

# That Textbook Question

Our America celebrates its heritage of religious freedom. In the Archdiocese of Baltimore we can also rejoice in remembering that religious freedom in the English-speaking world had its beginnings in Maryland with the Catholic colonists in their Assembly's Acts of Toleration of 1639 and 1649.

That freedom, offered to all the colonists who lived here at the time, was taken away for Catholics following the so-called Glorious Revolution in England in the year 1688. In 1692 the newly appointed Royal Governor began enforcing the Anti-Catholic English Penal Laws. Our churches were razed to the ground. Mass could not be celebrated publicly. Priests could not hold property. Catholics could not stand for office or be lawyers, doctors or teachers. In time, double taxes were imposed on Catholics.

It is no wonder that, when the Revolutionary War came, the Catholic leadership of Maryland was in the forefront of seeking independence from England and the restoration of religious freedom in Maryland. They sought as well to extend this freedom to all the thirteen original States of the infant country.

Our first Bishop, John Carroll, his brother Daniel, and their cousin, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, were vigorous supporters of this freedom and of the adoption of the First Amendment to the Constitution. This at times painful history should inform us in the present discussion of continuing textbook aid to students in the non-public schools of Maryland.

- No constitutional issue of separation of Church and State is involved. The Supreme Court ruled many years ago that the provision of texts on neutral, non-religious subjects like mathematics and the sciences, is fully in accord with the Constitution.
- Nor is there an intrusion of the government into how we run our schools, or how our Jewish or Protestant friends run their schools. We must already meet State standards; already our Catholic schools have been accredited; already our school buildings comply with local building codes. But the experience of 37 other States proves that the acquisition of textbooks is a

positive help, and not a hindrance, to the educational process in religious schools.

- We can be proud of our schools. As Pope John Paul II said in the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen when he visited here in 1995, Catholic schools teach the virtues citizens of a democracy need to cultivate: responsibility, industry, respect for others, along with faith in God and the call to shape our lives according to God's revelation.
- Letters to the Editor, testimony before legislative committees, and statements by a number of public figures lead me to point to a deeper issue, that of justice. Justice is an issue when one realizes that parents pay taxes for the operation of the public schools. Simple justice says that some of that tax money should be used, as it is in other States, for the education of their children in accord with what is constitutionally permissible. The justice issue becomes even clearer when we realize that the existence of non-public schools is saving the taxpayers of our State more than \$2 million dollars a day! That comes to something like \$900 million a year!
- Some contend that aid to non-public schools would somehow harm the public schools. This is manifestly untrue. With respect to the present proposal, we note that state public school funding - about \$2 billion in the coming year - comes from tax-produced general revenues. [An additional \$3.6 billion is provided by Maryland counties, which budget no funding at all for non-public school children.] The textbook funding for non-public schools proposed in the Governor's budget this year, as in the last year, comes from the tobacco settlement and not from taxes. There is no question of public schools suffering in any fashion from the proposal. And we do want the public schools to succeed, and have regularly testified to that effect in Annapolis. A very high p