



bishopric of New York. To take Concanen's place as master of students and philosophy professor Connolly was assigned to Rome from Louvain. Subsequently, as Concanen moved out of a post it was entrusted to Connolly. In 1778 Concanen resigned as subprior because of other demanding responsibilities, and Connolly was appointed in his stead. In 1782 Concanen, now prior, withdrew as Regent of Studies, and Connolly assumed the post. In 1787 Concanen became assistant to the Master General at the Minerva and theologian of the Dominican Casanate library, while Connolly succeeded him as prior of San Sisto and San Clemente.

Before becoming prior, Connolly had received the highest honor the order could bestow, namely, the title of Master of Theology. The friars of the Irish Province, assembled in Dublin wrote, "For the mastership . . . we ask, in virtue of his teaching, the appointment of Father John Connolly, who has passed his examination . and is Regent of our College of San Sisto and San Clemente, Rome. His merits and character are well known to your Most Rev. Paternity."<sup>[5]</sup> This honor was granted without objection as proof of the worth and esteem in which he was held by the head of the Order who knew him well.

Connolly was prior of San Sisto and San Clemente until 1796 when he became procurator of that community, an office he held for ten years. During this time, Connolly also assisted

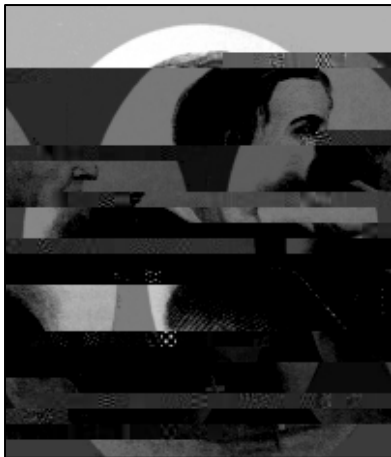
deplorable state, owing to a great scarcity of provisions, particularly bread, and the number of robberies committed almost every night in the streets, houses, and even churches.[\[7\]](#)

Confusion continued under the new Roman Republic, with financial negotiations and settlements of church properties left in poor condition. Connolly became vicar and bursar at San Clemente in 1800 and tried to cope with paying the bills. In 1809 the Papal States were incorporated into the French Empire and Pius VII was arrested and placed under custody in Savona. Restoration of religious life in Rome and repossession of properties began only after Napoleon's fall and the pope returned to the city. These difficult years of testing foreshadowed Connolly's days to come.

John Carroll, Archbishop of Baltimore, petitioned the Propaganda for the erection of four new American dioceses. In April, 1808, Pius VII divided the huge see of Baltimore into the dioceses of Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Bardstown. Carroll had suggestions for all these sees except New York. In 1807, he wrote to the congregation of Propaganda Fide, "It seems necessary that in the beginning the bishop of Boston should exercise jurisdiction over the territory [of New York] . . . . For none of the priests residing in that territory appear to me suited for the episcopacy. I therefore refrain from recommending anyone for that responsible post."[\[8\]](#)

The Cardinals acted quickly in 1808 and unanimously chose Luke Concanen, who was an agent and friend of John Carroll, as well as the personal choice of the pope. When Pius VII approved the selection of Concanen for New York, he added that should the bishop-elect be unable to sail for America because of poor health, John Connolly should be his replacement. Concanen spent over two years attempting to gain passage to America during the period of embargoes on Italian ports. He spent much time at Leghorn, exhausting his finances. Sadly, he died there on June 18, 1810.

With Bonaparte's abdication Pius VII returned to Rome in January, 1814. Restoration of civil and religious order began. The Propaganda took up its concern for filling the see of New York and in its general meeting of September 19, 1814, unanimously voted for John Connolly. He was consecrated bishop on Sunday, November 6, 1814, but maintained responsibility for the repossession and repairs of San Clemente until time for his departure from Rome.



**John Connolly, second bishop of New York**

At last Concanen's replacement, John Connolly, was on his way to the New World. From Rome, the new bishop traveled to Belgium, England and Ireland and obtained two young priests willing to serve in New York. They were Irish-born Michael O'Gorman and James McKenna. Connolly sailed on the *Sally* with its fifty-seven passengers in mid-September of 1815. The transatlantic journey was a long and dangerous one of sixty-seven days, so unduly prolonged that he was believed lost at sea. On December 24, only to be confined for several weeks until his health returned.

In Baltimore John Carroll eagerly awaited Connolly's arrival. He wrote in mid-1815 to John Troy, Archbishop of Dublin, "We cannot account for Bishop Connolly's not being yet arrived; his Diocese is suffering for him; and for its sake, it is to be wished, that he may come, accompanied by a number of zealous, capable and edifying clergymen."<sup>[9]</sup> Carroll, who favored American-born and educated clergy, was not at all happy with Rome's choice of bishop for New York, a choice made without consulting him. He expressed his feelings to Charles Plowden, his Jesuit friend in England:

By letters from Abp Troy it is given me to understand, that a Rev. Mr. John Connolly, Dominican, resident at Rome for 37 years, was nominated in Sepr. And consecrated in Novr., as Bishop of N. York; that he was in Flanders about March 20th. On his way to Ireland, where he was to embark for his Bishoprick [sic]. It was known here that before the death of Dr. Concanen his Holiness at the Drs. Intreary [sic], intended to assign to him, as his Coadjutor, the Rev. Mr. Maréchal, a priest of St. Sulpice, now in the seminary

For his part, John Connolly faced formidable challenges in a shortage of personnel and funds. Three Jesuits, Maximilliam Rantzau, Benedict Fenwick and Peter Malou, and one Dominican, Thomas Carbry, served the Catholics of New York — a small number indeed for their population. The parishioners could afford but little for the collection box in their parishes. In his adopted city, the bishop found a Catholic minority population of between 13,000 and 15,000. They were mostly poor and largely Irish immigrants escaping political and economic conditions

The bishop regularly visited various areas of his diocese and in 1816 made his way to Albany. He was surprised at the number of Catholics there. In June of that year, he wrote that he was enjoying good health, but heavy priestly duties barely left him time to say the Divine Office.[\[15\]](#)

Financial burdens were ever present. Connolly wrote on February 13, 1817, that he was unable to advance customs charges in New York for books held there. "At this moment," he wrote, "I am not in a condition to advance money for any person, as the Trustees of this congregation have assured me two days ago, that they have not at present in their hands money enough to pay me the salary due to me for those three months last passed."[\[16\]](#) Even church services were without elaborate decorations because of meager resources of the time. Losses from unforeseen circumstances could always be expected. Minutes of the Trustees of St. Patrick's of February 20, 1821, record that thieves broke into the cathedral, stealing \$300 worth of gold and silver, sacred articles and lace torn from vestments, as well as \$90 from the collection for the poor. After rewards were offered, the articles were found in the city canal.[\[17\]](#) The cathedral owed \$53,000, and having borrowed to build it, paid annual interest at seven percent. That financial burden prevented th[\[15\]](#)

Bishop Connolly was not well received by the New York City trustees nor did he do

Active to the end, Connolly fell ill after attending a funeral on Tuesday February 1, 1825. Anticipating his death, he appointed John Power administrator of the diocese, and called to the cathedral Father John Shanahan, whom he had ordained the previous year. New York lost its bishop on the following Sunday evening. He lay in state at St. Peter's Church which was more convenient to visitors than St. Patrick's. It was estimated that 30,000 persons paid their last respects. Burial was at St. Patrick's on Wednesday, February 9. The bishop was eulogized for his prudent and unostentatious zeal. Although he was not known as a highly prized orator, yet his activities preached volumes to those who knew him best – the uneducated and the poor.

Upon his arrival in 1815, Connolly found only four priests and three churches, but he left his successor 35,000 Catholics in New York City alone, with 150,000 in the entire diocese and eight churches and eighteen priests.

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## NOTES

1. This chapter relies to a great extent upon the initial work of Dominican historian Victor O'Daniel (1868-1960) who left an eighty-page typescript in the archives of the Dominican Province of St. Joseph. He gathered primary sources in the United States and abroad to prepare the manuscript.
2. Peter Guilday, "Trusteeism in New York," **Historical Records and Studies** 28 (1928): 49.
3. Though sources differ on the date of his birth, O'Daniel ascertained from the Archbishop of Mechlin that 1751 was the correct year. O'Daniel Ms., hereafter referred to as ODMS, Saint Joseph Province Archives (SJP).
4. Leonard E. Boyle, **San Clemente Miscellany I: the Community of SS. Sisto e Clemente in Rome, 1677-1977**. Apud S. Clemente, 1977, 59.
5. Quoted in O'Daniel manuscript on Connolly, 239-240. Original is in Tallaght Archives. A province can have no more than twelve Masters of Sacred Theology at one time.
6. Anthony Cogan, *The Diocese of Meath, Ancient and Modern*, vol. 3 (Dublin: Joseph Dollard, 1870) 318-319.
7. Anthony Cogan, (1870) 234.
8. Carroll to Michele Di Pietro, Baltimore, June 17, 1807. Thomas O'Brien Hanley, ed., **The John Carroll Papers III** (CP) (Notre Dame, In.: University of Notre Dame, 1976) 26.
9. John Carroll to John Troy, Baltimore, 1815, CP, vol. 3 312.
10. Carroll to Plowden, Baltimore, mid-1815, CP vol.3 338.
11. Ira Rosenwaike, **Population History of New York City** (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1972) 18.
12. James R. Bayley, **A Brief Sketch of the Early History of the Catholic Church on the Island of New York**, 2nd edition, (New York: United States Catholic Historical Society, revised 1973) 84-86.
13. Henry De Courcy, **The Catholic Church in the United States** (New York: Edward Dunigan and Brother, 1856) 384.
14. Bayley 83-86.
15. Connolly to Joseph Plessis, New York, June 7, 1816, **United States Catholic Historical Magazine**, vol. 4 (1892): 60.
16. **United States Catholic Historical Magazine**, vol.4, No.2 (1891-93): 193.
17. Mary Peter Carthy, **Old St. Patrick's New York's First Cathedral** (New York: United States Catholic Historical Society, 1947) 31.
18. John F. Maguire, **The Irish in America** (London: Longman's Green and Co., 1868) 370.
19. Patrick Carey, **People, Priests, and Prelates: Ecclesiastical Democracy and the Tensions of Trusteeism** (Notre Dame, In: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987) 134.
20. See Carey, **People, Priests and Prelates**, 134-135.
21. Guilday, "Trusteeism in New York" 57-58.