

**Homily for John Henry Hobart, Bishop of New York, 1830**  
**September 12, 2020**

**By the Reverend Stephen Gerth**

*Jude 20–25, Psalm 78:1–8, John 17: 11b–19*

John Henry Hobart was among the Episcopal Church's great leaders in the first decades of the nineteenth century. On September 14, 1775, he was born in Philadelphia and educated at the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton. William White, bishop of Pennsylvania, ordained him deacon in 1798 and priest in 1801. Yet a year earlier, in 1800, he became an assistant minister at Trinity Church Wall Street, where the rector was the second bishop of New York, Samuel Provoost. He would resign as rector in 1801, but the Episcopal Church did not accept his resignation as bishop. Instead, Benjamin Moore became rector of Trinity Church and was ordained bishop to serve as Provoost's assistant. Upon Provoost's death in 1815, Moore became the second bishop of the diocese. That said, in his history of the diocese of New York, *This Planted Vine*, James Elliott Lindsley wrote that "he was de facto Bishop of New York from the day of his consecration."<sup>1</sup> In the meantime, the great preacher at Trinity was the

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<sup>1</sup> James Elliott Lindsley, *This Planted Vine: A Narrative History of the Diocese of New York* (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1984). 95.

Reverend Mr. Hobart. In 1811, he was chosen and consecrated as a second assistant bishop for New York. When Bishop Moore died in 1816, Hobart became the third bishop of the diocese—the entire state of New York.

When he became bishop, there were “twenty-five clergy, forty churches, and 2,345 communicants.” When he died on September 12, 1830, there were “168 clergy, sixty-eight churches, and 6,708 communicants.”<sup>2</sup> He was only fifty-five years old.

I first came across Bishop Hobart’s work in 2009 when, in preparation for a talk on the American Prayer Book’s history, I discovered a published dissertation by Lesley Armstrong Northup, *The 1892 Book of Common Prayer*.<sup>3</sup> The Reverend Dr. Northup, ordained deacon in 1980 and priest in 1981 here in our diocese—she’s been in the diocese of Southeast Florida for many years, a professor of religious studies.

Hobart sought to bridge the gaps among Episcopal religious leaders between a growing evangelical wing of the church and the high church tradition. He was

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 122–223.

<sup>3</sup> Lesley Armstrong Northup, *The 1892 Book of Common Prayer*, Toronto Studies in Theology 65 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993).

for the order of governance for the church with roles for laity, clergy, and bishops. He is credited with “deep biblical spirituality,”<sup>4</sup> and “the primacy of worship, strictly observed in accordance with the official rites.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1826, Hobart introduced the first resolution at General Convention to alter the Prayer Book. Opposition came from Virginia. He would withdraw his proposal in 1829. But the seeds were sewn, as it were.

Northup writes, “Hobart’s most lasting legacy was his singlehanded metamorphosis of Episcopal high churchmanship into the first expression of Anglican catholicism.”<sup>6</sup> On a visit to England in 1823, he met John Henry Newman. Hobart made an impression he was a high churchman with evangelical energy. One reason Anglo-Catholicism found a ready home in the diocese of New York, and in the broader American church, was Hobart’s legacy. Anglo-Catholicism did not have to be imported to the Episcopal Church; it was already here before John Keble preached the sermon on July 14, 1833, from which the Oxford Movement was born.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 17.

Hobart was buried in the churchyard of Trinity Church. The evangelical Bishop of Virginia Richard Channing Moore, Hobart's friend, officiated at the service.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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