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The First American Bishop

It seems that I've heard Samuel Seabury referred to as "the first American bishop" at least a million times over the past few months; I'll bet you have, too. After a while I started wondering if this title might not be a slight exaggeration. Certainly, he was the first bishop consecrated for the Episcopal Church in the colonies, but that doesn't really mean he was the first bishop on these shores -- or does it? -I had to find out.

Unlike the various denominations which co-existed in the colonies at that time, our church was in a desperate situation during and after the Revolution. English colonial efforts, begun in the early 17th century, brought, along with settlements, commerce and exploration on behalf of the "Mother Land," the established "Mother Church," the Church of England. But "Mother" kept tight reins on her children, and the colonies were not permitted to have their own bishops, which allowed the Bishop of London, who never set foot in the colonies himself, to control and direct religious affairs. But the Revolution changed all that. Suddenly, almost overnight, 150 years of established tradition and organization collapsed, and the Church of England in the American colonies was swept away with the rest of the political establishment. All that remained were scattered and leaderless Anglican clergy, many without parishes or funds, but eager to begin again. One of these men was Samuel Seabury. The story of how he became a bishop will be widely told elsewhere over the next few months, as we prepare to observe the 200th anniversary of his consecration by nonjuring* bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church. But what about being "first" bishop. My researches turned up the following chronology, a history of those "main line" churches who continue to uphold the ancient office of bishop (whether in an administrative or sacramental sense):

- **The Rt. Rev. Samuel Seabury** was consecrated bishop in Aberdeen, Scotland, on November 14, 1784, and began his ministry as first Bishop of Connecticut shortly thereafter.

Coming quite soon after this were the Methodists, who elected Mr. Francis Asbury and the Rev. Thomas Coke to be the first bishops of the newly formed Methodist Episcopal Church, in Baltimore, Maryland, on December 24, 1784.

- **As for the Roman Catholics** in the colonies, who numbered far fewer than the Anglicans at that time, their first bishop was the Most Rev. John Carroll, SJ, who was consecrated in London in 1790 and returned to become the first Archbishop of Baltimore, in addition to retaining authority over all Roman clergy in America.
- **During the colonial period**, and the period of immigration, the Lutheran congregations in America were fragmented and constantly undergoing reorganization. It is unclear when the first Lutheran bishop appeared on these shores (Lutheran church polity at that time regarded the episcopacy as adiaphorous -- a matter of indifference).
- **Eastern Orthodoxy first arrived** in North America in 1840, when the Holy Russian Church established its first missionary see in Sitka, Alaska. From there the see was transferred to San Francisco in 1872 and to New York City in 1903. The first Greek Orthodox bishop to come to America was none other than His Eminence Meletios Metaxakis, Archbishop of Athens, who arrived in New York City in August of 1918, in an effort to organize the Greek-Americans into a coherent church body. He was succeeded by the Most Rev. Alexander on September 19, 1921, who became first archbishop of the newly formed Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America.

So, it would seem, that in this particular case, history bears out a traditional title, for the "Westchester Farmer," Samuel Seabury, was indeed the "First American Bishop"!

* DEFINITION: The **nonjurors** were bishops, clergy and laymen of the Church of England and the Scottish Episcopal Church who refused to accept the action of Parliament which, in 1688, forced King James II to flee to exile in France and established Prince William of Orange as King of England. The clergy refused to take the Oath of Allegiance to him, as the 'legal' monarch was still living. This refusal cost the English priests and bishops their benefices (including the Archbishop of Canterbury). The church in Scotland ceased to be the state church, though it continued as an organized body autonomous from the English Church until the death of the last Stuart monarch, Prince Charles Edward, in 1788, when the Scottish bishops meeting in Aberdeen agreed to submit to the government of King George III.

The English nonjurors did not fare so well. They were unpopular, and were forced to operate out of private homes and chapels, continuing to consecrate bishops approved by the exiled James II, to whom they remained loyal. The last nonjuring bishop died in 1805.

The legacy of these principled nonjurors, who would not go back on an oath in the face of political expediency, lives on in the rites of the Scottish Episcopal Church, upon which much of the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church (ratified in 1790) was based, and in the fact that their consecration of Samuel Seabury brought to the Episcopal Church the possibility of realizing its goal of independence.

— James, BSG

Br. James, a Life Professed member of the Brotherhood, currently serves as Director of Public Relations. He leads an active parochial ministry liturgically, through the Church of St. Luke in the Fields, New York City. His secular employment is in the theatre industry; he has worked in the sales, management and accounting departments of Golden-Penn / Leblang's / Mackey's, New York's largest brokerage firm, for sixteen years.



The Conference of Major Superiors of Men (RC) met in Atlanta, Georgia, August 19-24. Following is an account of that assembly, which I attended as representative of the House of Bishops Standing Committee for Religious Communities and the General Convention Executive Officer.

The theme of the assembly was "Formed in the U.S. Culture, Challenged by the Gospel, Called to Proclaim the Kingdom." This theme was carried through the week, integrated into Morning and Evening Prayer, meditations, the daily Eucharist, plenary sessions and small group discussions. The latter divided subject matter into four categories: Authority, Spirituality, Community and Ministry. The "culture" topic was further enhanced by specific presentations by Abbot Jerome Thiesen, OSB, Mr. Joseph Holland, John Stadenmaier, Ron Carignan, OMI, and Maria Riley, OP. Three Benedictine sisters coordinated daily worship and the integration of several liturgical dance interpretations. In keeping with the theme of culture, readings and music were taken from the scriptures, black spirituals, Chippewa Indian songs, as well as materials of concern to women and minorities.

Tuesday evening, August 21, I was honored to be present at the first Eucharist to be celebrated in Freedom Hall at the Martin Luther King Center for Nonviolent Social Change. Mrs. Coretta Scott King was present, as were Mayor Andrew Young, the Rev. Martin Luther

King, Sr., and Archbishop Dunellen of Atlanta. The 190 assembly participants joined in a candlelight procession to the King gravesite following the Eucharist. I was able to greet Mrs. King in the name of our church.

On Wednesday, August 22, the assembly met at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, for a Eucharist at which all renewed their religious commitment. This was followed by a testimonial dinner in honor of the Rev. Don Skwor, who will be stepping down as Executive Director to take up a new post in Rome.

The assembly was, for me, a time of great sharing and discernment; an intellectual and spiritual journey, and an opportunity to share the life and work of Episcopal religious orders and communities with our Roman brothers and sisters. In addition, I was able to meet Br. Patrick Hansen, President of the National Assembly of Religious Brothers, of which many of us are members. But most of all, it was a time to share our common bonds in the Lord -- to celebrate the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Richard Thomas, BSG
Superior General

OCTOBER INTERCESSIONS

FOR THE ILL: Br. Christian, BSG Br. Leslie Victor, BSG Ruth Leverich

FOR THOSE WHO SERVE THE CHURCH, especially:

The Most Rev. Robert A. K. Runcie	The Most Rev. John M. Allin
The Rt. Rev. Paul Moore, Jr. Episcopal Visitor	The Rt. Rev. Horace W. B. Donegan Visitor Emeritus
	The Rev. Thomas F. Pike, Chaplain Emeritus
The Rt. Rev. William G. Black	The Rt. Rev. Charles T. Gaskell
The Rt. Rev. Robert B. Hall	The Rt. Rev. Charlie F. McNutt
	The Rt. Rev. John T. Walker
The Rev. David Thomas Andrews	The Rev. Jeremy W. Bond
The Rev. Henry N. Fukui	The Rev. John A. M. Guernsey
The Rev. James L. Jelinek	The Rev. Lynde E. May, IV
The Rev. Wayland E. Melton	The Rev. Grant R. Sherk
	The Rev. Robert J. Vanderau, Jr.

and for the brothers of Provinces III and V: John, Thomas Joseph, Thaddeus David, Edward, and Novices Thomas Martin and Bernard Francis

FOR RELIGIOUS ORDERS AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES, especially:

The Visitation Nuns	The Sacramentine Nuns	Society of Saint Francis
Community of St. Francis	Friars of the Atonement	Order of Friars Minor
Order of Saint Luke		Third Order Regular Franciscans

SPECIAL INTENTIONS AND THANKSGIVINGS:

The Rev. E. A. St. John Br. Richard Thomas, BSG
The birthdays of Brs. Edward (10/13), Joseph Thomas (10/20), and Bernard Francis (10/25),
and of the Most Rev. Robert A. K. Runcie (10/2)
The Poor Clares of Reparation -- Srs. Mary Philomena and Mary Dorothea, Postulant Sharon
The 50th Anniversary of the ordination to the priesthood of the Rt. Rev. John E. Hines
The Community of Christian Family Ministry -- Jose Luis Lopez and Gail Ann Kelly, making
Permanent Vows; and Marge Lane, making Oblate Vows
The ordination of the Rev. Mike Newman