

## CHURCH HISTORY: PART II THE AMERICAN CHURCH

### I. Gathering

#### Hymn

- God is working his purpose out, *The Hymnal 1982* #534
- Singing songs of expectation, *The Hymnal 1982* #527.

#### Collect for the Day

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### Introduction

*Remind participants of the basic themes of the Anglican way as it had emerged by the 17<sup>th</sup> century: a national church, common prayer, apostolic faith, incarnational theology, and the via media. How will these inheritances from the English experience be challenged by and adapted to the conditions of a democratizing American society in a federal, republican polity?*

*The Church of England was never established in all the English colonies, and no bishop was ever consecrated for the colonial Church. The colonial Church experienced the separation from England as a disaster, losing its privileged position in some colonies and many of its clergy everywhere. In the years immediately after the American Revolution, the Church in America had to re-think what it meant to be an Anglican without being English, an Anglican in an American republic. It was slow to adapt to the conditions of a growing and democratizing nation moving westwards. It did not learn how to grapple with these new realities quickly, but a new generation of American bishops after the 1820's was able to establish a secure place for the Episcopal Church in the United States.*

### II. Illumination

1. The Church of England came to the English colonies in North America with the first settlers at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. Since the New England colonies were the creation of Puritans dissatisfied with the established Church at home, they were never Anglican, but the southern colonies gave a privileged position to the established Church of England.

2. During the two and a half centuries from 1607 to 1776, the English never consecrated a bishop for America, and even in the southern colonies there were many Anglicans who were not eager to see them appointed, since they were regarded as unwelcome extensions of royal authority. Laymen on vestries acquired much greater control over their clergy and parish affairs than in England.

3. The American Revolution was at first a disaster for the Church. Identified as it was with the mother country, having a clergy dependent upon episcopal oversight from London, worshipping according to a form that required prayers for the King at every service, it was the target of laws disestablishing it where it had been established and limiting it where it was not. Many clergy fled to England or Canada and left their congregations without pastors and without the sacraments.

4. At the end of the war, with British recognition of American independence, it was not clear how a Church of England could continue to exist in an American Republic. Samuel Seabury of Connecticut went to England to seek consecration as a bishop, but the English bishops were not legally able to lay hands upon anyone who could not pledge loyalty to the King of England. The answer was to turn to the Episcopal Church in Scotland, whose bishops consecrated Seabury in 1787.

5. Now that the historic episcopate had been brought to the United States, however, it was still not clear how the American Church would govern itself. William White of Philadelphia, soon consecrated a bishop himself, led the effort to design an American church suited to the new republic, and in 1789 the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. was created, with a governing structure based on the model of the Federal Constitution, combining lay and clerical leadership, with a Presiding Bishop and a General Convention made up of a House of Bishops and a House of Delegates.

6. The infant American Church existed in the doldrums as the new century opened. Its parish-level organization was suited for a stable society, but Americans were on the move. Protestant denominations with their circuit-riding preachers laid the foundations for large Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian Churches while the Episcopal Church remained small. Only with a new generation of leaders such as Bishops William Henry Hobart and Jackson Kemper did the domestic mission of the Church find proper expression.

7. Briefly divided by the Civil War, the Episcopal Church found it easier to reunite afterwards than many other denominations, because its unity came through common worship and prayer and the episcopacy. Even as Protestantism continued to give rise to new religious groups in America, the Episcopal Church remained largely intact. There were, however, multiple influences acting on the Episcopal Church from the Oxford movement to Liberal theology, the Broad Church movement, and the Social Gospel. The Catholic revival notably enriched the liturgy and led to a Gothic revival in church buildings. High Church and Low Church parties differed in their emphases but remained within the same Episcopal Church structure.

8. As America industrialized and large numbers of immigrants arrived from central and eastern European lands, and as slavery disappeared, to be replaced by racial segregation, the religious makeup of the nation changed quickly. At the same time, industrialism and racism presented new problems and opportunities for the American Church. Episcopalians were prominent in the Social Gospel movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and they struggled with the question of race relations and mission to African-Americans and Native Americans. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, American Episcopalians also began to play a significant role in foreign mission work in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Philippines, and China.

9. Having pioneered in the development of a non-English Anglicanism, American Episcopalians also played a role in the evolution of the Anglican Communion as other former colonies of Great Britain acquired self-government and looked to the American Church as a model of how to retain an Anglican identity outside a colonial relationship with England. Similarly, from the 1850s on, Episcopalians led in the emerging Ecumenical Movement, offering the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888 as a basis for church union.

10. In the twentieth century, the Church avoided the internal schisms that Protestant denominations often faced in the battle over a literal understanding of scripture and the issue of evolution. In the first half of the century, the Church was generally conservative, and its membership was largely middle and upper-class, but it promoted the social gospel and the ecumenical movement.

11. After World War II the Church experienced tremendous growth, reaching 3.4 million members by 1960. The controversies since that time have included the turbulence over racial and gender equality:

the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and the issue of Prayer Book revision. Typically for Anglicans, many of these issues have found expression as questions of liturgy and ordination. The 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* attempted both to modernize the language of the 1928 *BCP* and to return to many ancient practices of the Church. At present the Episcopal Church is struggling with issues of sexuality and sexual orientation which continue to find expression in typically Anglican form as questions of liturgy and ordination.