



## Founding of the Episcopal Church, Epilogue

The matter that Samuel Parker had raised for the Third General Convention in 1789 concerning the consecration of further bishops was resolved in a different way from what was proposed. It was announced at the beginning of the first session of the convention that David Griffith, bishop elect of Virginia, had resigned his position.

Thus in principle Virginia might nominate a new candidate for bishop who in fact could afford to go to England. This Virginia did. It selected James Madison (1749-1812), a second cousin of the fourth President, as bishop elect. Madison was approved by the Standing Committee, sailed to England, and was consecrated there in 1790. Edward Bass meanwhile resigned his post as bishop elect of Massachusetts and New Hampshire, having allowed his name to be used only to facilitate the unification of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

Griffith for his part had come to Philadelphia in July 1789 as a delegate but became ill and could not attend the first session. White's memoirs say that Griffith died in White's own house during the session rather unexpectedly from "inflammatory rheumatism, which passed to his head during sleep." The date of death was August 3, and William Smith delivered the sermon at the funeral in Philadelphia's Christ Church on August 4.

The Archbishop of Canterbury used Madison's visit as an occasion to respond orally to the letter from the Third General Convention about mixing juring and nonjuring bishops. Madison reported to White in a letter in December 1790, "A few days before I left London, the archbishop requested a particular interview with me. He said, he wished to express his hopes, and also to recommend it to our Church, that in such consecrations as might take place in America, the persons who had received their powers from the Church of England should be alone concerned. He spoke with great delicacy of Dr. Seabury; but thought it most advisable, that the line of bishops should be handed down from those who had received their commissions from the same source."

At about this time one of the lines of succession to the British throne died out, and the question of juring vs. nonjuring subsided as an issue. White's memoirs say, "It was afterwards supposed, that the sense of the archbishop was fully accomplished by the presence and the assistance of the canonical number of the English line; and the matter was so understood by Bishop Madison. Besides, the question had changed its ground, by the repeal of the laws against Scottish bishops; and by their reception in their proper character, in England. This happened after Bishop Madison's visit to that country."

The first consecration of a bishop in America was of Thomas John Claggett of Maryland, done in 1792. All four American bishops were in attendance---Madison, Provoost, Seabury, and White---and the sense of the archbishop in the previous paragraph was thereby carried out. The formal records of apostolic succession, however, had to name three bishops for the consecration, and the ones named were Provoost, Seabury, and White. Seabury died in 1796 without being involved in the consecration of any further bishops. However, he had ordained many ministers and had confirmed a countless number of people.

South Carolina eventually changed its collective mind about bishops and elected someone to the position; this person was consecrated at the 1795 General Convention. Vermont, which then had but one clergyman, sought to have its person consecrated as bishop at the 1795 convention. That request was declined on the grounds that Vermont had not yet acceded to the ecclesiastical constitution. The General Convention forthwith instituted a rule that a state could not have a bishop until it had at least six clergymen.

William Smith's move to Maryland from Pennsylvania in 1780 was only one of several dramatic moves in an extraordinary career. Smith had first come to public attention in 1753 by publishing a pamphlet "A General Idea of the College of Mirania" in response to a call for ideas for the curriculum of what was to

become Columbia University. Benjamin Franklin was intrigued by Smith's ideas, and in 1755 he invited Smith to serve as the first Provost of the newly chartered College of Philadelphia. Smith's move to Maryland in 1780 was occasioned by the suspension of the college charter. In 1789 the charter was restored, and Smith returned to his position as Provost. In 1791 the college merged with the University of the State of Pennsylvania to become the University of Pennsylvania, and Smith's position was a casualty of the merger. Smith's reputation as a writer and speaker was so great that every delegate to the Third General Convention in 1789 signed a statement urging Smith to prepare a book of his sermons; each signer agreed to buy the book if he should write it. Benjamin Franklin died in 1790, and despite an earlier falling out between Franklin and Smith over political differences, Smith was chosen to prepare the official American eulogy to Franklin, which was delivered in Philadelphia in 1791 before an assembly of President George Washington, both houses of the Congress, the Pennsylvania legislature, and assorted dignitaries. In his last years Smith took an interest in city planning and philanthropy, developing the borough of Huntingdon in south central Pennsylvania. He had bought 400 acres there in 1767 and had named the borough in honor of a countess who had earlier given money to the College of Philadelphia. At the time of the purchase, he merely leased out the land in question, but in the 1790s he sold lots and made gifts of land to churches of various Christian denominations. He died in 1803 without ever becoming a bishop. Toward the end of his life, he completed the draft of his book of sermons and other writings, and it was published months after his death under the title *The Works of William Smith, D.D.* It includes his 1753 pamphlet and his eulogy of Benjamin Franklin. The book is available online through [www.google.com/books](http://www.google.com/books).

Edward Bass, having resigned his nomination as Bishop of Massachusetts and New Hampshire, was later nominated again, and he was consecrated in 1797. He died in 1803 and was succeeded in 1804 as bishop by Samuel Parker, who died later that same year.

Samuel Provoost took ill in 1800 and resigned his position as rector of Trinity Church Wall Street. He attempted to resign as Bishop of New York, but that request was refused in 1801 by the House of Bishops, which made up a new rule that bishops cannot resign. Instead, an assistant bishop was appointed, who then succeeded Provoost upon Provoost's death in 1815.

The tradition established by Seabury and White that the senior bishop is the Presiding Bishop lasted into the twentieth century, with the one exception that a special rule was used at the 1792 General Convention to allow Provoost to be Presiding Bishop. Depending on interpretations, the records thus show that the first few Presiding Bishops were White from July 28, 1789, to October 3, 1789, Seabury from October 5, 1789, to September 13, 1792, Provoost from September 13, 1792, to September 8, 1795, and White from September 8, 1795, until his death on July 17, 1836.

The church constitution of 1789 provided that the General Convention would meet in September every three years. However, this rule had to be changed because of recurring epidemics of yellow fever in Philadelphia each summer and fall starting in 1793 and continuing for a number of years thereafter. The General Convention scheduled for 1798 had to be postponed to 1799, and the delegates from New England were unable to attend the one for 1801 because travel between New York and Philadelphia was forbidden. Accordingly it was proposed in 1801 and affirmed in 1804 that the General Convention would thereafter occur in May of every third year, starting in 1808.

It was at the convention of 1808 that the rule was repealed that previously had allowed the House of Deputies with a four-fifths majority to pass legislation over the objection of the House of Bishops.

The expression "Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America" was adopted as the official name of the church in 1814, partly to help the Diocese of Virginia with its real-estate problems. In 1967 the church constitution was amended to allow "The Episcopal Church" as an alternative name.

New editions of the *Book of Common Prayer* for the United States appeared in 1892, 1928, and 1979, always with the same preface. The one in 1892 involved only small changes, and the one in 1928 eliminated the vow of obedience for the wife in the marriage ceremony. Extensive changes did not

occur until the 1979 edition. For the first time in the 1979 edition, the church is identified as "The Episcopal Church."

--Tony Knapp