

Session II

Issues of the Day and the Charges of 1850 and 1853

Bishop Medley's 1850 Charge is the longest of his entire episcopate. Totalling fifty-eight pages in length it boasts a further five page appendix in fine print. Obviously, there were many things on the young bishop's mind. Typical of his style in public addresses he began with a tug at the heartstrings – three clergy had died since they last met and the beloved elderly Bishop of Nova Scotia, so many years their bishop, was also gravely ill. Prayer for the ill, thoughts of our mortality and a renewed sense of duty in the face of soon having to give an account of labor in the Lord's vineyard were all in order.

The bishop commenced his charge in a predictable enough manner with the recitation of statistics. The number confirmed since Medley's arrival in the diocese totaled 2,214, deacons ordained were 20 and priests 19. New churches consecrated stood at 19 and nine burial grounds had been consecrated. There were 23 new clerics in the diocese and 13 new missions opened. With respect to the new missions, the Diocesan Church Society, the DCS, had been instrumental in aiding the bishop in their erection and he noted that the Society's funds had doubled in the same time frame. The total number of consecrated churches stood at 79 with a total of 120 worship sites which received regular or occasional ministrations. The number of baptisms for the most recent year for which complete statistics existed stood at 1,310, marriages at 316 and burials at 452. Noteworthy is the fact that baptisms were almost triple that of burials. Cathedral construction was proceeding well and the bishop proudly reported a "Cathedral library of about 700 volumes."¹

While first praising the work and contributions of churchmen in the life of the diocese and noting that the clergy "are not the church, we cannot stand alone, nor work alone,"² Medley then proceeded to his Charge proper. What was on the bishop's mind fell under three distinct heads; Unity, Sanctity and Progress.

First, there was the issue of unity. "By unity," Medley stressed, "I do not mean uniformity only, though without some uniformity, unity cannot exist." He did not mean Apostolic succession, "nor am I thinking of distinctive dresses, open seats, painted windows, or Gregorian chants." He noted that "if the world suppose that this is what we mean by unity, they utterly mistake or artfully pervert our meaning." By contrast, "unity consists in the oneness of our Head; the oneness of our faith; in the oneness of our Scripture; in the fellowship of the Sacraments, in one Church, and in a general agreement of heart and judgement on the doctrines and duties of the Christian Religion."³ In sum, while disagreements did and could exist in the Church, according to Medley's view, there was an overriding core and doctrinal unity which held all together. This center was not diverse, shifting or negotiable. Medley would maintain this position throughout his episcopate. To make his position even clearer, the bishop stressed that "we have not unity to seek but to preserve." As he carefully explained, "Whatever differences exist, let them not obscure the broad fact, that we are united in one Church, built professedly on one confession of faith, and that confession Scriptural, Apostolic, and Primitive; that we have been made ministers by one ordination, and that by our own voluntary subscription we are bound, as far as any subscription can bind us, to one general interpretation of Scripture, in respect to certain great propositions."⁴ It is worthwhile to reflect the emphasis here in Medley's words. As opposed to what is often valued today, no mention is made of the particular denomination referenced like a

brand name, as being the focus of unity. On the contrary, Medley cites the Church of England's value as found in a visible manifestation of a unity which is founded upon prior truths, those truths being Scriptural, Apostolic and primitive. Also of note is the entire absence of positing the Church's unity in her bishops either individually or corporately as is often done in the 21st century. Bishops were simply one order in the church not the essence of the church and they too were sworn to uphold and preserve the doctrinal and scriptural locus of the church's unity. Clearly there are here in Medley's Charge different points of emphasis well worth pondering in the midst of our present confusions.

As to the practical implications of this unity, Medley proceeded to caution the clergy against the "needless mutilation of some of the services." He observed, "if we begin the work of omission in deference to the scruples of others, we may in the end omit half the doctrinal parts of our service, or large portions of the lessons appointed to be read." Medley urged, "as a matter of canonical obedience" to read all Prayer Book services entire and to conduct marriages wherever possible "in God's house." As Medley was still learning about his diocese he referred to a custom "which I was not, until lately, aware, of offering up extemporaneous prayers over the dead, in private houses, instead of bringing the corpse to Church, so that, in fact, the clergyman substitutes his own prayers for the prayers of the church." Medley continued, "I must, in duty to the church and to the laity, forbid this practice, as not only inconsistent with the use of our formularies, but contrary to them."⁵

The 1850 Charge is also noteworthy, as Dr Craig has highlighted,⁶ for Medley's words on attitudes towards Roman Catholicism and the Eastern Churches. At a time of deadly riots between recent Irish immigrants and local Orangemen in Saint John and Woodstock, Medley spoke against the "ceaseless vituperation of the Roman and Oriental Churches."⁷ They worshiped the same Triune God, looked to the one Savior, sought the one Spirit and administered the one Baptism and confessed the same three ancient creeds. Medley held that repeating the "same hard and bitter words ... and to trample on the rights of ancient and apostolic churches, by reason of our might, and our knowledge and our wealth, is unwarrantable."⁸ As for obvious friends Medley cited "that pure and venerable branch of the Episcopal church in Scotland." He held special praise however for "the rapid progress, the undoubted orthodoxy, the learning and the zeal of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States."⁹

Medley's second great topic in his 1850 Charge was sanctity. While all Christians are called to separation from the world or holiness of life, the bishop was especially concerned with how this consideration applied to the clergy. "Our vocation is this: to publish with authority and defend Christ's gospel amongst mankind; to recommend it by our lives; to gather in to His fold all that are to be won; and to prepare His members by teaching them their duties, by the right exercise of discipline, by imparting to them the sacramental gifts which Christ has imparted to us, and by presenting their prayers and praise with our own." Medley moreover was not going to "insult (the clergy's) understandings or your hearts ... by a lecture on morality."¹⁰

He first cautioned involvement in abstinence societies and the like, not because he depreciated their goals but he questioned whether the creation of such groups was the most legitimate, safe and effectual method for churchmen to promote the ends envisioned. The bishop next urged seven points under the general heading of clerical sanctity. First, that the clergy be moderate in their appetites. Secondly, that they exercise moderation in their expenses. Thirdly, that they be diligent and punctual in keeping appointments. Fourthly, that they abstain from unnecessary

secular employment, a task, the bishop admitted, made somewhat difficult by the existence of glebe properties which required management. Fifthly, that a clergyman be a peacemaker and avoid involvement in "litigation, nor mix himself up with the feuds of families, but to keep aloof if he cannot compose them."¹¹ Sixth, that the clergyman be a visitor and actively seek out the sick rather than waiting to be told of the illness. Finally, clergy must be men of prayer both in private and public and need to be seen taking seriously the public worship of Almighty God on a daily basis.

Doctrine weighed especially heavily on Bishop Medley's mind in 1850. He urged his clergy to avoid alluding to preachers of the 'full Gospel' or the 'pure gospel' and concentrate on the fundamentals of the Faith. "What we have to teach concerns the author of salvation, the way of salvation, the means of salvation and the nature of salvation."¹² Of particular concern were these two areas; "the denial of the eternity of future rewards and punishments and the denial of sacramental grace."¹³ Regarding the first, Medley pointed out that if it were true, "it matters not, as regards the next world, how we live and how we die, for we are sure to be saved; and the heavy afflictions which befall the best men in the present life, reduce divine retribution, and the desirableness of a virtuous course, to a perfect uncertainty."¹⁴

Medley's prime concern by far was the subject of sacramental grace especially as regards the grace of regeneration in Holy Baptism. He devoted thirteen pages to outlining and defending the Prayer Book teaching on the subject. At the very end of his dissertation we find the reason for such attention to the topic at the time. Medley states, "I earnestly protest against the doctrine avowed in a late decision, that our Church speaks with ... ambiguous and uncertain formularies."¹⁵ All present would have known the reference – the decision, in England, of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the Gorham Case. The case involved the issue of Baptismal regeneration in Medley's former diocese and his friend Bishop Phillpotts. Phillpotts had refused to institute a certain Reverend G. C. Gorham into a parish after having examined him and finding him deficient in his belief with respect to baptismal regeneration. The case was appealed to the newly formed highest court for such cases which attributed to Gorham a view he did not hold and then declared it **not** to be contrary to the doctrine of the Church of England. The decision denied the clearly taught doctrine of baptismal regeneration as found in the Prayer Book. Many persons took great offense at the decision. This court decision precipitated two more defections to Rome, namely H. E. Manning and W. I. Wilberforce. The repercussions echoed around the Anglican church throughout the world including colonial New Brunswick. In this situation, Medley's method of argument is interesting to observe. Contrary to what one might expect he hardly alluded at all to the Fathers of the Ancient Church. He articulated his position almost entirely from direct Scriptural sources and then proceeded to buttress his case with quotations from Reformation Anglican theologians. His point was to show that baptismal regeneration is Scriptural and Reformation Anglican through and through. This method of proceeding, while genuinely Anglican, was also well suited to convince his nay-saying evangelical audience.

The final section of Medley's 1850 Charge was devoted to the topic of Progress. While he noted that progress was being made, that for instance DCS funds had increased, he reminded his audience that "pecuniary results are not progress ... this is to be measured not by collections of money, but by the well being of souls (and this) by Communicants, steady, holy, frequent communicants."¹⁶ He reminded his audience that they were missionaries as well as priests and

that to make progress they had to visit accordingly and he offered to accompany his clergy during his next visitation tour in visiting the out-districts of the province.

Medley's main concern under the heading of progress was however progress in the promotion of the proper place and role of externals in the worship of Almighty God. Externals such as beautiful places of worship did matter. He pointed out the care and expense expended upon the Temple in the Old Testament narrative. He contrasted the desire even the humblest New Brunswicker had to improve his living quarters and the great amounts expended upon the houses of the wealthiest members of the provinces's population. He stressed that the purpose of churches was not merely to accommodate a group of people but rather a church building was constructed as a place for "worship, solemnity, reverence, order, sacrifice, communion, faith and love."¹⁷ He noted that "we must take care that the form of building is neither mean, secular, nor domestic, that it is, if possible, such as to impress the beholder with the impression, that it is a Church, and nothing else." He reminded his audience that to their English forefathers "churches were not square rooms, mean barns, Spectatoria and Auditoria, but Houses of Prayer; long rather than square, lofty rather than low, with means of kneeling all together in humble adoration."¹⁸ Clearly the Church's bishop in New Brunswick had some very definite ideas on the subject of ecclesiastical architecture.

In the closing pages of his 1850 Charge, Medley made some observations on the manner in which the Church of England had developed in North America. He held, at least in part as a result of contemporary American thinking on the subject, that the church was founded in an "unprimitive manner." What he meant was that clergy and congregations had sprung up ad hoc without a bishop present, let alone leading, in the foundation of the Church on the new frontiers. The English state "obstinately refused to allow a bishop to be sent at all" and the SPG was left to finance missions as best they could. Sadly, the result was that "the people of these countries ... form(ed) a mistaken notion, never to this hour eradicated, that the clergy are all paid by government and are highly paid, which is perfectly untrue." The resultant evil was that churchmen "have generally neglected to perform the duty of supporting their own pastors."¹⁹ In his 1853 Charge Medley discussed one possible remedy for this problem, the issue of Convocation or the possible establishing of church governing assemblies.

Taking the issue of convocations up in earnest in his 1853 Charge, Medley began by clearly stating first principles. While the English Convocation and its relationship to Parliament was of "no further importance or interest"²⁰ to New Brunswick churchmen, Medley wanted to be clear that "Convocation was no more a creature of Parliament than the church of Christ is a creature of Parliament." That is to say, "the calling of church assemblies is an inalienable right of the body which the Lord founded." Furthermore, the notion that the church and the church's interests were in some manner represented in and served by Parliament was a notion which had to be "dismissed" entirely. Turning to Scripture, Medley considered the so called Council of Jerusalem and noted that it was called to deal with a specific vexed question. However, it did so by means of "reason, and argument, and apostolic wisdom, and forbearance, and a humble teachable spirit, and with a real desire for union." Medley strongly suggested such qualities did not at the time exist in his diocese adding that he had no faith in the utility of such gatherings "if an opposite spirit prevail." He pointedly noted that such assemblies would not be called in order to "make a Church," and so "the subjects with which our assemblies would have to deal, are necessarily limited." In sum, "the record of our faith has come down to us; we have only to hand it on

undefiled and unimpaired.” Again, in reference to the relationship which pertained in England between Parliament and Convocation, Medley pointed out that after the English Civil War it was Convocation who redrafted and presented the 1662 Prayer Book to Parliament for its acceptance, not the other way round. Parliament obediently “made it into a statute” and the Crown approved.²¹

Having outlined the manner in which the English heritage did and did not illumine the way forward in the colonies, Medley turned his attention to the American church and its governance structures. He immediately sounded a note of caution – “we must not forget, that there is considerable difference in our respective positions.” American church assemblies came about as a result of a Revolution and were the “work of an overwhelming necessity.” He elaborated, “the monarchical principle was overthrown, (note that Medley identifies monarchy as a principle not just a choice or option in human self-government) the Church lay prostrate, the episcopal element did not exist, it was a disjointed, fragmentary body, existing only in a few scattered presbyters, deacons and laymen.” In sum “church assemblies were the natural revivers of their corporate existence” and Medley affirmed “apart from their ecclesiastical organization, American churchmen have no organization at all.”²² The situation pertaining in 1850s New Brunswick was different. There was no “urgent necessity” to create assemblies as there was in the 13 Colonies at the end of the Revolution and churchmen were not a suspect, previously persecuted minority, at odds with the majority of the citizenry in the colony. The church in the colony was even ‘established’ – at least on paper, though Medley found “it difficult to explain the meaning of the expression,” adding that he “was wholly at a loss to know what advantage we derive from it (establishment).”²³

Medley was crystal clear as to how the situation in New Brunswick differed from that of the church in the neighboring republic. “We are connected by tradition, duty and affection, with our Sovereign; we have no desire .. To shake off her mild and gracious sway. We are connected by equally endearing ties with the Mother Church; we have been all ordained with the rites and subscriptions peculiar to that body; we cannot prove false to our subscriptions and vows; our wish is to remain in strict union with her. (A position, it must be remembered, reiterated the year after Medley’s death in the Solemn Declaration of 1893 at the creation of the Canadian Church). We have a Prayer Book which has stood the test of three very trying centuries.” In sum, “these facts would tend to modify our mode of practical action and certainly would render a servile copy of American conventions a very useless mode of proceeding.”²⁴

Medley, having been in the New World scarcely eight years, nonetheless had great praise for the United States. “We greatly admire the immense energy of the nation.” Economically “it puts us colonists to shame. The river Saint John, in their hands, would be made capable of ten times what it has hitherto been in ours.” Medley also admired the American Episcopal Church. He mentioned its colleges, its missionary zeal, its learning and its magnificent churches adding that – “in all this we are a century behind them.” In connection with this praise it should be remembered that Bishop Medley had preached twice at the Church of the Advent in Boston in 1851. Again in 1853, earlier in the year of this Charge, he had traveled to New York to preach at the consecration of two bishops for the American Church. The sermon had been published at the request of the American House of Bishops. Along with all this praise and the attention he had received, Medley was nonetheless not blinded by the American scene. He noted, “there is a sad tale on the other side.” He pointed out that while the population of the United States was 25

million, there were scarcely one million churchmen. “In the city of New York we find learned clergymen and stately churches, but where are they to be found in the rural villages? Where are the clergy in such villages as Richibucto, Shediac, Musquash, Saint George, Saint David, or Grand Falls, in this province?”²⁵ Rural New England was a wasteland for the Episcopal Church, the territory had been abandoned and there was no Anglican presence whatsoever. New Brunswick was an entirely different story. Missions and missionary work, had, since the establishment of the colony in 1784, started at home, in the colony itself and progress was continuing to be made. Medley pointed out the contrast, “the neighboring diocese of Maine numbers 548,000 souls. It has 13 clergy of the Episcopal church, and I should suppose not over 3000 churchmen. We have in this diocese 54 clergy and 10,000 churchmen and our population is less than 200,000.” In this comparison it was clear that New Brunswick Churchmen had indeed accomplished something. Moreover it was not just a matter of accomplishment but also of attitude. The Episcopal Church had, to Medley’s mind, abandoned all hope and missionary effort in rural New England. The area had been abandoned to non-conformity, fundamentalism, universalism and Unitarianism.

Medley nevertheless lamented the conditions prevalent in his own colony. “We have no men of leisure, few men of means. Few think of anything but struggling for a livelihood. The mart is filled, the store is occupied, the axe resounds, but a thorough education is not felt to be a need of present life. Food and raiment first, learning afterwards; and such learning as will bring food and raiment.”²⁶ Such were the realities, the limiting realities of colonial New Brunswick life as bishop Medley saw them. Surely there is much of his analysis which holds true even 150 years later.

This limiting, if not stifling, preoccupation with the immediate and the material had practical implications for the Church and the issue of potential governance structures. Medley lamented, “the education of our people is so imperfect, their notions on church matters confused, and their time so fully engrossed with providing for the necessities of the body, that they have no leisure, had they the inclination, to study the history of the church.”²⁷ It was precisely the lack of time to acquire even a cursory knowledge of church history and thereby gain a perspective on general church issues which Medley identified as a problem pregnant with implications.

As if this was not sufficient cause for pause with respect to any scheme of church self-government, Medley noted another, more pressing reality in 1850s New Brunswick – “the extreme indisposition manifested by our church-people generally to take up the subject seriously.” Medley added, “when the clergy agree among themselves on any definite line of action ... and the laity are in any tolerable degree united with them, I shall not be slow to work with them.” In this 1853 Charge however, Medley expressed his preference that any action on the establishment of colonial church assemblies be co-ordinated from the center, that is, by and from England. He articulated his reasoning as “any satisfactory measure must be Imperial, not local, for no two colonies would agree on the same, and the only hope of tolerable unity of action rests on the Imperial Parliament laying down distinctly those principles which we are to carry into practice.”²⁸ We will see how, with the passage of time, Medley would alter his position. However, it is important to note at this point that what he sought was Imperial direction as to principles, not particulars. Furthermore, while the Imperial Parliament would prove unable to grant such direction, Medley’s suspicions as to the potential for incompatibility, if the development of church government was left solely to local initiatives, would prove prescient.²⁹

1. *A Charge delivered in the Cathedral of Christ Church Fredericton to the clergy of the diocese assembled at the second triennial visitation of John, Bishop of Fredericton*, (Saint John, N.B. W. I Avery, 1850), 6.

2. *Ibid.*, 8.

3. *Ibid.*, 8

4. *Ibid.*, 9.

5. *Ibid.*, 10.

6. Craig, *Apostle to the Wilderness*, 50.

7. 1850 Charge, 12.

8. *Ibid.*, 13.

9. *Ibid.*, 14.

10. *Ibid.*, 17.

11. *Ibid.*, 20.

12. *Ibid.*, 23.

13. *Ibid.*, 25.

14. *Ibid.*, 26.

15. *Ibid.*, 40.

16. *Ibid.*, 43.

17. *Ibid.*, 46.

18. *Ibid.*, 47.

19. *Ibid.*, 53.

20. *A Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese by John, Bishop of Fredericton, holden in Christ Church Cathedral, Fredericton*, (Fredericton, J . Simpson, 1853), 17.

21. *Ibid.*, 16.

22. Ibid., 17.

23. Ibid., 18.

24. Ibid., 18.

25. Ibid., 20.

26. Ibid., 19.

27. Ibid., 21.

28. Ibid., 23.

29. W M Jacob, *The Making of the Anglican Church Worldwide*, (London, SPCK, 1997), ch. 6.