

**Samuel Seabury .....Myth and Reality? Lecture delivered at Meeting Room1 in New Library, Aberdeen University on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2011 by the Very Rev'd Dr A E Nimmo.**

He certainly was reality..... I have just returned from across the 'pond' and from the place where he was re-interred..... the Hallam Chapel in St James' New London Connecticut, where the Rector and I, were daily saying our offices beside Sam (as he was affectionately called). I was also at the Glebe House in Woodbury, where he was elected to be Bishop of Connecticut on Lady Day, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1783. Fabulous old colonial wooden building, which now sports somewhat belatedly a Gertrude Jekyll garden, the only one in North America, just enchanting! The roses fairly excited my passion. It is no myth, I was there and the mosquito bites which I sport are a testimony. In addition, Sam at one point consumed me in research for a Doctoral Thesis so also did the Imperial Tobacco Company, but that was in my unredeemed days!

The Church of England in the British Colonies of North America was under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London. Various schemes for introducing an indigenous Episcopate came to naught and the situation of the Church was quite perilous. Despite the sterling work of Society for Propagation of the Gospel there were not enough American ordinands. In account of the system, candidates for ordination were required to go to England, on average, one third were captured by pirates or shipwrecked, one third died of smallpox and one third made it! Benjamin Franklin 'expressed his amazement that devout and learned men who were fully qualified to instruct and pray for their neighbours should hesitate to do so without taking the pains to cross the sea for the purpose of securing "the permission of a cross old gentleman at Canterbury."' <sup>1</sup> There was a great deal of ignorance amongst English Churchmen about the Colonies. Archbishop Secker in the mid-seventeen hundreds was anxious about an increase in American native vocations for the health of the American Church. He was concerned that only desperate men of low qualifications or bad or doubtful character would go to America. He noted 'that a great many of them were Scotch. I need not say what chance there is that Episcopal Clergymen of that Country may be disaffected to the Government.'<sup>2</sup> For Secker a spiritual Episcopate was what was required and that 'no other Jurisdiction is desired for the proposed Bishops than the preceding Commissioners have enjoyed.'<sup>3</sup> That of course was a concept that the Eighteenth Century British Establishment found difficult to comprehend.

It was the American Revolution which propelled the Church in the British Isles into consecrating a Bishop *Apud Americanos*. The religious society responsible was not the Erastian Church of England, but the shattered but determined (Scots word *thrown* might be better!) remnant of Episcopacy in Scotland which also, like America, was up against the Erastianism of the British Government.

Samuel Seabury was a Loyalist who had resolved to go with his son-in-law Colin Campbell to Nova Scotia after peace was declared on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 1783. Life for a loyalist Episcopal Clergyman in an American Republic, and particularly for him, would be grim. He was engaged in arranging passage for

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<sup>1</sup> McMaster-History of the United States Vol i p232 quoted in S.D.McConnell, History of the American Episcopal Church, (The Young Churchman Company, Milwaukee & A.L. Mowbery & Co London, 1916), p189

<sup>2</sup> A Letter to the Right Honourable Horatio Walpole Esq.,(following letter found among the papers of the late Archbishop Secker) from Archbishop Secker, Written in Consequence of a letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1750 from the late Lord Walpole, to the late Dr. Sherlock, Bishop of London which was communicated by the latter to Bishop Secker 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1750/1(J F Rivington, London 1771) p.343

<sup>3</sup> Ibid p.344

thousands of other Loyalists. He was 'the principal agent in directing and superintending the emigration from New York until June 1783'<sup>1</sup>. He managed to load nearly three thousand persons on board a first group of ships sailing from Sandy Hook on April 26<sup>th</sup> 1783. It was whilst engaged on this activity that Abraham Jarvis, Secretary of the Convention of Connecticut's clergy first encountered him. Jarvis brought him news that ten of the fourteen Connecticut clergy at the end of the War<sup>2</sup> had met at Woodbury and selected Jeremiah Leaming and Samuel Seabury to go to England and obtain Episcopal consecration. The two candidates were in New York and Mr Leaming to whom the appointment was first offered, shrank at his time of life and with his infirmities from undertaking responsibilities and burdens so great<sup>3</sup>. Samuel Seabury, with his seventeen year old son, set sail on HMS Chatham as chaplain on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1783, bound for England.

Samuel Seabury was born at Ledyard, Groton, Connecticut on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 1729, the second son of a Congregationalist minister of the same name.<sup>4</sup> On the 14<sup>th</sup> of December he was 'baptised in dissent' by the Reverend John Owen, Congregational minister at Groton. His mother Abigail Mumford was the daughter of Thomas Mumford who had adopted the ways of Episcopacy through the influence of James MacSparran, a Scots SPG missionary in charge of St Paul's Church, Narragansett. There can be little doubt that the Mumford's household's faith encouraged Samuel Seabury's (senior) decision to convert to the Church of England.<sup>5</sup> Seabury sailed for England in May 1730 was ordained deacon and priest and duly appointed missionary to New London Connecticut.

In 1742, his son Samuel, the subject of this symposium, started as a catechist at Huntingdon, New Hempstead, Long Island. In 1744 he entered Yale and graduated BA therein 1748 and in 1751 sailed to England. In fact he went to Scotland for a year's medical studies. It is more likely that he attended one of the English Qualified Chapels in Edinburgh. The Episcopalians were operating under severe Government restrictions in the form of the Penal Laws. The young Samuel was ordained deacon and priest in December 1753 by Dr John Thomas Bishop of Lincoln and Dr Richard Osbaldiston Bishop of Carlisle respectively. He returned to America in May 1754.

HMS Chatham duly deposited Seabury in England. Robert Lowth, the Bishop of London, and John Moore, the Archbishop of Canterbury, approved Seabury's plans but warned of difficulties in the way of consecration by English Bishops, feeling an Act of Parliament would be necessary to authorise consecration. The fact that Seabury was now a national of another country which had recently been at war with Great Britain, proved to be the stumbling block. Seabury required a purely spiritual consecration from a Church intimately connected with the British Government. He was met by one frustration after another so much so that he wrote to Abraham Jarvis on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 1784..... 'this is certainly the worst country in the world to do business in, I wonder how they get along at any rate'.<sup>6</sup> Frustration led Seabury to consider applying to the Danish bishops and other Scandinavian Lutheran Churches and to the English non-jurors. Seabury was urged to turn aside from this path and

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<sup>1</sup> B.E.Steiner, 'Samuel Seabury 1729-1796'. The Study in the High Church Tradition (Ohio University Press, 1971), p.174

<sup>2</sup> E E Beardsley, Life and Correspondence of Samuel Seabury (Houghton, Mifflin and Company, Boston 1881), p. 77

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp. 78-79

<sup>4</sup> G B Hertz, 'Bishop Seabury' English Historical Review Vol C1 (Longmans Green & Company, London, 1911), p.57

<sup>5</sup> B E Steiner, Ibid, p.3

<sup>6</sup> E.E. Beardsley, Op Cit, p.123

make recourse towards the Scots Bishops by Martin Routh (1755-1854), future president of Magdalen College, Oxford and Dr George Berkeley, son of the philosopher, and a loyal friend of Scots Episcopacy. Correspondence between Bishop John Skinner co-adjutor of Aberdeen and Dr George Berkeley would show that Skinner considered it the Scots Bishops' duty to extend the precious benefit of consecration to the Americans<sup>1</sup>.

Seabury was briefly in Edinburgh in 1783 for a re-union with Myles Cooper, senior minister of the Cowgate Chapel. Samuel junior accompanied his father and took up medical duties till the following spring. Seabury first approached the Northern Episcopate through the agency of two Scots living in London, the Reverend George Bisset and James Elphinstone. Bisset a Loyalist refugee and former rector of Trinity Church, Newport appears to have been a native of Peterhead where Bishop Kilgour, the Primus was living in 1783. Before his emigration to Rhode Island he served as an assistant in a well-known school kept at Kensington by the eccentric Elphinstone, a minor literary figure and a promoter of phonetic spelling. Elphinstone's father was an Episcopalian priest, his mother was a niece of the Bishop of Orkney; he would shortly marry the niece of Bishop Falconar<sup>2</sup>. Writing to the Reverend John Allan of Edinburgh in November 1783 Elphinstone asked him to secure from the Scottish Bishops an answer to a question posed by Bisset.... 'Whether consecration can be obtained in Scotland, by an already dignified, and well valued American clergyman, now at London, for the purposes of perpetuating the Episcopal Reformed Church in America, particularly in Connecticut<sup>3</sup>. Allan forwarded both letter an enquiry to Bishop Kilgour, who thereupon sent out copies to his colleagues. Bisset's enquiry met with good reception. If Seabury could produce proper vouchers Primus Kilgour was willing to consecrate. Bishop Petrie would do the same when assured that Seabury possessed the proper qualifications and Catholic principles. Bishop Falconar of Edinburgh would have nothing to do with the proposal. Bishop Rose that ardent non-juring Jacobite stated...'I have no objection to lay my hands upon this American doctor but one...and that is, his having got his orders from the schismatical Church of England'<sup>4</sup>. Berkeley had written to Skinner, declaring 'that the King, some of his Cabinet, counsellors, all our Bishops except peradventure the Bishop of St Asaph and all the learned and respectable clergy in our church will at least secretly rejoice if a Protestant Bishop be sent from Scotland to America'<sup>5</sup>. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of December Bishop Kilgour answered Bisset in the affirmative. In the meantime approval was given by the Members of the Connecticut State Assembly.

Seabury arrived in this city on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> of November 1784, and having examined Seabury's documents and completed plans for the consecration, the service was set by the Scots Bishops for Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> of November 1784 at Skinner's Chapel in the Long Acre, long since demolished with the building of the present Marischal College. The plaque also being moved into Marischal Quad in 1984, the original site not being regarded suitable for a visit by an Archbishop of Canterbury!

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<sup>1</sup> Skinner to Berkeley, 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1783-Scottish Record Office MSS CH12/12 1993

<sup>2</sup> B.E. Steiner Op Cit, p.198

<sup>3</sup> Allan to Kilgour, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1783-Scottish Record Office MSS CH 12/12 1997/2

<sup>4</sup> Rose to Kilgour, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1783, Consecration of Bishop Seabury: Additional Correspondence of Scottish Bishops edited by J. Nicholson, The Scottish Church Review 1, September 1884 p589

<sup>5</sup> Berkeley to Skinner, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1783, Scottish Record Office MSS CH 12/12 1998

The Chapel was crowded with laity as well as clergy. One eyewitness said he was 'possessed with a very strong desire to feast my eyes with the sight of the first orthodox Bishop of America'<sup>1</sup>. The Service opened with Mattins, the day being the XXII<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity. There followed a celebration of the Holy Eucharist probably the 1764 Scottish Communion Office. After the Nicene Creed, Bishop Skinner mounted the pulpit and preached on the apostolic communion from St Matthew 28: 18-20. The Sermon was an exposition of the High Church doctrine of episcopal succession and contained a seething attack on Erastianism..... 'I prefer Acts of the Apostles to Acts of the British Parliament'<sup>2</sup>. Needless to say the sermon upset many in England when it was published, the Bishop of London for one!

The Sermon prefaced the consecration which was according to the rites of the English Ordinal. Kilgour, Petrie and Skinner were dressed in black gowns and preaching bands, the liturgical dress of the time. The Reverend Alexander Jolly, confidant of Bishop Petrie, held the folio Prayer Book from which the consecrators read. After the consecration they sang 'part of the nineteenth psalm in Tate and Brady's version.'<sup>3</sup> The proceedings ended with the bestowal of the Episcopal blessing<sup>4</sup> by the newly consecrated Bishop. That evening Seabury preached at Evening Prayer and 'produced a favourable impression'. His earnestness and manner of address were somewhat new to Scottish Episcopalians. He used more gesture than was common in Scotland and that he waved a white handkerchief while he preached,<sup>5</sup> similar to audience approval of a Gaelic Song at the National Mod.

Mod.

On Monday the 15<sup>th</sup> of November, seven Articles of Concordat were drawn up by the Bishops at colloquy at Skinner's house at Berrybank, near the later Kittybrewster Station<sup>6</sup>. It was described as a Concordate or Bond of Union, between the Catholic remainder of the ancient Church of Scotland, and the new rising Church in the State of Connecticut. From the time of Seabury's first negotiations in 1783-1784 Kilgour and his colleagues had envisaged such an agreement. In addition to the Concordat a letter was sent from the Bishops of Scotland recording the deed of consecration and desiring that the Episcopal Church in Connecticut be in full communion with the Episcopal Church in Scotland. This was in fact the beginning in amoebic form of what we now call the Anglican Communion.

Skinner had examined some earlier agreements, in particular a concordat proposed by the non-juring Bishops to the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1716. Two of its articles he incorporated into his graft. The Concordat was a skilful piece of writing by Skinner and was an attempt to secure the friendship of Connecticut in measures and propositions directly applicable to the Scottish situation. In Article II no lay-deprivation could affect the spiritual powers of the Episcopate. In Article III there is an objection to the qualified clergy in Scotland who are regarded as schismatical intruders by

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<sup>1</sup> Jolly to Skinner, 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 1784 and Minute Book of the College of Bishops in Scotland, quoted in inter-communion of the American and Scottish Church- Scottish Ecclesiastical Journal 1 (R Grant & Company, Edinburgh, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1851) p.215

<sup>2</sup> John Skinner, The Nature and Extent of the Apostolic Communion- A Sermon preached at the consecration of the Right Reverend Dr Samuel Seabury, Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut (J Chalmers & Co Aberdeen, 1803)

<sup>3</sup> Perry's Seabury and Episcopal Records 1863 p.145 quoted in G.B.Hertz, 'Bishop Seabury' p.69

<sup>4</sup> G Grub, Manuscript letter 20<sup>th</sup> November 1879 quoted in E.E. Beardsley, Op Cit p.157

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp.156-157

<sup>6</sup> W. Walker, The Life and Times of the Reverend John Skinner (J.&G. Edmond & Spark, Aberdeen 1887) p.34

Skinner. In Article IV Skinner refers to 'prudent Generality in their public Prayers' and obvious reference to praying for George III which neither party did but which Episcopalians in Scotland would four years later with the death of Charles Edward Stuart at Rome in 1788.

Article IV is very relevant to the current dialogue in the Anglican Communion on the Covenant...where it refers to the hope 'that there may be as near a Conformity in Worship and **Discipline** established between the two Churches, as is consistent with the different **Circumstances** and **Custom** of nations.

When Seabury returned to London from Aberdeen he discovered that both English Archbishops did not approve of what had happened in Scotland, although they did say that Seabury and the Scots had acted from the best motives. Seabury returned to America and took from the Scots a 'free, Valid and purely Ecclesiastical Episcopacy' to 'pass into the Western World'<sup>1</sup>. Even more important in a sense, was that the Scottish Communion Office of 1764 became the basis of the American Rite which quite definitively gave the American Rite the concept of Eucharistic Sacrifice in conjunction with an Epiclesis.

Samuel Seabury had intended to take passage to New York on the ship **Triumph** under the command of a Captain Stout. In correspondence with Skinner he stated that Captain Stout 'is of my particular acquaintance; a friendly, obliging man, and a good churchman, and very anxious to have the honour of carrying over the Bishop of all America. I pray God he may have a good voyage, not only for his own, but also for the Bishop's sake, for whom, you will suppose, I have a great regard'<sup>2</sup>. However Seabury took passage for Halifax, Nova Scotia on the Captain Dawson, which as it turned out was a rough voyage. We know that Seabury was given a box of books and letters by Bishop Skinner<sup>3</sup>. I would hazard a guess that the list contained liturgical, as well as sacramental theological books, judging by the material contained in his Discourses on Several Subjects published in 1815.

Things back in America did not quite go as smoothly as hoped. The question was over the business of the Convention which had been held in his absence in 1784 and the influence of one Dr William Smith. Seabury when he arrived home, immediately wrote to Abraham Jarvis to arrange for a Convention to be held for the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 1785 at Middletown. SPG in the meantime decided to withdraw stipends from all missionaries who chose to remain in the United States. Seabury suspected that this was due to his Consecration at Aberdeen. Anyway ten pastors met at Jarvis's on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August. They requested his Aberdeen certificate and after reading it, proclaimed him duly and canonically consecrated. The next day he was installed.<sup>4</sup> Connecticut's Episcopal Church had declared 'to the world that' they did 'unanimously and voluntarily accept, receive and recognise' him to be their Bishop<sup>5</sup>. In his address Bela Hubbard decidedly criticised the Episcopate and Ministry in England. This was followed by the ordination of four deacons, which was succeeded by a Convocation. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 1785 a request was intimated that the clergy of Massachusetts wished to join under Seabury's Episcopal oversight. On the Sunday following Mr Ferguson was advanced to the priesthood and another a Mr Thomas Fitch Oliver was admitted to the order of

<sup>1</sup> Seabury to Miles Cooper quoted in Allan to Petrie-14<sup>th</sup> September 1784- Scottish Record Office MSS CH/12/24/P535-6

<sup>2</sup> Seabury to Skinner, 27<sup>th</sup> December 1784-Scottish Record Office MSS CH12/12 2017

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Record Office MSS CH12/12 2017

<sup>4</sup> E. E. Beardsley, Op Cit p.208

<sup>5</sup> Gentleman's Magazine Volume LVI January 1786 Op Cit p.61

deacons.<sup>1</sup> On the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1785, Seabury joined with a committee of three persons to frame liturgical alterations, in which the Scots Communion Office was a distinctive feature.<sup>2</sup> The gift to America of the Scottish Rite was described by one American Bishop as a greater boon than that of the Episcopate. That in a sense is true, because I would assert that it is the Liturgy which is the glue that holds the Church together, not the Episcopate. Scottish Liturgical expertise and practice had been exported to the New World.

The Clergy of Connecticut, when the time came for holding the Convention at Middletown, invited their Southern brethren to meet them for the purpose of considering measures tending to the union and organisation of the Church in the thirteen States. The only response to this was an invitation to the Bishop and Clergy of Connecticut to attend the general convention which was to meet at Philadelphia the 27<sup>th</sup> September following. Seabury could not be induced to attend because of one of the Articles of the New York Convention which brought him into conflict with Dr William Smith. The Connecticut Church was constituted according to 'the primitive pattern', stood in contrast to the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Southern States. His early years in Episcopate were not easy. Republican patriots looked askance at the bold actions of this High Church Loyalist Tory. Some found it hard to forgive him being the author of political tracts and also his chaplaincy with, and assistance to, the military campaign of British troops against the Sons of Liberty. Even the authenticity of his Consecration was regarded by some with great suspicion. For them the Scotch line was a line of darkness, and that Scottish churchmen were a group of stalwart Jacobites. One much later American historian referred to Scottish Episcopalians 'as a brood of inveterate treason hatchers.'<sup>3</sup>

Early in 1786 news reached America that the two English Archbishops and eighteen of the twenty-four bishops were willing to recognise an American Church upon receiving the sanction of parliament. Encouraged thus to displace Seabury from his pre-eminence, William White was elected Bishop of Pennsylvania on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 1786 and Samuel Provoost, another Whig had already been chosen Bishop of New York on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 1786. They sailed for England on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 1786, a Royal Warrant authorised the Archbishop to consecrate them, and this occurred at Lambeth on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1787. Seabury applied to Skinner to have a co-adjutor consecrated and Abraham Jarvis was elected to go to Scotland. However Skinner was afraid of another Scots style schism between English and native Scots congregations being perpetuated into the New World, and for him the way forward was to encourage the union of the two parties in the American Episcopal Church as the way forward.<sup>4</sup> White earned the reputation of being the Father of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States by agreeing to co-operate with Seabury's supporters, who accordingly were present at a General Convention in 1789 when Seabury's consecration was formally admitted to be valid. A revised version of the Book of Common Prayer for America was agreed upon. Seabury's desire for the insertion of the Scots prayers for 'the oblation and epiclesis in the communion office' was agreed. In September 1792 the two strains of Scots and English consecration came together, when Claggett was consecrated Bishop of Maryland. The modern American Episcopal Church had been born.

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<sup>1</sup> E.E. Beardsley, *Op Cit* pp.214-215

<sup>2</sup> Hart's *Episcopate of Seabury* 1885 pp.15-16 quoted in G.B. Hertz, *Op Cit* p.70

<sup>3</sup> S.D. McConnell, *History of the American Episcopal Church* (The Young Churchman Company, Milwaukee and A.L. Mowery & Company, London, 1916) p.233

<sup>4</sup> Skinner to Seabury, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1787, J Skinner, *Annals of Scottish Episcopacy 1788-1816* (Printed for A. Brown and Company, Aberdeen, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown; and J.Hatchard, London, 1818)p.71

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