6

Benjamin Moore: Benign Bishop

The varied knowledge and classical attainments of Provoost, the piety and beneficence of Moore, and the talents, zeal and ceaseless activity of Hobart . . .

—J. W. Francis[1]

Though Samuel Provoost was sufficiently sensitive to the significance of dates, it could not have occurred to him that his resignation in 1801 marked far more than the passing of the old century. It symbolized nothing less than the disappearance of the New York he had known all his life. The years immediately following the peace probably revealed to Provoost himself that the views of Church and society he shared with an enlightened eighteenth century left him ill fitted to meet the demands of a new century. A century later, a successor was to allege (without sufficient citation) that Bishop Provoost

> had no very sanguine expectations as to the growth of the Church or its mission to his age and countrymen. He is said, indeed, to have expressed the opinion that the Church in the United States would die out with the old Colonial families; and with such views it is not to be expected that he should do much to promote its growth or advancement.[2]

The mild, patrician, Latitudinarian stance of Provoost frustrated those clergy and laity who believed the Church was of divine origin and by providence had now been presented a great opportunity in the State of New York. The bishop's policy of presiding over the corporation of Trinity Church, dining out as a sought-after table companion, and making occasional visits to confirm or consecrate churches was unacceptable to those who believed the Episcopal Church should be expanding its efforts in the city and in the countryside. An eighteenth-century bishop was inadequate in a city eager to greet new things.

Such is the well-worn appraisal of Provoost. It needs some modification. We must bear in mind that in Philadelphia William White was in 1800 much the parallel to Provoost. Apart from the fact that White seems to have enjoyed presiding over the House of Bishops, and was blessed with good health during a very long life, his views of the episcopate evolved only slowly toward that which was later thought to be appropriate.

Provoost and White shared an unquestioned patriotism, but the Bishop of New York could not claim that he had actually taken part in the contest (apart from that caper on the banks of the Hudson in East Camp in 1777). William White had long served as chaplain to the Continental Congress. In any event, Provoost's loyalty to the American cause was, in the last decade of the century, a coin of little value. Despite the threat of renewed hostilities, there was strong pro-British sentiment in New York. If ever there had been a sharply drawn line between Tory and Whig in the city and its environs, it was obscured now.

Provoost lived another fifteen years after his retirement, almost entirely forgotten by the Church—perhaps himself even unmindful of the Church. Years later, this was held against him. The ascendant High Churchmen excoriated him, and his memory has had few defenders. Many years after his death, Provoost's eclipse was thus stated by a Presbyterian:

> Our Episcopal brethren have too much overlooked the man, his learning, his liberality, and his patriotism. He had the bearing of a well-stalled Bishop, was of pleasing address, and of refined manners.[3]

Exactly! But the Church in New York needed more than these delightful qualities.

Immediately after Provoost's sudden resignation, Benjamin Moore was elected president of the diocesan convention. It is thought that Provoost left the chair in order to free the convention of any restraints his presence may have imposed. We may also assume that he shied away from the dubious compliments every retiring parson must receive. He would be especially sensitive about this because of the recent ordeals of his wife's death and his son's suicide. Perhaps it was these tragedies that moved the convention to its delicate farewell next day, in which Samuel Provoost, their bishop, was thanked "for his kind wishes, and whilst they regret that he should have judged himself under the necessity of quitting so suddenly beg leave to assure him of their sincere and fervent prayers."[4]

THE FIRST BISHOP MOORE

The day after the resignation, September 5, 1801, the diocesan convention unanimously elected Benjamin Moore to replace Provoost as Bishop-acting in the State of New York. It must be thus stated because the resignation of a bishop was novel and, in fact, the General Convention (then meeting in Philadelphia) refused to accept Provoost's resignation but permitted New York to elect Benjamin Moore as acting bishop.

Everything presaged Moore's election. He had long been prominent in the Church. His former Tory sympathies were now no barrier to promotion. So general was the satisfaction that Benjamin Moore was consecrated in St. Michael's Church, Trenton, just six days after his election. The consecrators, who crossed the Delaware River from the General Convention in Philadelphia, were Bishop White, Bishop Claggett of Maryland, and Bishop Jarvis of Connecticut. As far as we know, Bishop Provoost was not present. But it is probable that he had anticipated the convention's quick approval and Moore's consecration when he suddenly resigned.

If Samuel Provoost had been precisely the right man to identify patriotism with the Episcopal Church in 1783 (and by doing so make the future of the Church much more secure), Benjamin Moore was now the right man to bridge the gulf between the eighteenth century and what would be expected in the nineteenth. First of all, there was still a dearth of leaders in the New York clergy (though Hobart was one of Provoost's last appointments). More important, however, was Benjamin Moore's sympathy with demands that the Church vigorously expand upstate.

Benjamin Moore was born in Newtown, Long Island, in 1748; his family recognized his academic qualities and sent him to King's College, from which he graduated with honors in 1768. He prepared for orders under the supervision of Dr. Auchmuty of Trinity Church, and was ordained in London in 1774. He returned to assist in Trinity parish, filling the place Provoost had vacated not long before. A mild degree of competition and mutual suspicion that arose then may never have quite disappeared between these two men, especially since Moore (despite his New England ancestry) was a thorough Tory during the Revolutionary War. Their relationship could not have much improved when Provoost was called back to Manhattan to displace Moore as newly elected rector of Trinity. But Provoost had been sufficiently large-minded to reinstate Benjamin Moore as first assistant at Trinity. By 1800 the two were apparently congenial, and it was Provoost who nominated Benjamin Moore to succeed him as rector of Trinity in 1800.[5] Morgan Dix

later believed that Moore's "quiet behaviour and modesty" won the approval of the patriot bishop.[6]

During the Revolutionary War, Moore married Charity Clarke. Her father was an English ship captain who invested in land some distance north of New York City. He named his new holding "Chelsea"—a name still well-known in New York, and in the Episcopal Church. For, not many years after Moore was made Bishop of New York, his son, Clement Clarke Moore, would induce the fledgling General Theological Seminary to settle in Chelsea by offering it an entire square of land.

When Benjamin Moore became Bishop of New York he was greeted by overt anti-Christian sentiments reminiscent of the reputed excesses of the French Revolution. "The typical symbols of Christianity were sometimes outrageously profaned, and the holy sacraments prostituted to the vilest ends," wrote a commentator some years later.[7] Into this ferment Bishop Moore entered at the age of fifty-three; perhaps exactly the best age for the task ahead. If a man will ever be wise he will be so when fifty-three; if ever of a strong constitution, he will have that, too. The record shows that Benjamin Moore was precisely the man of the hour. Like his predecessor and successor, he retained the rectorship of Trinity Church, for that salary maintained the Bishop of New York. There was as yet no adequate state-wide manner of providing for a bishop. In addition to presiding over Trinity Church, Bishop Moore was responsible to perhaps as many as fifty churches and twenty-five clergy and an uncounted number of laypersons in a rapidly growing state. Though it is arguable that Moore was bishop for only one year (since Provoost died in 1815, and Moore in 1816) he was de facto Bishop of New York from the day of his consecration in 1801. Bishop Provoost never interfered with his diocesan administration, and the contretemps of 1811 (which will soon be discussed) was brought about by enemies of Hobart, not opponents of Moore. In fact, the episcopate of Moore perfectly blended the gentle viewpoint of his own heritage with the exuberance of his gifted assistant, John Henry Hobart.

CHURCH LIFE IN THE GROWING STATE

As Benjamin Moore assumed the responsibilities of the Bishop of New York, the city itself still retained much of the intimacy of a small town. A prominent New Yorker later wrote:

> Trinity and St. Paul's Chapel marked the populous centre; around the Battery, and in Wall Street (where but one bank yet existed), and the

> parallel streets, dwelt the aristocracy; and the bridge where Canal Street now is formed the usual boundary of evenings walks. . . . Harlem was a distant village; mails from New England and Albany arrived and departed only twice a week; there were but two newspapers published; water was a marketable commodity.[8]

This was the city Moore knew well. As a landed gentleman whose holdings in Chelsea promised rich increase in value, his mind must often have turned to New York's destiny to grow and grow. He and all knowledgeable Episcopalians were aware of awakening commerce and building upriver where the Mohawk, emptying into the Hudson, seemed to invite restless men and women to enter upon the promising fields of the western valleys.

The death of Alexander Hamilton provides us with a vignette of life in the Church and city. When Bishop Moore was told that his neighbor Hamilton was fatally wounded by Aaron Burr, in July 1804, and desired the sacrament, the bishop refused to comply immediately because Hamilton (not among New York's more fervent Episcopalians) had probably thought about it insufficiently. Also, there had been a duel. Later, the bishop relented and celebrated the Holy Communion at Hamilton's bedside, and the dying man showed "unmistakeable gratitude." Bishop Moore was present when Hamilton died, and later testified to the coroner against Burr. The funeral oration was delivered from the porch of Trinity Church by Gouverneur Morris.[9] Hamilton was buried near the church door.

Following the New York customs of the time, his body was probably carried in a small hardwood coffin resting on a footed bier borne by four intimate friends. Family, physicians, business associates, and other friends followed on foot, or in carriages. Churches were often draped in black for funerals. A lengthy sermon might be expected. There being no tolling hammer in the early days, the church bell was wrapped in a blanket or carpet, its sound thus muffled and lugubrious. Its tones would be heard before the service, and again while the body was carried to the grave nearby. The English custom of ringing out the number of years of the deceased's age, preceded by six tolls for an adult woman, and nine for a man, may have been common in New York in the early years of the nineteenth century. Certainly the professional clerk was employed at that time to lead the responses in the service; it is said that the first city church to discard the clerk was Grace Church, and when the rector, Jonathan M. Wainwright, did so, he faced some opposition.[10]

The first call upon the new bishop was from the distant parts of the state. Several Episcopal churches had long been established in the Albany-Schenectady area. In the Hudson River Valley, whose agricul-

ture supplied the city's markets, there were a number of growing towns and river hamlets. There had been Episcopal churches in Newburgh, Walden, Fishkill, and Poughkeepsie since the old century. Now in the first years of the nineteenth century there were new ones in Catskill, Hudson, and Red Hook. In the year after Bishop Moore's consecration, the Rev. Davenport Phelps was "employed as a missionary on the frontiers of the State" by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New York under the direction of Bishop Moore.[11] Mark this event well, for it is the first practical diocesan-wide missionary effort we know. Daniel Nash had already begun his heroic work upstate; twelve parishes today owe their foundation to him.[12] Soon, Troy, Lansingburg and Waterford were added to their number. By 1810 there were twenty-five parishes in and near Albany—twenty of them established since 1801.

These facts make two things clear: there was increase in population upstate, and an awakened appeal of the Episcopal Church. Even so, Bishop Moore did not visit those upriver places until 1809.

Later on, energetic Victorian churchmen would fault Bishop Moore for his failure to visit far-off places in his diocese immediately. Bishop Provoost had been similarly excoriated. We will do well to remember that the role of Bishop of New York was seen by these men as complementary, perhaps subsidiary, to their position as rector of Trinity Church. If we praise Trinity for its diocesan-wide munificence, we must recall that its impulse to such generosity was immeasurably encouraged by these rectors, who, as bishops, were responsible for those distant places. No less a high Victorian than Morgan Dix credits Samuel Provoost with the foresight of garnering Trinity's wealth to ensure future generosity. Between 1800 and 1868 Trinity aided at least forty-five churches alone in the wide area now the Diocese of Albany.[13]

Bishops then were not expected to travel to distant places. Seabury had done so, but then he was always somewhat peripatetic (and sometimes a nuisance to his brother bishops). White of Pennsylvania preferred to restrict his ministrations to the Philadelphia area until the last years of his episcopate—by which time his protégé Hobart had set an example many later bishops (including Hobart himself) found lethal. Qualities of one era must be shrewdly assessed by succeeding generations. Their contemporaries in New York admired Provoost's scholarship and Moore's piety, and this went far to sustain those men in their day. Soon, much more would be expected of a bishop in New York.

More would be expected of the other clergy and of the laity, too. In the diocesan convention of 1803 there was pointed discussion about the failure of delegates to appear. The next year, lists of clergy present and not present were published (Samuel Provoost appears in neither column; was it supposed that he had resigned his orders as well as his

position?). Again, in 1805, there was poor attendance, but this time with reason: the convention met in Poughkeepsie. The place is significant. Now the Church beyond Manhattan island is formally recognized. Another reason was one more severe outbreak of yellow fever in New York. The clergy gave their parochial reports verbatim this time, and fellow delegates heard the communicants statistics of the Church in Albany (80), Brooklyn (77), Catskill (12), Hudson (15), Trinity and its New York City chapels (1,000), Christ Church, New York City (300), St. Mark's (20), St. Esprit (12), New Rochelle (18), Newtown (23), Flushing (20), St. Andrew's in Walden, Orange County (50), Rye (30). Of course there were many parishes not reporting. And we must not be confused by the low number of communicants: when bishops were not expected to travel beyond their own city they simply did not confirm many persons belonging to outlying parishes. Thus Trinity (where the bishop resided) could report a thousand communicants, but Christ Church in the fast-growing city of Hudson a mere fifteen. Also, sometimes only confirmed *men* may have been reported as communicants because only men were allowed to cast a vote at parish elections. These reports soon changed, for in 1808 Bishop Moore visited ten churches (none far from New York City) and confirmed 692 persons. The next year he reported to an admiring convention that he had gone as far as Lansingburg and Schenectady, had confirmed 304 persons, had ordained seven clergymen (and deposed one). It is important to notice those ordinations. The fact that seven men had undertaken preparation for the ministry in a time when the church seemed weak and was unable to provide the benefit of a divinity school doubtless weighed heavily upon the delegates gathered for that convention.

It is equally remarkable that one reads little about money in the early records of the diocese. This is partly because the convention needed very little income. It had minimal diocesan expenses. There was, of course, no diocesan office, and no diocesan program requiring funds. At Moore's election, the diocese (by this time the word *diocese* was in increasing use) had about £1,000 invested, a most respectable sum, one would think. Provoost's style hadn't been expensive. He spent freely from his own inheritance—too freely it was said—and at the same time had husbanded Trinity's investments. Bishop Moore relied upon the munificence of Trinity Church, but like Provoost, he enjoyed a comfortable inherited income that he probably used for church purposes on occasion. The expectations of the eighteenth century didn't disappear after 1800.

The American bishops had to forge their individual manner for the work in their several jurisdictions. Bishop Madison of Virginia saw his lifework fulfilled as president of William and Mary; he gave modest

attention to his episcopal duties. William White was First Citizen of Philadelphia, and lived long enough to adapt to and even be enthusiastic about the requirements of episcopacy in America. Benjamin Moore, unlike others, had been privileged to study closely Provoost's failures and the needs of the Episcopal Church in New York State. Not dynamic by temperament, he began almost casually the work of a bishop. Two years after his election his report to the convention delegates "congratulated them on the flourishing state of the diocese." By gradual steps his reports foreshadowed the work of later bishops in New York and elsewhere; he directed missionary activity; he exercised right of appointment to vacant places (as many as eighteen in 1807); he assumed chairmanship of ecclesiastical organizations such as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Upon this broad understanding of a bishop's responsibilities Benjamin Moore's immediate successors had at their command various established agencies and precedents, and these provided money and policies for church growth. This novel strengthening of an executive bishop lent facility to expansion of the Church's interests. But the disasters of the 1840s may be traced directly to those decisions which, early in the century, provided the Bishop of New York with power to express by means of Church organizations his personal preferences in opposition to a sizable and resentful minority within the diocese. The benign Benjamin Moore could easily endorse young Hobart's New York Bible and Common Prayer Book Society in 1809, and the Protestant Episcopal Tract Society the next year, never supposing these organizations would very soon be controversial among New York Episcopalians.

SIGNS OF GROWTH

All the evidence suggests that the revival of Episcopal church life in New York came soon after the Revolutionary War, and that prejudice against the former Church of England was quickly forgotten. The difficulty lay in finding clergymen available to minister in the now-independent Church.

An excellent example of Episcopal renascence is found in the story of St. Matthew's Church, Bedford. As we have seen, this was part of the Rye, Mamaroneck, Bedford triad envisioned as one of the two Westchester parishes mentioned in Governor Fletcher's Ministries Act back in 1693. Bedford was to be served by the rector of Rye. As early as February 28, 1694, a Rye Vestry was elected having two representatives from Bedford. An early rector was Thomas Pritchard, who was remembered because he "totally ruined the interests of the Church" in Bed-

ford. When James Wetmore became rector of Rye things improved markedly in the Bedford congregation, but nevertheless there were no great stirrings there. But there was promise enough to induce the ardent churchman St. George Talbot, then in his one-hundred-fourth year, to bequeath £600 to the Bedford church. That was in 1766. When in the next year Talbot died, his executors were slow to pay the generous bequest. It is a sign of life in St. Matthew's that, thirty years later, in 1796, the congregation demanded an accounting and a remittance from Talbot's executors and their successors. Eventually, Alexander Hamilton was engaged as a lawyer for St. Matthew's, and he was concluding successful litigation at the time of his death.

The fact that the congregation was impelled to seek its elusive inheritance is enough to indicate that the people of St. Matthew's, Bedford, meant their church to prosper. They used the Talbot bequest to purchase a glebe and land for a church building, which was built 1807–1808. In 1810 the parish was declared to be in a very flourishing state—certainly better than it had ever been under the Crown. Reasons for this are easy to discover: a definite easing of animosity toward the Episcopal Church, population growth in Westchester, including perhaps Episcopalians from Connecticut, and the prestige attached to the Jay family, who belonged to the Rye and Bedford parish. (There is yet another note important to this history: a century after its church was built, the three-decker pulpit was still in use—perhaps the last such in the Diocese of New York.)

In the ten years between Moore's consecration in 1801 and his virtual retirement in 1811, the Bishop of New York found himself in an ever widening sea of concerns and demands for a number of reasons. First of all, the never-absent English ascendancy in Manhattan provided, after the Revolutionary War, a firm and, yes, patrician base for the Episcopal Church. Then there was the growing importance of New York's port, rapidly overtaking Philadelphia and Boston as the commercial shipping center of the nation. This meant immigration from Europe to New York City, and thence upriver toward Albany. The immigrants were very often from England.[14]

The record of Bishop Moore's ten years' activity is clearly a record of growth and laying foundations for future growth for the Church in New York State. But there is one thing conspicuously lacking in those ten years: leadership. Bishop Moore was benign; everyone respected his gentle, quiet, blameless life. The city, however, was an increasingly tough place. Everywhere there was an aggressiveness which was seen as part of the American ideal. Episcopalians were perhaps disappointed in the pacific gentility of their Church. There was, also, a stirring of American Christianity, the opening tremors of what became the Second

Awakening. A younger generation was impatient to improve the performance and correct the outlook of the fathers.

These younger men had, after all, never had a chance in New York. Provoost was the man of the hour in 1783, but, thanks largely to his generous spirit, Benjamin Moore was regarded as heir apparent. "In Case Bishop Provoost should resign it is not supposed there will be any choice at this time of a successor," wrote the newly appointed assistant minister at Trinity, John Henry Hobart, in September 1801. He continued in the letter to a friend, with an archness that is amusing to all who know that Hobart was not above playing politics,

> You must come forward to aid us in conciliating unanimity and harmony—I trust that the party spirit that both disgraced and injured us is near expiring. Had I my will, I would crush it, I was going to say, to the nethermost hell, its congenial habitation.[15]

This was written when the tired Provoost was about to retire. The ensuing ten years saw gratifying growth in the Episcopal Church, but the younger people questioned whether it had been a growth as rich in doctrine as it had been in numbers.

The concerns of the Diocese of New York and its bishop increased steadily. The burden proved to be too great for Bishop Moore. He suffered a stroke in 1811 and was thereafter partly paralysed and much confined to his house. He declared "the utter improbability of my ever being again able to perform my episcopal functions."[16] His son, Clement, wrote to the diocesan convention on behalf of the bishop, asking that a special convention elect an assistant. That convention was called for May 14, 1811, and when it convened there were representatives from thirty-eight congregations and other delegates from mission stations. Now there arose a possibility and a problem. The possibility was that, for the first time since 1786, the diocese could elect a man without circumstances dictating who would be the choice. Despite the appropriate regrets at Moore's misfortune, it was seen as a hopeful springtime for the Church in New York. But there was the problem, too; who, in 1811, was the Bishop of New York? The House of Bishops had displayed reluctance to accept Provoost's resignation in 1801, because it was unsure how to handle the resignation of a bishop. Therefore, it was made clear then that Moore would be considered "Assistant, or Coadjutor Bishop during Bishop Provoost's lifetime."[17]

One bishop who declined to serve, another bishop unable to serve—and a third man who very much wanted to be bishop. For one thing was clear in New York in 1811: John Henry Hobart would be Benjamin Moore's successor.