

Session I

Initial Impressions and Reactions: 1845-1849

Bishop John Medley arrived in New Brunswick on June 7, 1845. The new bishop had been appointed to the newly created episcopal see of Fredericton by the British government. This same government had created the new diocese and placed its first bishop in it by means of Medley's Letters Patent. Medley, English born, educated, and recently widowed, arrived in the colony which was to be his home and field of endeavor and in whose soil his earthly remains would be interred forty-seven years later. Unlike other colonial bishops who retired back to England or who sought and secured translation to English sees after a successful early career in the colonies, Medley came, made the colony his home and stayed.

Needless to say, things were not the same in New Brunswick as they had been in the diocese of Exeter where Medley had served as a Parish priest. In this, our first session, we will investigate three broad topics; namely, what Medley encountered, what he initially did and what was on the new bishop's mind in his early years.

Initial Impressions

Indicative of his youth, energy and determination, immediately after his arrival in Fredericton, Medley embarked on an extensive tour of his new diocese. He traveled, he met his clergy, he preached, he confirmed and he administered Holy Communion. He first went to St Andrews. There he met Dr Alley, consecrated the chapel at Chamcook, a building of stone and in which all the seats were free – no pew rents allowed, and he celebrated the Holy Communion. Next he journeyed to St Stephen, where fifty to sixty persons received Holy Communion. Then off to St David's and St Patrick's where Dr S. Thompson ministered to six congregations. Next came Pennfield, Musquash, Differ (Dipper) Harbour and Carleton before his return to Fredericton. He remained in Fredericton one day before leaving on the next leg of his tour which took him to Ludlow, Blackville, Mirimichi, Bathurst, New Bandon, Dalhousie, Campbell Town, then down to Chatham, Richibucto, Shediac, Westmorland, Sackville, Bend of Petitcodiac, Sussex Vale, Grand Lake, Young's Cove, Canning, Maugerville and finally home to Fredericton. Overall, the tour covered 939 miles.

Tellingly, an account of this tour was written (in October 1846) for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, (the SPG) and published in England.¹ Medley's diocese of Fredericton was poor and needed as much financial aid as could be generated. The obvious source was the Mother Country and churchmen at 'home.' What were the new bishop's impressions of his new cure? Medley was struck on a personal level by a number of things he encountered. He noted, apparently to his surprise, that "generally speaking, the roads in the province are better than the English country crossroads, and some of them are equal to any turnpike roads in England."² Another observation was more telling, he wrote, "One circumstance has often struck me in passing through the country, as a mournful evidence of its spiritual destitution. One finds separate and lonely graves scattered about on farms, or by the roadside,

without any mark of Christian or even common sepulture. The communion of saints is not found even in our last resting-place; nor is there any visible sign that 'the spirit of man goeth upward, and the spirit of beast goeth downward to the earth.' Men and beasts are mingled together: our brethren are committed without sign of salvation, without any outward token of Christian fellowship or of future resurrection."³ On a more positive level, the new bishop was "much struck with the simplicity and earnestness of (the people of New Bandon); and their devotion at the communion was remarkable." The folks in question were described by Medley as "an interesting settlement of north country Irish, many of them strongly attached to the Church."⁴ Adding to the distinctiveness of the event was the fact that even though it was harvest season the little church was crowded to excess for a confirmation of sixteen and Holy Communion administered to fifty. Another note of unusual praise was reserved for the people of Baie des Vents where Medley confirmed twenty-three. In addition to his praise for the church building whose "internal arrangements were good, and the effect reverent and devotional," Medley especially noted that "means were taken to prevent the entrance of dogs, which are most commonly brought with their masters, and which are a profane and intolerable nuisance in our country churches."⁵

Medley's initial impressions as to the challenges and mentality of the New World churchman are also worth noting. He wrote, "our brethren in England can hardly understand the desolation of spirit which must be felt by those who have been induced by a desire of bettering their worldly circumstances to plunge into the wilderness and find themselves reduced to the sad alternative of forsaking the communion of their fathers for a less perfect faith, or of seeing their children grow up unbaptized, uneducated, uncared for, and even unburied by a Pastor of their own Church." He further observed, in his early days in the colony, "How rapidly, under such circumstances do good impressions fade away; and the heart becomes thoroughly worldly and thoroughly callous!" Rather than the call of devotion and worship, the prevailing attitude was,

"Money ! - get money - is the only sound that vibrates in his ears all the year round." Medley mused, "for my part I know not whether the polluting worship of idols is much worse than this cold, selfish, deadening atheism, which freezes up the heart against all holier and more vivid impressions."⁶ Medley had also learned that when a missionary of the Church did go into the wilderness, "expecting to find himself received with open arms, and the Church welcomed as their Mother and their guide, he finds a rapid under-current of suspicion, jealousy and division; a feeling that the people are to be placed under some hateful, undefinable restraint, which they have never known and would be glad to shake off." Medley summarized the situation stating, "Simplicity, unhappily, is not the characteristic of the North American mind; every man's wits are keen and trenchant" and this, coupled with Christian denominational divisions, resulted in the "doubt which steals through many a mind; that as *all* cannot be equally true, *all may* be equally false."⁷

Medley's comments no doubt were at least in part due to his experiences in Albert county where he and the Rev Scovil had made an unscheduled missionary expedition. Though described as a large and flourishing district, "there never has been any clergyman of our Church resident." Having traveled twenty-five miles over bad roads to Hillsborough on a Saturday, Medley arrived to find "no Church people; and on asking where we could hold service, we were told that there were two meetings, and 'we might suit ourselves with either of them.'" The only assistance forthcoming was from the local Baptist preacher who was most helpful. Finally, some other willing souls were found and the next day the bishop "robed in a cottage hard by, proceeded to a

chapel, where 300 people had assembled.” Medley observed, “scarcely any of whom had ever seen a bishop, nor had ever heard the Church service.” Nonetheless, he noted, “I never had a more attentive auditory.”⁸

Medley summarized his needs to the Society by stating “that after filling up twelve vacancies (with clergymen) I could find immediate and full employment for twenty additional clergy without diminishing the labors of any at present in Holy Orders.”⁹ As for assessing the overall condition of the Church in the province, Medley described it as “a very difficult matter, but I am in great hopes that we are advancing rather than going backwards: still I confess our state morally and spiritually seems to me to resemble the Church of Laodicea much more than that of Smyrna or Philadelphia: ‘the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things enter in and choke the Word:’ and many, if they could have their heart’s wish, would have a new preacher every month, who should send them all away satisfied with themselves.”¹⁰

First Charge of 1847

Bishop Medley’s first Charge to his clergy was delivered in Fredericton on August 24, 1847. It was republished in London by the Fredericton Cathedral Committee during Medley’s journey home in the summer of 1848. These facts alone reveal a great deal as to the young bishop’s priorities in his first years. He arrived in New Brunswick with funds and definite plans for a Cathedral Church to be built in Fredericton. His trip to England in 1848 was designed to secure funds for continuing construction as well as books for a Cathedral Library and candidates for Holy Orders in his diocese. Upon his return, he was able to report success on all three fronts.

Although the Cathedral project would necessitate the tearing down of the old wooden Christ Church parish church commenced in 1787 (due to Medley’s choice of site for his new Cathedral), the building of St Anne’s Chapel of ease and the decimation of fellow high churchman, Archdeacon Coster’s congregation, Medley forged ahead. Surprisingly, within the text of the forty-four page 1847 Charge, the issue of the Cathedral takes up barely two pages. In this brief space, Medley summarily defends the project. As for size and cost, “the building is not larger than the wants of the population around it require, and though more expensive at present than a wooden building, it is more decent and more lasting.”¹¹ To bolster this last point, Medley added a footnote stipulating, “in the case of ordinary parish churches, however, wooden churches are really more expensive than stone buildings. In twenty years they cost as much in painting and continual repair; in sixty or seventy years they grow old and hasten to decay.” As for the objection of cost, Medley pointedly noted that, “he who objects to lay out on God’s house a sum, which, in its proportion, he never fails to lavish on his own, has forgotten (as many of us seem to have forgotten) the truths of his Bible.”¹² Medley went on to point out an inconsistency of attitude. As for the much discussed proposals for economic progress of the day he asked, “where are these mountainous difficulties when a railroad is talked of? Then nothing is too gigantic for our efforts; hills are to be tunneled, valleys spanned, rivers bridged, a six month’s winter with its snow-drifts is to be defied ... But when the house of God is to be builded ... Then we begin to hear of vast and unusual waste, and of its never being completed, from the lips of a self-seeking, self-deceiving generation.”¹³

Medley admitted “I might indeed have expected what I have not received, some small share of co-operation from all of the Churchmen in the province (noting) the question of place has no

doubt interfered to a considerable extent in preventing such co-operation.” Saint John had wanted the honor of receiving the Cathedral, but two reasons weighed against this in the bishop’s mind. First, that his Letters Patent named Fredericton as his residence and secondly that Fredericton, “is the most central place in the province, the seat of government and of the college.” Nonetheless, Medley did add as an observation which has stood the test of time, “the local feeling of the province damps, if not extinguishes, all generous public spirit:” so much so that “to save themselves the expense of a pound, some would destroy or injure a city.”¹⁴

Early on in the text of his first Charge Medley called for unity among the clergy of his new diocese. Unity was understood however to be based not on some vague theory of tolerating diverse and contradictory opinions but upon clear, mutually agreed upon, doctrinal undertakings. He wrote, “we must banish that frightful party spirit, that minute exclusiveness, which refuses the hand of fellowship to those who have signed the same articles, own the same creeds, and are built on the same foundation with ourselves.” In sum, “the odious cries of High-Churchman and Low-Churchman, with other more offensive names, must not be heard in our mouths.”¹⁵

It must be recalled that the timing of Medley’s arrival in his new diocese, coupled with his reputed Tractarian tendencies, made his reception problematic. Clergy and laity of a low church disposition, of which there were many in the colony, especially in prosperous Saint John, worried that the new bishop would introduce and promote practices which, to their minds, were improper for the Church of England and which tended towards Roman Catholicism. Medley was well aware of this concern. He consciously eschewed actions and statements which would confirm these fears. He also tackled the underlying issues head on. In his first Charge he spoke of “those who have left our Communion.” He noted that they had been “induced to quit” due to “being persuaded, that the Church of England, at the Reformation, was guilty of an act of schism, and that, in consequence, our Orders and Ministerial acts are invalid.” Medley made it clear that he did not share this view. In a direct reference to John Henry Newman, who joined Rome on 9 October 1845 and wrote a work on doctrinal development afterwards, Medley stated, “the theory of development since put forward to justify their succession, may rather be regarded as a bold and ingenious speculation to cover their retreat, than as a doctrine authorized, or indeed generally approved by the Roman Church.”¹⁶ In sum, Newman’s writing was in no way a statement of the Roman Catholic position but simply an elaborate justification for leaving the Church of his birth.

Rather than dwelling on issues of controversy, Medley, in his first Charge, devoted a large degree of attention to the practical duties of a clergyman. He addressed the conduct of Public Prayer, public reading of Scripture, sermon format and style, the importance of catechizing, visiting the sick and personal clerical habits of prayer and study. With respect to Public Prayer he observed, “with regret that, the Churches in this diocese are seldom open during the week for prayer” and urged improvement “on the Litany days at least, and in many cases oftener.” As for the public reading of prayers, “nothing has contributed to bring the prayers of the Church into more general disuse than a slovenly hurried manner of saying them.” Rather he urged “slowness and distinctness of utterance, without drawling ... are essential to good reading.” A problem he had apparently encountered was “an affected tone, and a habit of dramatizing the prayers and the lessons, as if a play were being enacted,” which he found “especially offensive.”¹⁷ As for preaching, Medley bluntly confessed that, “one of the great faults commonly found with sermons is that they are dull.” He also identified the clerical tendency “either to dwell on single points of doctrine in every sermon, in almost the self-same words, or confine themselves to the same round

of moral duties, or preach about nothing but the church or else they never mention it.” Medley urged variety of style, format and content. The young clergy especially were asked to avoid the three point sermon with standard conclusion, and as for content attempt to engage “a parable, a psalm or one of the gospels or epistles of the day.”¹⁸ As for catechizing, Medley stated that “the great ignorance of a vast number of Christians on the main points of faith and practice, as well as on the specific doctrines of their own Church, is the strongest argument that can be alleged in favor of public catechizing.” As for visiting the sick, the need was self-evident, however, with respect to the healthy, Medley added, “the principal difficulty is to bring those who are in health to desire the visits of a clergyman in his clerical capacity.” As he observed, “all persons are glad to receive marks of attention and civility, ... but when the conversation goes no further than the weather or the crops, or is confined to observations upon persons, it is difficult to see that it is attended with permanent advantage to either party.”¹⁹ What was desirable was conversation promoting “his actual progress in the great preparation for the eternal world, his discharge of daily duties, ... his habit of constant communion with the Church, his real fitness for the awful presence of the Holy One Himself.” As for private prayer, Medley exhorted his clergy that they “must be men of meditation and prayer.” With respect to studies, he noted that “he whose office requires him to teach, will soon exhaust himself, unless he is perpetually learning.” Medley further expressed the hope that his introduction of rural deanery meetings would provide occasions at which the gathered clergy could give “attendance to reading, to exhortation and to doctrine.”²⁰ Medley’s vision as to the role of his clergy in intellectual matters went far beyond simple Bible study. He stressed that they should be “educators as well as regenerators of Society.”²¹ As he articulated the matter,

It is not enough for the clergy to attempt to educate. To do their work well, they ought to be the best educated men in the Province, the best informed in all general history, as well as on theological subjects, and the most in advance of the public mind. A mere smattering of Latin and Greek, ... and Burnet on the Articles, with a few volumes of skeletons of sermons, will never make the man who is to mould the public mind.²²

To this end, the bishop urged knowledge and study of the Church’s disagreements with Roman Catholicism on the one hand and Puritanism on the other. Music was to be learned so that God could be duly praised and this aspect of worship rescued from “its present state of degradation.” Architecture also was to be the clergyman’s pursuit so that church building and restoration could be conducted along better lines. The clergyman needed knowledge to escape from the “hands of some rude mechanic, whose superior practical knowledge makes him hopelessly conceited, and as the clergyman can teach him nothing which he does not already know, he will listen to no advise.” In this regard Medley cited an attitude he encountered which held that, “a high pitched roof, which even nature teaches must shoot off the snow, is deemed objectionable, as mysteriously prone to Romanism.”²³

Finally, Medley spoke of two evils of inherited liturgical practice which he sought to see discontinued. First, “the practice of marrying in private houses.” Although inclined to forbid the practice outright, he declined to do so, “lest the people should be led to insist on its continuance.”²⁴ He hoped that reflection on the inappropriateness and cool reason would “cure the evil.” Secondly, the “preaching of funeral sermons on every occasion.” Medley “strongly disapproved of delivering them in private houses.” He also correctly observed that doing so at

every funeral supported “one of the tenants of Universalism, that, as Christ died for all men, therefore all men will be saved. This wicked heresy prevails to a great extent in our borders.”²⁵

To conclude his Charge, Medley stated that upon arrival in New Brunswick there were 86 parishes and only 30 clergy. By the time of his first Charge there were 44 clergy servicing 70 churches. Twelve consecrated churches had no regular services, by the time of the Charge, eight had regular services and one occasional. Four new missions had been opened and twelve churches consecrated.²⁶ Progress was indeed being made but, as we shall see, much remained yet to be accomplished.

1. *John Medley, Diocese of Fredericton: Notes of a Visitation Tour in 1846*, (Bread Street Hill, R Clat, London, 1847). [CIHM 38234]

2. Ibid., 4.

3. Ibid., 14.

4. Ibid., 10.

5. Ibid., 15.

6. Ibid., 13.

7. Ibid., 14.

8. Ibid., 20.

9. Ibid., 24.

10. Ibid., 25.

11. *A Charge delivered at his primary visitation held in Christ Church Cathedral, Fredericton, August 24, 1847, by John, Bishop of Fredericton*, (London, Joseph Masters, 1848). [PANB F10013]

12. Ibid., 35.

13. Ibid., 36.

14. Ibid., 36.

15. Ibid., 7.

16. Ibid., 13.

17. Ibid., 14.

18. Ibid., 15.

19. Ibid., 18.

20. Ibid., 20.

21. Ibid., 29.

22. Ibid., 30.

23. Ibid., 30.

24. Ibid., 32

25. Ibid., 34.

26. Ibid., 34.