



Written by [Daniel Sayani](#) on March 25, 2011

## Anti-Catholic Vandals Destroy Statue of Mary in Md.

Yet another instance of anti-Catholic violence reared its ugly head last weekend, as a statue of the Virgin Mary was found desecrated on the grounds of Immaculate Conception Church, in Towson, Maryland (a suburb of Baltimore.)



The 6-foot high statue of Mary that watches over traffic on the church hillside still has the same beatific expression on her face, but last Saturday night, someone disconnected the spotlight that made her presence known and, in the dark, knocked her off her stone pedestal, according to the Baltimore County Police Department.

The white cement statue was last seen where she was supposed to be March 19, at 6 p.m., according to police Detective Cathy Batton, [as reported](#) in *The Baltimore Times*.

The vandalism was discovered and reported to police at 9:45 a.m. March 20. On Monday morning, as traffic whizzed by, the Mary statue was lying on its back in the grass behind the pedestal. Mary's arms were slightly extended from her garments as usual, but without her left hand.

"The hand is missing, but no one is able to tell us if it was missing before or from this incident," Batton said after reviewing the report.

Immaculate Conception declined to comment. But Monday afternoon, Archdiocese of Baltimore spokesman Sean Caine reported the church had determined the missing hand was, indeed, a result of Saturday's vandalism. "It was a not a pre-existing condition," he said.

The statue was donated to Immaculate Conception and its 3,000 registered member-families in the late 1980s, he said. Located where it was, the church saw it as "a gift to the community. "Meanwhile, police have no information on suspects, Batton said.

The vandalism is especially troubling for Immaculate Conception, and Catholics in general, he said, because the church is dedicated to Mary, the mother of Jesus. "But we view it as an isolated incident," Caine said. "She'll be good as new before too long."

### Maryland's Catholic Heritage

The act of vandalism committed against the Towson Catholic church is replete with irony, considering the history of Maryland, which was formed in the 1600s as a haven of religious tolerance for Catholics (and others), who were persecuted in England due to their nonconformity to the Church of England. In 1632, Charles I issued a charter to Cecilius Calvert, the second Lord Baltimore, who carried out his father's plans of creating a Catholic colony in the New World. On March 25, 1634, the first Catholic Mass was said in Maryland, as recorded by the Jesuit priest Andrew White, in his *Relatio Itineris in Marylandum*.

Most notably, despite being founded as a refuge for persecuted Catholics, Maryland colony was tolerant



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towards non-Catholics, as well, as Calvert enjoined an abstinence from all religious controversies, “to preserve peace and unity amongst all the passengers and to suffer no scandal or offense, whereby just complaint may be made by them in Virginia or in England. . .and to treat the Protestants with as much mildness and favor as justice will require,” as people of opposite creeds and differing social conditions were all welcome in the colony. In fact, Maryland and nearby Quaker Pennsylvania were the only colonies that offered religious freedom to all.

Maryland was also home to [Charles Carroll](#), the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence; his cousin Daniel Carroll; and Daniel Carroll’s brother John Carroll, who became America’s first Catholic bishop.

Charles Carroll of Carrollton (1737-1832) was the most illustrious and best-known of the Carrolls. He was the only signer whose property, Carrollton, was mentioned in the Declaration of Independence. Carrollton was the 10,000-acre estate in Frederick County, Maryland, that Charles Carroll’s father had given him on his return to America from his education in Europe.

(Unfortunately, however, according to historian [Marian Horvat](#), once the Maryland colony turned to Puritan control, the penal code against Catholics included test oaths administered to keep Catholics out of office, legislation that barred Catholics from entering certain professions (such as Law), and measures had been enacted to make them incapable of inheriting or purchasing land. By 1718 the ballot had been denied to Catholics in Maryland, following the example of the other colonies, and parents could even be fined for sending children abroad to be educated as Catholics.)

## **Anti-Religious Vandalism in the United States**

Sadly, violence targeted against religious institutions and houses of worship is nothing out of the ordinary in the United States. Catholic churches and Jewish synagogues, in particular, are frequent targets for desecration and violent acts of vandalism, according to organizations such as the [Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights](#), and the [Anti-Defamation League](#).

In New York, where a string of vandalism struck houses of worship in June 2010, lawmakers proposed expanding existing law by creating a new “E” felony crime when property of a place of religious worship is damaged in an amount greater than \$150.00. The bill also broadens current statutes to include and protect property located outside and on the grounds of places of religious worship. The bill has the support of [Archbishop Timothy Dolan](#), who said “a house of worship represents safety, security, peace, love, acceptance, the most noble aspirations we as human beings have. When we vandalize that, when we wreck that, when we deface that, we strike right at the heart of what makes us great as Americans and people of faith.” Orthodox Jewish leaders partnered with Abp. Dolan on the proposal.

In its 2008/9 report on Human Rights, the FBI [reported](#) that anti-Catholic bias consisted of 76 incidents, 81 offenses, and 86 victims, and in addition to statues being desecrated, church arson, often accompanied by anti-religious and racist graffiti, is also prevalent. Attacks on churches were also reported in which racism and anti-immigrant bias and xenophobia combined, including attacks on traditionally black churches and churches attended by Americans and immigrants of Hispanic origin.

Such incidents also include attacks by social liberals over the Church’s stance on issues such as abortion, the ordination of women, and homosexuality, in the name of “tolerance.” Once such incident occurred in San Francisco, in which [Most Holy Redeemer Catholic Church](#) was spray-painted with swastikas and pro-gay slurs, due to the church’s opposition to Proposition 8, a California ballot initiative that would legalize gay marriage.



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## Societal Anti-Catholicism

Unfortunately, violence against churches and synagogues remains pervasive, and some say that anti-Catholic bias remains the last acceptable form of prejudice in American and European society. This is the subject of an intense study by [Philip Jenkins](#), who argues that today's postmodern culture lends itself to anti-Catholic bias. Indeed, Jewish historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr. even [argued](#) that "prejudice against Catholics is the deepest bias in the history of the American people."

In many ways, anti-Catholicism has become the new acceptable anti-Semitism; Jenkins says that anti-Catholicism has emerged as "the anti-Semitism of the liberals." Despite the historical commonalities between the two forms of prejudice in the United States, there is nonetheless a double standard in which anti-Catholicism is shrouded in the terms of "social justice" or "reproductive rights." While criticisms of individual Church policies or leaders may not constitute irrational bias, all too often these become pure prejudice, and manifest themselves in angry acts of vandalism against Catholic churches, such as the latest incident in Towson, Maryland.

*Photo: Statue of Mary, Mother of Jesus, at [Immaculate Conception Church, in Towson, Maryland](#)*



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