
Alexander Hamilton and William White!

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by Dean Sam Candler**

Most of us have only read about the musical titled *Hamilton*, created and produced by Lin-Manuel Miranda. The tickets were expensive! And, usually, we had to be in New York City to see it. Most of us these days are not traveling much. But we sure know about that Broadway musical, and its wonderful re-interpretation of the days and life of Alexander Hamilton with modern dance and fast rap music. It has been a phenomenal success.

Others of us have read the Ron Chernow book titled *Hamilton*, the book which actually inspired Lin-Manuel Miranda to produce his brilliant musical. That book, too, has been acclaimed as a phenomenal success. Now, it seems that the Broadway musical has been expertly filmed, made into movie, and rushed out to our in-home streaming services. I have not seen the musical or the movie, but I am halfway through the book! When I do finish the book, I hope to watch the movie. I am trying to use my pandemic quarantine time for the best, and maybe this modern historical reflection will be good for me.

In the meantime, I am curious about this present fascination with Alexander Hamilton. His story is a great one, and find myself rooting for him in almost every turn of his life (though he does make some tragic mistakes). However, I also know that he represents only one side of our country's early and critical debates on Federalism. His political opponents were represented by another flawed hero of mine, Thomas Jefferson, who led the political party known as the Republican-Democrats.

In its most simplistic form, our country's early political struggle was between those who favored a strong and centralized federal system of government, and those who favored an emphasis on local and rural state governments. To the greatest extent, thankfully, the Federalists prevailed; but more dispersed governmental entities – the states—also maintained authority and strength. I am glad our country has both!

The political and organizational struggle of our country was mirrored by a similar struggle occurring in our own Anglican Church at that time. Anglicans in the United States of America would become known as Episcopalians, thus breaking their connection –in name—from the centralized authority (England), but continuing a connection to some sort of local authority (local bishops. The word “episcopal” means “organized with bishops.”)

During this week, July 17, we in the Episcopal Church observe the feast day of the man responsible for creating that organizational system of our Church back in the late 18th Century. He is William White, of Philadelphia. As in the United States debates, there were two factions, or trends, in the fledgling American Episcopal Church. The first was the strong centralized government system of the formal and traditional Anglicans, led by Bishop Samuel Seabury of Connecticut. Seabury did not even want laypeople to have a vote in the new Episcopal Church; it would be run solely by bishops. At another extreme, in the rural areas especially, were the Methodists, who were still Episcopalians back then. They found no need for bishops at all, and were happy to have a loose system of local leadership. (By the way, I have never had a fond taste for the Tory Samuel Seabury; and I am glad that he apparently makes rather an oafish appearance in the *Hamilton* musical!).

William White rose to prominence in this fascinating time after succeeding Jacob Duché as rector of Christ Church, Philadelphia (Duché had turned from being a Revolutionary War hero into a loyalist). White ended up being rector of Christ Church, Philadelphia for 57 years. Wow! As bishop, he was also the person who later ordained Absalom Jones.

In 1782, William White wrote the masterful pamphlet, *The Case of The Episcopal Church in the United States Considered*, which laid out a plan for the new Episcopal Church to be composed of both ordained and lay leadership: the House of Bishops AND the House of Deputies. It is that beautiful example of comprehensive Anglicanism which makes William White worth remembering. Neither Samuel Seabury nor John Wesley and the Methodists would be the future for Anglicans in America; William White is the true hero of our American Episcopal Church.

So, this week, we pause during two trends to remember William White. One trend is our fascination with Alexander Hamilton, a worthy trend when we are in favor –and in need—of a strong federalist system of government. (It would not be worthy if that government were serving dishonorably, as other centralized world governments unfortunately have, in history). The other trend, with our Covid-19 pandemic, has been the temptation to turn all our attention and allegiance to a single, centralized, expert. Believe me! I am in favor of expert science and wise counsel!

But, I am ultimately in favor of governmental systems, in both the Church and the secular government, which honor both historic tradition and local progress, both global truth and local innovation. I am thankful this week for William White, early American patriot and early Episcopal priest and bishop, who helped shape our comprehensively governed future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Sam Candler
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