

Bishop Seabury [Schluss]

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BISHOP SEABURY.

(CONCLUSION.¹)

After the consecration a concordate was drawn up and signed by the Scottish Bishops on the one side and by Bishop Seabury on the other containing seven articles; in the first four they declared their agreement touching “the analogy of the common faith once delivered to the Saints”; the government of the Church by bishops whose sacred office being held under Christ is “independent on all Lay powers”; the fulness of communion to be maintained between the Churches in Scotland and Connecticut, and the desirability of having as near a conformity in worship and doctrine established between the two Churches as is consistent with the different circumstances. The fifth article treats in particular of the Eucharistic Service; the Scottish Bishops “though very far from prescribing to their brethren in this matter” ardently wish “that Bishop Seabury would endeavour all he can consistently with peace and prudence” to adopt the primitive characteristics of the Scottish Liturgy, while “Bishop Seabury also agrees to take a serious view of the Communion Office recommended by them and if found agreeable to the genuine standards of antiquity to give his sanction to it and by gentle methods of argument and persuasion to endeavour as they (the Scottish Bishops) have done to introduce it by degrees into practice without the compulsion of authority”; article six resolves that such correspondence as opportunity may offer or necessity require be maintained between the two churches; and article seven declares the singleness of purpose with which all the bishops concerned have acted in the matter.

¹) See the last Number, P. 561-572.

So America obtained the blessing of the episcopate free, valid, and purely ecclesiastical; and what is more, the lesson which a century of oppression had been teaching the Scottish Church was now not only brought home to herself but was also held up to the whole English speaking world with a simplicity and a strength that awakened and instructed even the very men whom it most displeased. It is inconceivable indeed that the English Church could have gone on for ever the slave of secularity wrapped in her own earthly dignity, and deaf to the call of duty, for many of her own sons were striving for better things, but the fact remains that the awakening began when, and only when, Seabury had been consecrated in Aberdeen. While Seabury stood, little more than a century back, the only bishop of the Reformed Church outside the British Isles, there are to-day close on 180.

In the course of Bishop Skinner's sermon he had remarked that for a long time the clergy of the Scottish Church had ventured to pay more regard to the Acts of the Apostles than to the Acts of the British Parliament, and though the preacher seems to have chiefly had in his mind the refusal of his own Church to accept against her conscience the use of prayers dictated by parliament and enforced by penal laws, and the completeness with which she had thereby learned to recognise the essential mutual independence of ecclesiastical and civil authority, yet the truth expressed could not be tied down to one application and was felt as a rebuke in England, and in some quarters bitterly resented. And in general in that country those who rejoiced at the action of the Scottish Bishops kept silence, prudently it may well be rather than timidly; one who is supposed to have been the learned Bishop Lowth of London who had throughout the whole affair show a very friendly disposition to Seabury did not venture to sign his name to a letter to the Primus in which it was intimated that a design had been formed in England to do the Scottish Church some service when opportunity offered. No English bishop had the generosity or the courage to congratulate Seabury on his success, and even the S. P. G. seems to have delayed till now its discovery of the fact that its charter made it necessary to discontinue its grant in aid of those in the United States who had been its missionaries and were now more than ever in

need to tide them over the crisis; and not only so but in answering a letter of Bishop Seabury's on the matter a little later, of Seabury their own old loyal servant, they not only omitted such titles of respect as they would have accorded to any English bishop, but absolutely ignored his episcopate altogether, their secretary signing himself "your affectionate brother".

These are disagreeable trifles to dwell on, but they must be mentioned if we would understand how completely the political spirit had permeated the Church of England and how nearly it had blotted out from her conscience the knowledge of her own catholicity; for if anywhere we should have looked for better things it would have been in the truly noble and christian Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

Perhaps there was necessary not only the object lesson of the consecration but also, to win an entrance for it, the sharp point of the epigram.

The new Bishop makes little delay, and after a voyage of three months including a short stay in Nova Scotia where he first landed he reaches New London in his own diocese on June 29th 1785. He is gladly welcomed by his clergy and at once proceeds to set in order the things that are wanting, and it is good to see how eagerly the people came forward for Confirmation. In September of the following year he puts out a Communion Service in close accord with the Scottish, but very wisely and in full agreement with the Concordate makes no endeavour to force it on the clergy with "the compulsion of authority" and it seems to have been well received.

It is impossible within the limits of this paper to treat in detail of the condition of ecclesiastical matters throughout the States at this time. Briefly then, Seabury was obnoxious to many as having been in the war a declared and fervent loyalist, and an attempt was made at a later period to have him excluded from a General Convention of the Church on the ground that he was in receipt of his pension as a retired military Chaplain. To others the Scottish Church was a name of offence, partly from her association of old time with the theory of the inalienable rights of the Royal Family, and partly it may well be from her consequent sturdy opposition to the actually reigning house. Affection also for their own old Church of England and a fear both sentimental and prudent of alienating

her sympathy would make many more somewhat chary in knitting a brotherhood with the practically separated church in Scotland. Moreover the southern States had made some progress in settling matters in their own way which was different in important respects from that adopted in Connecticut.

Hence while throughout New England the home of Puritanism where men were churchmen from intelligent conviction if they were so at all, the new bishop was readily accorded his due position, it was otherwise in the South. In New York opinion was more equally divided, but it was there where Samuel Provoost whom we must call the evil genius of the crisis was found, for serious as were the questions that required solution, and many the misunderstandings that called for elucidation, a much speedier and more brotherly course would I think have led the American Church to its existing corporate unity had that man been absent. As it was, so nearly had matters come to a declared schism that at one stage, after Provoost had been consecrated in England as Bishop of New York, and White the author of the ill-advised pamphlet of which we have heard as Bishop of Pennsylvania Connecticut, was obliged to prepare for the worst by arranging for fresh consecrations in Scotland.

To the consecration of Provoost and White, which was effected in February 1787, no factious difficulties had been opposed in England, and we can well believe that the civil authorities were by no means anxious to throw the whole of the American Church into the arms of what they would call the Jacobite rebels of Scotland and so would now urge the English prelates forward; already in 1785 we find the Archbishop of Canterbury giving assurance that "the Administration would be inclined to give leave to the bishops to consecrate proper persons". Indeed so serious were some of the changes made in their constitution and worship by the Churches of the southern States that the English Archbishops might very well have hesitated longer than they did, they insisted only on a very moderate conservatism. But it is to be confessed that the voice was still the voice of Erastus though the hand was now the hand of a Catholic Bishop.

At length in July 1789 an important Convention of the Western and Southern Churches was held in Philadelphia;

Provoost fortunately being absent, and New York represented by men of a better mind than his. Clergy who had been ordained by Seabury were allowed to take their seats on terms of perfect equality, and an address was voted to the Bishops of Connecticut, New York and Pennsylvania praying them to accede to the request of Massachusetts, and unite in the consecration of a bishop for that State, and to correspond with England if necessary for the removal of any scruples. With regard to the Prayer Book and Constitution, in which very serious changes had been made, matters were so adjusted as to make it possible for delegates from New England to join the Convention without sacrifice of principle. Finally the Convention itself was adjourned for two months in order chiefly that New England might have opportunity of doing her part.

The reference to the removal of scruples refers evidently to the hesitancy of Bishop White who feared that his "faith impliedly pledged" to the English Bishops would stand in the way of his joining with Seabury in the proposed consecration, but doubtless all might have been easily arranged but for Provoost, who in spite of White's entreaties remained obstinate, using such phrases as these in his letters. "The delegates from New York have grossly deviated from their instructions". "It is not an absolution from the Archbishops and Bishops of England that will induce me to sacrifice the principles upon which I have uniformly acted." "As to what you style an implied engagement of the English Bishops, I look upon it in regard to myself as a positive one. I entered into it *ex animo* upon principle, and do not wish to ask or accept a releasement from it." Necessarily then the proposed consecration fell through as there was no such urgent cause as to set aside the general rule requiring the concurrence of three bishops, and to have done so would in any case have defeated one great object of the proposal, namely the true unification of the Church.

What this sense of an obligation to boycott Seabury rested on is not told us; it has an ugly look certainly, but it is also obviously capable of an explanation that is not discreditable to the English bishops in any serious manner.

The adjourned Convention duly meets and the Bishop of Connecticut and delegates from the New England States are present, Bishop Provoost being again happily absent all goes

well; a separate episcopal chamber is formed for the first time, and Bishop White, who draws up the rules of order, very gracefully and properly provides that the bishop senior by consecration shall always take precedence.

This Convention is of course chiefly notable for the attainment of corporate unity but other matters also of great importance were treated, chiefly the adjustment of the Book of Common Prayer, but here no more need be said than that Seabury proposed according to his own convictions and in terms of the Scottish Concordate that the Communion Service should follow the Scottish rather than the English model.

It is reported that when the proposition was made in the Lower Chamber some surprise was manifested and signs of discontent began to appear; but the president Dr Smith rose and read the paragraph so admirably and with such able comment that the change was acquiesced in with little or no debate.

This Dr Smith now President of Washington College Maryland had been Seabury's companion at ordination, and had opposed himself vehemently to Seabury's consecration in Scotland having indeed gone so far as to write in most unjustifiable terms to the Scottish bishops to induce them to hold their hands. Now however he acts a nobler and more intelligent part and we can well believe that without him the Liturgy would have been retained in the bald and maimed condition in which we find it in the English Prayer Book. In that case it is probable that Connecticut would have claimed the right to have a Liturgy of her own.

As we have seen, through the action of Provoost union was not yet perfect, but Seabury was spared not only to see this but in effecting it to give a striking example of the greatness of his nature.

In 1790 Dr Madison had obtained consecration as Bishop of Virginia so that there were now three of the English line in the States. In September 1792 a General Convention met in New York at which Dr Claggett was presented for consecration by the Church in Maryland. This was the first meeting of the General Convention since that one already mentioned as consolidating the union of the various Churches, and before the transaction of any business, Provoost, supported by

Madison, demanded the repeal of the rule by which precedence among the bishops fell to the senior, and according to which Seabury would not only have presided in deliberation but also have taken the part of chief consecrator at Dr Claggett's elevation to the episcopate.

Seabury naturally looked upon this demand as the first step of an attempt to exclude him altogether, but on learning from Bishop White that in his opinion no such design was contemplated and that if it were, he, Bishop White, would never fall in with it, Seabury nobly resolved to give the malcontents their own way; accordingly he absents himself from the next meeting and Bishop White without ceasing to regret the change offers no resistance to the passing of a new rule by which the honour would be held in rotation, falling at this time to Provoost himself, who on his part contented himself with the presence of three consecrators of the English line and made no attempt to exclude the Bishop of Connecticut. All the American bishops to-day trace their descent from this consecration in New York, and therefore also from that in the upper room in Aberdeen some eight years previously.

Save that South Carolina, which probably still deserved in some degree the description applicable a century before, held aloof for some twenty years, the unity of the American Church was now complete and has never since been troubled. This consecration also is the last act of Bishop Seabury's with which we need occupy ourselves to-day; thereafter he was busy only with the internal affairs of his diocese, and beautiful and interesting as are the glimpses we obtain of him at his work and in his home, we must pass over to the brief statement that in February 1796 he was called to rest.

The tireless selfsacrificing zeal of Seabury has met with abundant reward. We have already seen how his consecration by the Scottish bishops was the first step and the awakening call in giving an organic life to the Church of the United States of America and we may add also to the colonies of the British Empire. We have seen also how it brought home to men's consciences that the Church Catholic has an organic life of her own absolutely independent in vital essence and in function from any secular power whatever. And now we may conclude by pointing to another aspect of catholicity in which

it has wrought us great good. In primitive days the true value of catholic tradition to which the great Councils bore witness lay in this that it was the agreement of countless independent streams of tradition flowing down from a common source; and the true value of catholic unity as a witness to the love of God lay in this that it was the brotherhood of countless independent men holding the same faith and inspired from on high by the same Spirit. And the apostolic ministry was that which preserved the tradition, and allowed the spiritual unity to take corporate being.

Of the very essence then of the primitive idea of catholicity was a certain independence and therefore also diversity of parts. But as time went on this primitive idea became obscured, partly of necessity, and partly of corruption, the Church being linked too closely with the Roman Empire and organised too closely on its model.

In short the Church Catholic well nigh ceased to be a unity, and well nigh became a mere unit. And if this last calamity has been hindered in its completeness by the finger of God, yet at how great a cost; and how false also the idea of catholicity that, rising in the corruption, still lingers in the minds of many men, and leads astray their labour in the reedification of the ruins.

Most salutary in this respect for the Anglo-Celtic race has been Seabury's consecration in Aberdeen. With all her faults the English Church is beyond comparison, the Queen and the glory of the Anglican Communion. She it was alone who passed unharmed through the struggles of the Reformation; the Scottish Church fell in ruins and had to seek anew her very episcopate from England; the Irish Church retained her episcopate indeed but lost her people, the fault of her English rulers, may be, but the fact remains. And as for to-day, the English Church is in every sense the Church of England, the people are in her fold and she has all the prestige of the State alliance; the Scottish and Irish Churches neither have State alliance nor do they hold the bulk of the people; moreover the population of England is five or six times as large as that of Scotland and Ireland put together. The very greatness of the English Church, the love and reverence which we all bear towards her are ever drawing us of Ireland and Scot-

land perilously near to incorporation instead of alliance; as it is in fact, to the uninstructed the Churches of these two parts seem to be but mere overflows from England, separate from the national life of their own countries.

Again if Seabury had been welcomed as he should have been in England, not even the independent spirit of the States could have persuaded churchmen there that they were anything but what they always had been, members of the Church of *England*, there would have been nothing to call their attention to first principles, nothing to interrupt the fulness of their heart's allegiance to their English mother, and while of course the American Church could not have helped being independent in fact, yet much more than now her face would have been turned to Canterbury instead of to Jerusalem. The Colonial Churches on their part also would have been much more backward than they have been in receiving the inspiring breath of catholic freedom. The Anglican Communion would have sunk practically and in popular estimation into an English unit instead of a catholic unity.

But out of evil good came; the very afflictions of the Scottish Church at the time emphasised her spiritual independence, and the rejection of Seabury in England gave her the opportunity of exercising that independence in a way that not only has been a quickening memory in herself, but also has won to a consciousness of true catholic life the now powerful Church of the United States whose independence cannot be forgotten or ignored, a visible continuation and embodiment of all the lessons of her first bishop's consecration.

To the dauntless determination of Seabury, and to the acceptance of their plain duty by the Scottish bishops the whole Anglican Communion, the Churches that is of the whole Anglo-Celtic race, owes a deep debt of gratitude; for while it would be an exaggeration to say that without the consecration in the upper room at Aberdeen all the evil at which we have glanced would have come to pass, and none of the good been effected, it is no exaggeration to say that there is not any single act that wrought in these matters so effectually, or that can at all compare with it.

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