

THE TRAVAIL OF A TORY PARSON:  
REVEREND PHILIP HUGHES AND  
MARYLAND COLONIAL POLITICS  
1767-1777

*by John R. Wennersten*

*Reprint from*  
THE HISTORICAL MAGAZINE  
of the  
PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
Vol. XLIV    December, 1975    No. 4

# The Travail Of A Tory Parson: Reverend Philip Hughes And Maryland Colonial Politics 1767-1777

by John R. Wennersten<sup>o</sup>

When Reverend Philip Hughes settled in Maryland to begin the life of an Anglican country parson, he little suspected that he would become a highly controversial political and religious figure in the colony. The clergy in Maryland were well-provided and Hughes wished only to enjoy the comfort of a moderate parish living.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately the increasingly bitter quarrels between the colonial governor and the vestries over the selection of ministers and their salaries would extend into Hughes' personal life and ruin his career. The right of inducting ministers was a valuable instrument of patronage and Lord Baltimore and his governors were unwilling to surrender it to stubborn parish congregations.<sup>2</sup> Although the complaints of vestries over having dissolute and grasping parsons imposed on them were sometimes well-founded, many clergymen of learning and integrity like Hughes were simply caught up in the furor of political controversy on the eve of the American Revolution.<sup>3</sup>

A product of England's attempt to Protestantize the turbulent Irish, Philip Hughes was a strong-willed and independent man. His family had been part of a large group of Anglican settlers who settled in Carrickmacross, Ireland after 1700.<sup>4</sup> Little is known of the Hughes family of Carrickmacross except that James Hughes was a prosperous farmer who held learn-

<sup>o</sup>Dr. Wennersten is on the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, Princess Anne, Maryland.—*Editor's Note.*

<sup>1</sup>Nelson Waite Rightmyer, *Maryland's Established Church*, (Baltimore: 1956), 97.

<sup>2</sup>Gerald E. Hartdagen, "The Vestry As A Unit of Local Government in Colonial Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, vol. 64, (Winter) 1972, 363-388.

<sup>3</sup>An excellent account of a greedy, self-seeking clergyman is contained in Josephine Fisher, "Bennet Allen, Fighting Parson," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, vol. 38, December, 1943, 299-322.

<sup>4</sup>George Dames Mitchell, *Alumni Dublinenses* (London: 1924), 417.

ing in high respect and instilled in his son a fierce devotion to Church and Crown. As a youth barely into his teens, Philip Hughes enrolled in the University of Dublin to fulfill his family's wish that he seek a church living.<sup>5</sup> The University of Dublin was a Protestant citadel in a hostile Catholic country and Hughes was moulded by the school's martial-like commitment to spread the Anglican faith into the Popish counties of Ireland and across the seas to foreign lands.

Receiving his M.A. in 1737 at the age of seventeen, Hughes obtained a preferment from the Bishop of Waterford.<sup>6</sup> For the next twenty years Hughes enjoyed the comfortable life of a parish curate and circulated easily among the Protestant gentry. Irish discontent, however, occasionally shattered the complacency and solitude of Waterford. At times poverty and religious strife prompted insurrection in the countryside. By 1755 Waterford was an unhappy place. Anglican clergymen noticed a pronounced lack of enthusiasm in the House of Commons for its Irish dominion. More significantly, the Church of England had allowed its missionary effort in Ireland to deteriorate.<sup>7</sup> Sensing a dismal future in prospect, Hughes mustered all the financial support at his command and raised the required 300 pounds sterling to purchase a chaplain's commission in General Gage's 44th Regiment of Infantry.<sup>8</sup> Thus force of circumstance would propel Hughes from the Emerald Isle to the forbidding woods of the New World and the French and Indian War.

During the war Mr. Hughes participated in the Monongahela campaign against the French. The 44th Infantry experienced more than its share of fighting and Hughes ministered to the needs of the sick and dying. He also helped to bolster morale by his dedication to duty and his undisguised concern for the soldiers' welfare. For the Anglican pastor the war was an exhilarating experience, an opportunity to gauge the sprawling frontier world that formed the western perimeter of the British empire. In spite of his limited role as chaplain, Hughes demonstrated bravery under fire and won the attention and commendation of General Gage.<sup>9</sup> The war was a financially profitable experience for Hughes as well. As an army chaplain, Hughes received close to 100 pounds sterling a year.<sup>10</sup> The office, apparently, was well worth the price of the commission.

While the record is fragmented and unclear, Hughes probably decided at this time to cast his fortune in colonial America. An enterprising clergyman could obtain a lucrative benefice in the colonies. Some parishes pro-

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>Ethan Allen, "A Tabular Exhibit of the Clergy of the Church of England in the American Colonies Previous to their Separation from Great Britain, A. D. 1783," William A. Stewart MSS, Box II, 786. Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>7</sup>James Anthony Froude, *The English In Ireland*, I, (New York: 1873), 608-618.

<sup>8</sup>Rightmyer, *op. cit.*, 192.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>Francis Godwin James, "Clerical Incomes in 18th-Century England," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Vol. 18, 1945, 318.

vided an income well in excess of 100 pounds sterling.<sup>11</sup> Ireland was on the verge of revolt and clerical incomes in England were abysmally low. An average curate in an English country parish received but a scant fifty pounds sterling per year. Thus, when confronted with a choice, he opted for a comfortable life in the colonial upper middle class.

Following the cessation of the war, Hughes resigned his commission for a church position at Amboy, New Jersey. The battle-scarred parson was a delight to his congregation. Governor Barnard was often in approving attendance at services.<sup>12</sup> Hughes had been highly recommended by the Bishop of Waterford and the parson might have remained at Amboy indefinitely had not General Gage secured a highly desirable church appointment for him from Governor Horatio Sharpe in Maryland.<sup>13</sup>

Governor Sharpe appointed Mr. Hughes to Worcester Parish and a benefice that, with the inclusion of glebe land rentals, amounted to £144 10s. 7d or roughly over 300 pounds local currency or tobacco equivalent.<sup>14</sup> Hughes, however, did not count on the stormy reception that would await him on Maryland's Eastern Shore. The parishes were greatly annoyed over the lack of interest on the part of Lord Baltimore in the colony's religious life. Many colonists believed that drunkards, debtors, and murderers enjoyed Baltimore's clerical patronage. Also, many Eastern Shore parishes demanded the right to select their own ministers without the Proprietor's approval.<sup>15</sup>

When Hughes arrived at Worcester Parish in January, 1767, to receive his induction and begin his church duties, he found the parishoners in an angry mood. The Vestry had launched a campaign of vilification against him. Several individuals circulated stories of the clergyman's love for the rum tankard.<sup>16</sup> The Chaplain, however, endured the gossips of Worcester and after a few month's hard work earned the respect of the laity.

In December, 1767, Governor Sharpe transferred Hughes to Coventry Parish in Somerset.<sup>17</sup> Coventry, a parish of rough, quarrelsome, and independent men, had challenged Lord Baltimore's charter rights on the matter of clerical privilege.<sup>18</sup> As the people maintained their churches through the payment of taxes in tobacco and currency, they therefore claimed the right to choose their own ministers.<sup>19</sup> This argument struck at the political

<sup>11</sup>Samuel F. Hotchkin, "A Sermon on the History of Coventry Parish," August 21, 1892, Maryland Diocesan Collection, Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>12</sup>Ethan Allen, "Tabular Exhibit." *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup>Sharpe to Baltimore, March 31, 1768, *Archives of Maryland*, XIV, 481.

<sup>14</sup>William Perry Stevens, ed., *Papers Relating to the History of the Church in Maryland, 1694-1775* (Privately Printed: 1878), N. P.

<sup>15</sup>Sharpe to Hammersley, April 1, 1768, *Archives*, XIV, 486-487.

<sup>16</sup>Hughes to Sharpe, June 10, 1767, *Archives*, XIV, 395.

<sup>17</sup>"Commission Book #82", [Folio], *Maryland Historical Magazine*, vol. 26, 1931, 356.

<sup>18</sup>Vestry of Coventry Parish to Sharpe, [N. D. 1767], *Archives* XIV, 366.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

as well as the religious authority of the Proprietor, for it asserted the Vestry's power of the purse in colonial affairs. Sharpe hoped that with Hughes installed in the parish, common sense and discipline would replace seditious talk. To the men of Coventry, however, Hughes' appointment was the latest of a long series of abuses.

The unhappy colonists of Coventry had been, until his death, saddled with the Reverend Nathaniel Whitaker "who by his Scottishness and immoral behavior had long been considered an intolerable Burthen by the Parishoners."<sup>20</sup> The vestrymen had tried to deprive Whitaker of his benefice and had sued unsuccessfully in the Provincial Court of the Colony to drive the disreputable parson out of the Parish. While the Court sympathized with the Parish, it took the position that "the Reins of Government are not to be surrendered into the Hands of any Vestry."<sup>21</sup> Shortly after Whitaker's death, the parishoners sent Governor Sharpe a long petition asking for the induction of Reverend Thomas Bradbury Chandler.<sup>22</sup> Chandler had preached several trial sermons and had been favorably received by the community. Also, Chandler probably assented to the idea of a vestry-controlled benefice.<sup>23</sup>

During the interim, the congregation forced a government appointed curate out of the parish with rude behavior and threats of violence. The Vestry was sufficiently disturbed by this example of Sharpe's arbitrary rule that it sued again in the courts to present the parish to Chandler. To prove their point, the vestrymen were willing to close down the churches of Coventry.<sup>24</sup>

At this juncture, Mr. Hughes arrived on the scene to take control of the parish. The uproar that greeted Hughes' arrival was probably well-anticipated by the authorities in Annapolis. Here was another example, the colonists claimed, of one of the government's self-seeking clergy being foisted on them. Hughes, they argued, would not be welcome. The Vestry, by withholding their nomination, treated him as a Reader. If the clergyman wanted the benefice, he would have to petition the vestry for appointment.<sup>25</sup>

When Hughes arrived at Rehoboth to receive his induction and prepare the church for the Christmas celebration, he was confronted by the Vestry. The parson's induction had to be read aloud in the church yard because the angry parishoners had bolted the church shut.<sup>26</sup> The vestry argued

<sup>20</sup>Sharpe to Baltimore, March 31, 1768, *Archives*, XIV, 480.

<sup>21</sup>Report of Daniel Dulany, "Proceedings of the Council," *Archives*, XXXII, 227.

<sup>22</sup>Vestry of Coventry Parish to Sharpe, May 16, 1767, *Archives*, LXI, 513-515.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>Vestry of Coventry Parish to Sharpe, [N. D. 1767], *Archives*, XIV, 367.

<sup>25</sup>Vestry of Coventry Parish to Sharpe, [1767], Gilmor MSS, I, Maryland Historical Society, 53.

<sup>26</sup>"Remonstrance of Philip Hughes, Rector of Coventry," [N. D.], *Archives*, XXXII, 222.

as well as the religious authority of the Proprietor, for it asserted the Vestry's power of the purse in colonial affairs. Sharpe hoped that with Hughes installed in the parish, common sense and discipline would replace seditious talk. To the men of Coventry, however, Hughes' appointment was the latest of a long series of abuses.

The unhappy colonists of Coventry had been, until his death, saddled with the Reverend Nathaniel Whitaker "who by his Scottishness and immoral behavior had long been considered an intolerable Burthen by the Parishoners."<sup>20</sup> The vestrymen had tried to deprive Whitaker of his benefice and had sued unsuccessfully in the Provincial Court of the Colony to drive the disreputable parson out of the Parish. While the Court sympathized with the Parish, it took the position that "the Reins of Government are not to be surrendered into the Hands of any Vestry."<sup>21</sup> Shortly after Whitaker's death, the parishoners sent Governor Sharpe a long petition asking for the induction of Reverend Thomas Bradbury Chandler.<sup>22</sup> Chandler had preached several trial sermons and had been favorably received by the community. Also, Chandler probably assented to the idea of a vestry-controlled benefice.<sup>23</sup>

During the interim, the congregation forced a government appointed curate out of the parish with rude behavior and threats of violence. The Vestry was sufficiently disturbed by this example of Sharpe's arbitrary rule that it sued again in the courts to present the parish to Chandler. To prove their point, the vestrymen were willing to close down the churches of Coventry.<sup>24</sup>

At this juncture, Mr. Hughes arrived on the scene to take control of the parish. The uproar that greeted Hughes' arrival was probably well-anticipated by the authorities in Annapolis. Here was another example, the colonists claimed, of one of the government's self-seeking clergy being foisted on them. Hughes, they argued, would not be welcome. The Vestry, by withholding their nomination, treated him as a Reader. If the clergyman wanted the benefice, he would have to petition the vestry for appointment.<sup>25</sup>

When Hughes arrived at Rehoboth to receive his induction and prepare the church for the Christmas celebration, he was confronted by the Vestry. The parson's induction had to be read aloud in the church yard because the angry parishoners had bolted the church shut.<sup>26</sup> The vestry argued

<sup>20</sup>Sharpe to Baltimore, March 31, 1768, *Archives*, XIV, 480.

<sup>21</sup>Report of Daniel Dulany, "Proceedings of the Council," *Archives*, XXXII, 227.

<sup>22</sup>Vestry of Coventry Parish to Sharpe, May 16, 1767, *Archives*, LXI, 513-515.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>Vestry of Coventry Parish to Sharpe, [N. D. 1767], *Archives*, XIV, 367.

<sup>25</sup>Vestry of Coventry Parish to Sharpe, [1767], Gilmor MSS, I, Maryland Historical Society, 53.

<sup>26</sup>"Remonstrance of Philip Hughes, Rector of Coventry," [N. D.], *Archives*, XXXII, 222.

Vestry was going to tax the parish 50,000 pounds of tobacco to pay Hughes then it demanded the right to select and control him.

Sharpe appealed to Daniel Dulany to mediate the dispute between Coventry Parish and the fighting parson.<sup>34</sup> Dulany was rich, influential and highly regarded on the Eastern Shore. The Annapolis official managed to win a truce of seven weeks while tempers cooled. Hughes, however, may have gotten worried about his future under the Governor's protection. A petition for Self-Regulation and tenure in office of Anglican clergymen bore Hughes' signature.<sup>35</sup>

In May, 1768 the truce in Coventry was shattered when Mr. Hughes was violently accosted by some Vestrymen as he sought to enter Coventry Chapel. Hughes apparently was so roughed up that Governor Sharpe had to order his Attorney General to take into custody anyone who molested the curate.<sup>36</sup> During the summer there were repeated incidences of mob threats against Hughes. Sharpe talked to delegates of the Assembly from Somerset and Worcester Counties in an effort to have the affair quieted.<sup>37</sup> Mr. William Allen, a leader of the Vestry against Hughes, lost his position as Justice of the Peace for Worcester County. The governor threatened harsh action against the parish if the vendetta against Hughes continued. When a mob threatened to burn the preacher's home and assault his wife, Governor Sharpe jailed the ringleaders, including Mr. Allen.<sup>38</sup> In exasperation the governor proclaimed a peace summons to quell the disturbances. Meanwhile, the intractable parishoners complained that Hughes was plotting to have the leaders of the Vestry murdered. In December Hughes got involved in a heated fist fight with a parishoner in Princess Anne. A Vestryman presiding at the county court jailed Hughes and fined him forty shillings.<sup>39</sup>

Against this backdrop of violence and constant tension, a man of lesser mettle would have quit the troublesome parish. While enroute to a preaching engagement someone had shot at him with a musket.<sup>40</sup> Hughes, however, found himself isolated with no recourse but to hold on. A change of colonial administration was imminent and the parson was determined that the new governor was not going to abandon him for the sake of public peace on the Eastern Shore. Throughout this travail, Hughes had received practically none of his salary. Also, he had given up investments in New Jersey, sold his Chaplain's commission at a loss and had gone 100 pounds into debt for a farm in Somerset. Upholding the authority of the Church, King, and Proprietor had been costly indeed to the parson.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>34</sup>Sharpe to Baltimore, March 31, 1768, *Archives* XIV, 481.

<sup>35</sup>Sharpe to Hammersley, June 22, 1768, *Archives* XIV, 508.

<sup>36</sup>Sharpe to Hammersley, May 15, 1768, *Archives* XIV, 498.

<sup>37</sup>Sharpe to Hammersley, June 22, 1768, *Archives* XIV, 508.

<sup>38</sup>Sharpe to Hammersley, October 30, 1768, *Archives*, XIV, 548.

<sup>39</sup>Hughes to Sharpe, December 16, 1768, *Archives*, XIV, 560.

<sup>40</sup>Hughes to Sharpe, June 13, 1769, *Archives*, XIV, 563.

<sup>41</sup>Hughes, "Remonstrance," *op. cit.*, 223.

By the Spring of 1769, Governor Sharpe had managed to bring the "Rioters" of Coventry under control. Several of Hughes' more vigorous opponents were in jail.<sup>42</sup> Others had been dismissed from colonial offices for their harsh treatment of the country parson. From examination of the records one can assume that Governor Sharpe made certain that the Rector of Coventry received his long overdue salary. On May 11, 1769, Hughes signed a memorial praising Governor Sharpe for ". . . the respect you have been pleased to show its ministers, and the care you have taken to support their rights, demand our most dutiful acknowledgement."<sup>43</sup>

The departure of Governor Sharpe from office, however, was a signal for renewed hostilities between Hughes and the men of Coventry. When Robert Eden became governor he transferred the thankful parson to Chester Parish in Kent County. Chester Parish yielded almost £200 sterling in annual salary and the congregations seemed peaceable.<sup>44</sup> Also, Kent County was closer to the seat of political authority in Annapolis.

Philip Hughes lived happily as Parish Rector in Chestertown from August, 1769 to March, 1773. The curate was very conscious of his income and joined other ministers in protesting any legislation that would reduce his salary.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately the steadily deteriorating relations between England and the colony permeated Maryland's religious life. Colonial hostility to English taxes led to nonimportation agreements and rectors with staunchly pro-British views were unwelcome in Kent County. In 1773, Hughes became rector of the Great Choptank parish. After independence, the curate refused to take the new oath of loyalty to the revolutionary government and was deprived of his office.<sup>46</sup> Although a man of strong Tory principles, Hughes did not leave Maryland during the Revolution. He taught school in Dorchester County and then went into brief forced retirement as feelings against loyalists grew intense.<sup>47</sup>

Out of forty-five parishes in Maryland, twenty-eight became vacant at the Revolution. During the struggle only twenty-five Anglican clergymen took the oath of fidelity to the state.<sup>48</sup> Hughes was one of the non-jurors. The clergyman believed that swearing allegiance to the new government would betray his commission as a representative of the church of England and the King. He believed that no Anglican could abjure the British Em-

<sup>42</sup>"Proceedings of the Council," *Archives*, XXXII, 231.

<sup>43</sup>Ethan Allen, ed., "Records of Clergy Meetings in Maryland, 1695-1773," transcripts, "Address of the Established Clergy to Governor Sharpe, May 11, 1769, Maryland Diocesan Archives, Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>44</sup>Proceedings and Acts of the Assembly, 1769, *Archives*, LXII, 465-466, Perry, *Papers Relating to the History of the Church*, *op. cit.*

<sup>45</sup>Ethan Allen, ed., "Records of Clergy Meetings," October 4, 1771, *op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup>Ethan Allen, *Clergy in Maryland of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, (Baltimore: 1860), 7.

<sup>47</sup>*Maryland Journal*, October 31, 1780.

<sup>48</sup>Theodore Gramball, *Church Life In Colonial Maryland*, (Baltimore: 1885), 250.

pire and maintain his integrity. A man of great ambition and tenacity, Hughes attempted to pursue a rich career for himself as a religious leader in the colonies. That career foundered in the storm of political revolution in Maryland. Hughes' case demonstrates the plight in which many Anglican parsons found themselves in the colonies. Conscious of their status and income, they held on to their offices as loyal subjects of the King until the revolutionaries deprived them of their parishes. In Maryland the Church would be seriously disrupted by the Revolution and many Anglican congregations would be dispersed.

The Reverend Philip Hughes spent the remainder of his days as a private tutor in Cambridge. He died with his friends and family at his side on October 19, 1780.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup>*Maryland Journal*, October 31, 1780.