

Gibbons, James ^[1]

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by [William S. Powell](#) ^[2], 1986

23 July 1834–24 Mar. 1921



Cardinal James Gibbons.

Courtesy of NC Office of Archives
& History.

^[3]James Gibbons, [Roman Catholic](#) ^[4] prelate, was born in Baltimore, Md., the son of recent Irish immigrants, Thomas and Bridget Walsh Gibbons. In 1837 financial reverses forced the family to return to Ireland where young Gibbons received his early education. Returning to the United States in 1853, the family settled in New Orleans. Two years later James Gibbons entered a seminary in Baltimore, and he was ordained at the end of June 1861. During the [Civil War](#) ^[5] he served as pastor of a church in Baltimore as well as chaplain at nearby forts and military prisons. Although a Unionist in sympathy, he showed little or no outward sign of his feelings; he had a brother who was a [Confederate](#) ^[6] soldier. In 1865 he became secretary to the archbishop in Baltimore and remained in that position until 1868, when he was consecrated bishop. At age thirty-four, he was the youngest Roman Catholic bishop.

In that capacity Gibbons was assigned to serve the newly created diocese of North



Cardinal James Gibbons. Courtesy of the "Life of James, Cardinal Gibbons."

^[7]Carolina, which previously had been within the jurisdiction of a bishop resident in Charleston, S.C. There were few Roman Catholics in his new diocese but the young bishop, who arrived in Wilmington ^[8] in October 1868 to make his home, undertook a tour of the state. He afterwards traveled frequently to serve small, scattered congregations. He was warmly welcomed and often preached to large congregations in Protestant churches as well as in courthouses and other public buildings. Bishop Gibbons's pleasing personality, his friendly manner, and his open mind earned him many friends. As new converts were made and his church grew, he came to be recognized as a spiritual leader of great force. His ability to work with people of various faiths was significant in his future and the reputation he gained in North Carolina had much to do with the course of his life. In 1872 he became bishop of Richmond, and in the spring of 1877 he was named archbishop coadjutor of Baltimore. In October, at the age of forty-three, Gibbons became the archbishop and in 1886 he was made a cardinal. In Washington, D.C., which lay within his jurisdiction, Gibbons founded the Catholic University of America ^[9]. He was also the author of several books, a supporter of organized labor, and a defender of the principle of separation of church and state. He counted among his friends many presidents of the United States, justices, and other public officials who often sought his advice. Gibbons was praised for his role in eliminating prejudice and in breaking down many barriers between men. He died in Baltimore and was buried in the crypt of Baltimore Cathedral.

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Additional Resources:

"James Gibbons." N.C. Highway Historical Marker D-41, N.C. Office of Archives & History.
<https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=Markers&k=Markers&sv=D-41> ^[10] (accessed May 7, 2013).

James Cardinal Gibbons in the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/search.php?query=creator%3A%22Gibbons%2C+James%2C+Cardinal%2C+1834-1921%22> ^[11]

Will, Allen S. (Allen Sinclair). *Life of James, cardinal Gibbons*. Baltimore, New York : J. Murphy company; [etc., etc. 1911. <https://archive.org/details/lifejamescardina00will> [7] (accessed May 7, 2013).

Baltimore Basilica, James Cardinal Gibbons: <http://www.baltimorebasilica.org/index.php?page=james-cardinal-gibbons> [12]

James Cardinal Gibbons Collection, Catholic University of America: <http://archives.lib.cua.edu/findingaid/gibbons.cfm> [13]

History of the Diocese, Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlotte: <http://www.charlottediocese.org/history> [14]

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