

Historically Speaking

by Rev. Dr. Herman Hattaway PhD

England came relatively late to the New World. When she finally did, only the Southern Colonies had an established Anglican Church (and not Maryland). Maryland was given to Roman Catholics because the Roman Catholics had supported the crown in the English Civil War.

The Anglican Church had come to America, led by Francis Fletcher who planted a cross and read a prayer when Sir Francis Drake landed on the Western Coast of North America in 1578 and the first English Baptisms were conducted in Sir Walter Raleigh's colony on the outer banks of North Carolina.

The American Revolution alone destroyed the Colonial church of England since clergy had to choose whether to flee to England or Canada, remain as loyalists in the face of persecution or break their vows of allegiance. The church did provide many leaders of the American cause, including George Washington and Patrick Henry, but in the popular mind, Episcopacy was associated with the Baptists Crown rather than with independence and at the war's end the church had no bishops.

Like Martin Luther, John and Charles Wesley did not intend to form a new denomination. They wanted to effect some changes. The Methodist church which they wound up creating proved to be much more attractive to many people than did Anglicanism.

In 1783, a conference of the churches met at Annapolis Maryland and they formally adopted the name, "Protestant Episcopal Church". It was Protestant to distinguish it from Roman Catholicism and Episcopal to distinguish it from the Presbyterian and Congregational churches.

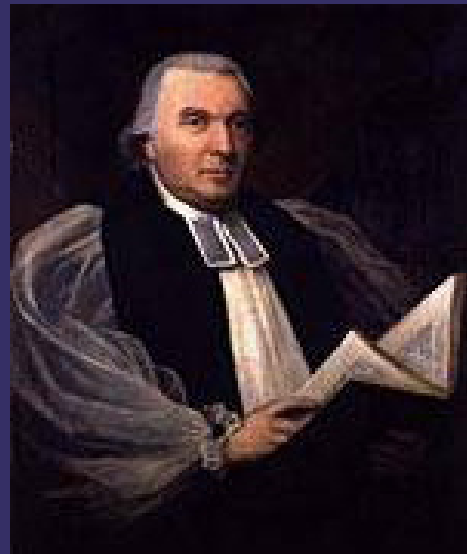
Also in 1783, the clergy in Connecticut elected Samuel Seabury (1729-96) as their prospective bishop. He went to England to be consecrated but was denied. He then went to Scotland and obtained consecration there in 1784. Two other bishop-elects (from New York and Pennsylvania) were consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1787 in recognition of the legitimacy of the American Church.

In 1789, the church constitution was adopted and the book of common prayer was revised for American use.

The Book of Common Prayer and the Episcopacy remained the glue that held the diverse and active church together.

W.A. Mulenberg (1796-1877) called for a wider catholicity in the Protestant Episcopal Church. This resulted in the famous Chicago Lambeth Quadrilateral on church unity in 1888, from which the Anglican Communion continues to derive validity. The Episcopal Church in American would popularly become known as "PECUSA"

Things were reasonably well until the late 1970's when a terrible package of changes came, culminating in 1979 when a new version of the Book of Common Prayer was adopted, and a chunk of the church broke away to form the church of continuing Anglicanism.



SAMUEL SEABURY, the first Bishop of the Episcopal Church, was born in Groton, Connecticut, November 30, 1729. After ordination in England in 1753, he was assigned, as a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, to Christ Church, New Brunswick, New Jersey. In 1757, he became rector of Grace Church, Jamaica, Long Island, and in 1766 rector of St. Peter's, Westchester County. During the American Revolution, he remained loyal to the British crown, and served as a chaplain in the British army.

After the Revolution, a secret meeting of Connecticut clergymen in Woodbury, on March 25, 1783, named Seabury or the Rev. Jeremiah Leaming, whichever would be able or willing, to seek episcopal consecration in England. Leaming declined; Seabury accepted, and sailed for England.

After a year of negotiation, Seabury found it impossible to obtain episcopal orders from the Church of England because, as an American citizen, he could not swear allegiance to the crown. He then turned to the Non-juring bishops of the Episcopal Church in Scotland. On November 14, 1784, in Aberdeen, he was consecrated by the Bishop and the Bishop Coadjutor of Aberdeen and the Bishop of Ross and Caithness, in the presence of a number of the clergy and laity.

On his return home, Seabury was recognized as Bishop of Connecticut in Convocation on August 3, 1785, at Middletown. With Bishop William White, he was active in the organization of the Episcopal Church at the General Convention of 1789. With the support of William Smith of Maryland, William Smith of Rhode Island, William White of Pennsylvania, and Samuel Parker of Boston, Seabury kept his promise, made in a concordat with the Scottish bishops, to persuade the American Church to adopt the Scottish form for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

In 1790 Seabury became responsible for episcopal oversight of the churches in Rhode Island; and at the General Convention of 1792 he participated in the first consecration of a bishop on American soil, that of John Claggett of Maryland. Seabury died on February 25, 1796, and is buried beneath St. James' Church, New London.

