This young printer, Mathew Carey, would be very influential in early American printing. This paper will examine his life and some of his most influential work both as an American printer, dedicated to creating a nationalistic literary identity, and his work as a Catholic, printing the Mathew Carey Bible during an important era for the Catholic Church in America.

Background of Mathew Carey

Although known mainly for his work in America, Carey was not born in America; he was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1760. He started his career as a journalist in Ireland. At the age of 19, Carey advocated the repeal of the British Penal Code against Irish Catholics in an anonymous pamphlet. When the British government offered a reward for the author of the pamphlet, Carey fled for France where he met Benjamin Franklin.

After a year in France, Carey returned to Ireland but again got into trouble with political authorities – this time for his views on economic policy. Carey, who supported tariffs, published a cartoon of a British official who opposed a tariff bill being hanged for treason. Fortunately for Carey, Franklin had introduced him to the Marquis de Lafayette and arranged for Lafayette to

¹ Nicholas Bruno won 1st place in the 2011 “A Piece of the Past” museum essay contest. Mr. Bruno attended Houston Baptist University from 2009-2011 studying for a major in government and minor in economics. While at HBU, Nicholas founded the HBU Speech and Debate Club and Political Science Honor Society and served as President of those organizations in addition to serving on the Collegian and as a Junior Senator in HBU Student Government Association. He plans to attend law school to study Constitutional Law after graduation.

accompany Carey to Philadelphia. Thus, at 24 years of age, Carey, forced to leave his homeland, decided to settle in Philadelphia in 1760.

While in Philadelphia, Carey published over 1,500 works including works that he wrote himself. Some of his works, such as his publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, were political in nature. Carey also published some of the classics for Americans including works of Virgil and other Greek and Latin classical writers.

In 1787, Carey founded the magazine *The American Museum*, a magazine devoted to publishing and distributing American literature. Primarily intended to instill a sense of nationalism in the American people, *The American Museum* received enormous praise from George Washington who said that, "a more useful literary plan has never been undertaken in America, or one more deserving of public encouragement."²

Besides being a printer, Carey was also very interested in politics. His friends included many of the important political figures of the time such as Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, the Marquis de Lafayette, and Henry Clay. Many of these leaders were very supportive of Carey's work as a publisher. These friends also provided financial assistance; for instance, General Lafayette lent Carey money to establish his publishing business.

Carey served on the city council of Philadelphia. As a friend of Jefferson, Carey campaigned for Jefferson in the 1800 presidential elections especially among Irish voters. Prior to this time, Carey was in constant financial insecurity as he would have to borrow money to print books and would go into debt if the book did not sell. After being elected President, Jefferson, at the request of Carey, ensured that Carey was appointed to the board of the Bank of

² Carter, M.S. "Under the benign sun of toleration: Mathew Carey, the Douai Bible, and Catholic print culture, 1789-1791," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 27(3), P 443.

Pennsylvania in recognition of Carey's support in the 1800 election. This appointment enabled Carey to acquire the loans he needed for his business.

Background of the Time

While Carey was living, significant events, specifically concerning the Catholic Church in America and the idea of religious liberty, were happening which were tremendously important in the printing of the Mathew Carey Bible. In the religious sphere, the Catholic Church established the first American diocese in Baltimore, Maryland. In the political sphere, the newly established United States of America had just passed the Bill of Rights which, among other things, guaranteed the right of freedom of religion.

On November 6, 1789, the Catholic Church established the Diocese of Baltimore, the first American diocese. This diocese included the entire US which at time included the land from Maine in the North to Georgia in the South and West to the Mississippi River.³ Of the approximately four million people in the US, 35,000 were Catholics who lived mainly in Maryland, Philadelphia, and the former French settlements in the West.⁴

In the political sphere, the Bill of Rights was proposed in 1789 and passed in 1791. Among other rights, the Bill of Rights guaranteed religious freedom. Mathew Carey attempted to use this political progress to sell the Bible. In a pamphlet entitled "To the Protestants of the United States", Cary stated that the Douay-Rheims Bible had fewer translation errors than the King James Version. Invoking the political feelings of the time, Carey said that American Protestants could prove that they truly believed in religious freedom and tolerance by buying a copy of the Bible he was printing. Carey wrote, "Uniting together the names of members of

³ *Our History: The Archdiocese of Baltimore*. Archdiocese of Baltimore. Retrieved December 31, 2010, from <http://www.archbalt.org/about-us/our-history/>

⁴ "Under the benign sun", P442.

various and hitherto hostile denominations of Christians, will afford one proof—among many that might be produced—of the rapid advances that America has made in the divine principle of toleration.”⁵

At least one Protestant, Benjamin Rush, accepted this challenge and bought the Bible from Carey although the vast majority of subscribers were Catholic.

Mathew Carey Bible

The Mathew Carey Bible was printed on December 1, 1790, by Carey through his firm Carey, Stewart, and Company. Carey had secured 471 subscriptions prior to printing the Bible and printed about 500 copies of the Bible which he sold for \$6 a copy. In contrast to previous versions of the Douay-Rheim’s Bible which were printed in multiple volumes, Carey published the Bible in a single quarto-sized edition. This edition also featured large margins and a binding designed to attract attention.

Mathew Carey was supported by leaders in the Catholic Church in America. Bishop John Carroll supported Carey in publishing the Bible through both his approval and his work to help secure subscriptions for the Bible. About 49% of the subscriptions for the Bible came from Philadelphia residents. Among those who subscribed for the Bible was Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and founder of the Philadelphia Bible Society. A few of the famous historical figures who subscribed were John Barry, the first Naval officer commissioned by George Washington; Charles Carroll, another signer of the Declaration of Independence; Edmund Nugent, a British admiral and member of the British Parliament; and Jacob Rush, a justice on the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. The Mathew Carey Bible in the Dunham Bible Museum belonged to John Councill, a resident of Philadelphia.

⁵ “Under the benign sun,” P460.

Bishop Carroll suggested that the Bible should be printed in separate volumes, one for the Old Testament and one for the New Testament, so that those who could not afford the entire Bible could at least buy one of the volumes. However, Carey decided to print the entire Bible in one volume.

Carey's printing of the Douay-Rheims translation of the Bible was the second complete English Bible printed in the U.S., but was a commercial success unlike the first American printing of the English Bible, Robert Aitken's King James Version of 1782. The Mathew Carey Bible was only the third complete edition, including both the Old and New Testaments, of the Douay-Rheims Bible that was published since the translation was finished in 1609.

The Douay-Rheims Bible was translated from St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate by exiled English Catholic Jesuit priests in France in the late 1500s and into the early 1600s. The New Testament was finished in 1582, and the entire Bible was finished in 1609. In the mid-eighteenth century, Bishop Richard Challoner made revisions to the Douay-Rheims Bible. With a few exceptions, mainly editorial adjustments, Carey used the 1764 edition of the Challoner version of the Douay-Rheims Bible when he printed the Bible.

Besides the text of the Bible itself, the Carey Douay-Rheims Bible also includes a table of references to compare the titles of the books and order of the Psalms from what Mathew Carey called the "protestant bible" to the Douay-Rheims Bible, a chronological table of dates from creation to Nehemiah, and a table with the biblical references for the Catholic gospels for Sundays and Holydays throughout the year.

Conclusion

Despite his humble beginnings of \$400 as a young printer in Philadelphia, Mathew Carey became an important figure in American literary history through his involvement with *The*

American Magazine as well as through the numerous books he published. Mathew Carey's printing of the 1790 Bible was important not only as the first Douay-Rheims Bible in the U.S., but also as a practical expression of the newly guaranteed rights of religious freedom.

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