

Session II

Bishop Medley's Charges of 1871 and 1874

Bishop Medley delivered his Charge of 1871 on July 4, just two days before convening the first session of the incorporated Synod of the Diocese of Fredericton on July 6, 1871. Not surprisingly, the first matter of importance dealt with was the "Constitution and conduct of our Synod."¹ Medley prefaced his comments with the observation that "intelligent and practical churchmen in all parts of the world have come to the same general conclusions respecting the necessity for synodical action as the best substitute for the old forms of an established church." He cited the actions of churchmen in North America, Australia and New Zealand. Medley did however concede that there were some important differences between New Testament and early church councils and contemporary gatherings. In the so-called, Council of Jerusalem, recorded in Acts chapter 15 "the lay element was certainly admitted, but with what powers and under what limitations the sacred writer does not inform us." Later on in the early centuries of the Christian Church, "the hierarchical and priestly element predominated, and the laity, though present by their representatives, occupied an unimportant part."² As for Medley's understanding of what transpired at the English Reformation, we need only recall his words from a few years earlier. In his 1868 Charge, he wrote, "Though our Church has been called, in derision, a Parliamentary Church, its liturgy is derived from very different sources; and though the Parliament ratified the Thirty-nine Articles it did not frame them."³ What is more "The three great creeds were not framed by lawyers, nor were they debated in parliaments. The canonical books of Scripture were not settled by jurists." Medley did make the further observation: "that as in ancient times, the undue preponderance of the sacerdotal element led to many and deep-rooted evils, so it will require all our wisdom to steer clear of those dangers into which an undue preponderance of laymen, many of them ignorant of theological controversies, and very moderately versed in Church history and biblical learning, may lead us."

Medley then proceeded to state what a synod was not to be.

A synod is ... not a political body, consisting of citizens owning no special form of faith, drawn together by the exigencies of the time . . . If, in legislative assemblies, the laws of the past govern the present til they are repealed and the wise foundations laid by our ancestors are considered to be the pillars of our legislation, so in a synod, we neither meet to found a church nor settle the canon of Holy Scripture, nor to frame an ecclesiastical Constitution, nor to separate ourselves from the catholic believers before us, nor to begin to form a liturgy. We set

¹ *A Charge delivered in Christ Church cathedral, Fredericton, July 4, 1871 at the Triennial Visitation by John, Bishop of Fredericton* (Fredericton: H. A. Cropley, 1871), 5.

² *Ibid.*, 6.

³ 1868 Charge, 36.

out with these broad actions already laid.⁴

In sum, to function properly, a synod, “must, if its work is intended to last, retain a strong conservative element in its constitution.” Change was neither impossible nor undesirable but, essential changes should never be made without careful deliberation and the concurrence of all orders concerned in the change; and that when made, they should not be made in the interests of a party, nor for the purpose of crushing an adversary: nor should they place us in an antagonistic position to the decisions of the Catholic Church in all ages.⁵

While at this stage of Medley’s episcopate, the worse fights between high and low churchmen were past, the latter half of the twentieth century has seen a pronounced return to divisions within the church. The interests of party or, to use more contemporary language, lobby groups, has been a mainstay of the contemporary church. Synods have become precisely what Medley feared — an arena within which “crushing an adversary” has become the order of the day.

Medley also mentioned the ever increasing gap between the Church in England and the colonies. He cited changes to the ordination service, the Lectionary and the subscriptions required of clergy at their ordinations. Changes had been made in England which were not communicated to the church in the colonies. He mused that “if it should come to pass that we thus become an independent branch of the Church, in full communion with the church in England, as we did not seek such a position, we must accept it when it comes, as part of the Providential ordering” of things. Medley made specific mention of the fact that “at my death, no successor will be appointed by the Crown, and no oath of obedience will be taken to the Archbishop” of Canterbury.⁶

⁴ Medley, *1871 Charge*, 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6, 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

The matter of Medley's advancing age and the prudence of making some official provision for his replacement arose again in 1874. At that time, Medley mentioned that, of the clergy who had died in recent years, not a few were younger than he and had served less time in the ministry. Having served as bishop almost thirty years by 1874, he noted that "I cannot look forward to so extended a period, even if life were spared, with any hope of increasing usefulness."⁷ He worried out loud "of the evils that might arise from physical inability to discharge all the duties of my office, or from possibly, some severe and continued affliction of illness, or in the case of sudden removal, from the difficulties likely to happen during an interregnum." What Medley proposed in 1874 was "a canon of this nature; that, whenever I feel that my diminished strength requires the assistance of another bishop, the synod shall proceed to the election of a bishop, such an assistant to have the right of succession after my death." Medley was prepared to share his salary with such an assistant. It is worth noting that as well as having assistance during his lifetime and sparing the diocese the worry and uncertainty of finding a successor, Medley's proposal assumed that he would select his assistant and that the synod would elect him. Clearly, Medley was unabashed when it came to setting reasonable limitations to the democratic element of synodical governance.

Medley's Charge was not wholly devoted to governance issues. He also had plain practical advice for his clergy. Stressing the need for continual study and familiarity with the Holy Bible the bishop said, "I would intreat (sic) you all ... for your own sake, for the church's sake, to be students to the latest hour of your lives, and to study continually the Greek of the New Testament."⁸ Why this should be the case was evident enough — your chief duty in the pulpit is to be expositors of the Word of God." This meant "to grapple with and explain its difficulties, to place its truths in lucid order before the people, and to make your discourses not vapid repetitions of the elements of the faith, but clear expositions." Medley stressed that "in the highest and best sense of the word, you should preach learned sermons; not sermons bristling with Latin and Greek quotations; not sermons which are decorated with other men's thoughts, as if they were your own; but sermons, which however plain and homely in form, carry conviction to your congregations that you have a treasure within your minds."⁹

⁷ *Charge delivered by the Right Reverend John (Medley), Lord Bishop of Fredericton, at St Paul's Church, Portland, on Tuesday, June 30, 1874* (Saint John: Geo. A. Knodell, 1874), 9.

⁸ Medley, 1871 Charge, 8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

Two other issues of enduring importance were on Medley's mind in 1871: revisions to the lectionary and a proposed revision of the English Bible. First, the lectionary or the Church's systematic method of reading the Scriptures, which for Churchmen was set forth in the **Book of Common Prayer**. As Medley saw matters, "the Cycle of Proper lessons seems to have been formed on two very wise principles. First, as a means of presenting the reader with a systematic presentation of salvation history, namely "the creation, the fall, and the consequences of that fall; the steps taken by God to procure our redemption," the election of the Hebrews, "the conduct of that people, their apostasy, and their punishment, as illustrations of God's dealings both with Churches and with individuals." The second great object of the Lectionary "was to fix in the minds of the worshipers the chief truths of the Christian religion ... whether in prophecy, ... or by type ... or by history." Medley noted that by following the course of the daily lessons throughout the year, a churchman would read the New Testament three times and the Old Testament once. Medley however continued, stating that "the chief thing to be regretted is, that both clergy and laity have so little availed themselves of the inestimable privilege" of daily reading their scriptures.

Medley acknowledged the Church's right to make selection of appropriate Scriptural lessons and noted several deficiencies, as he saw it, in the Lectionary of the period. First, the omission of entire books of the Bible, the most notable instance of which was the Book of Revelation. Secondly, the selection of lessons for some Saints days being "most unsuitable, there being no apparent reason why the chapters selected should be read rather than any other." Thirdly, that the selection of certain lessons from the Apocrypha seemed "unwisely chosen" and finally, "the lessons are (in many instances) too long, and break in on the unity" of the Lectionary's flow and logic at many points.¹⁰ While identifying these perceived flaws, Medley was also aware of certain pitfalls to be avoided in the course of scriptural lesson revision. With respect to the revision of lessons from the Apocrypha, Medley worried that in a new Lectionary it will be "found to have removed too much, rather than too little of these venerable Books, which though they never formed part of the Canon of Scripture, were highly esteemed by the Jews, and largely quoted and adopted by the writers of the New Testament."¹¹

Medley's most prescient observation regarding Lectionary revision concerned the temptation to revise with a view to the spirit of the age, what we would more likely term, according to prevailing notions of political correctness. To let the bishop speak for himself:

The Bible is remarkable not only in the Old Testament but in the New, for its distinct mention and its plain condemnation of sins, the very name of which is painful. The spirit of the age leads men to hush up all such matters, but to act in secret the vile things which it is afraid to speak of, and to hear condemned. As in this respect the Bible and the world are clearly at variance, nothing can be more dangerous to public morality than to refuse to read what the sacred writer has evidently recorded for the general good, and which will be in all probability unheeded in private,

¹⁰ Medley, Charge, 1871, 11.

¹¹ Ibid., 13.

when the lesson is considered unfit for public reading.¹²

Medley had specific selections in mind for he elaborated: “a clergyman who would close the book or substitute another chapter, when the chastity of Joseph is recorded for our instruction, if he would be consistent, must cease to read the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans; and where are we to stop?” It takes little imagination to suggest what Bishop Medley would think of the 1962 Canadian Prayer Book Lectionary’s omission of Genesis chapter 19 verses 4 to 11. The Canadians were however rather slow in this matter for the American Prayer Book revisors of the 1780s had judged that portion of Genesis inexpedient for public consumption almost two centuries earlier.

Medley’s second major concern was the proposed revision of the “English translation of the Bible.” He reminded his audience that the Authorized or King James edition was the fifth major English effort at translation dating from the Reformation period. Medley also pointed out that “the very fact that our translators adopted alternative renderings, some of which are in the margins and some in the text of our Bibles, and the better rendering is often that which is not read to the people, would lead us to the conclusion that we may lawfully revise both, if a still more accurate rendering can be found.”¹³ Medley noted that advances in Biblical scholarship, including textual sources, made better renderings both possible and desirable. This was especially true in his estimation of certain Old Testament books. He mentioned in particular the Song of Songs and the Book of Job. Medley was perhaps by this time working on his translation and commentary on Job which would be published in 1877.

Medley did however have one telling observation and criticism of the proposed scheme of revision and translation. He noted, that in England, “the project has been taken up with more haste, and pressed with less consideration for the feelings and interests of English-speaking people living out of England, than is desirable.” Medley, the Englishman, elaborated. He asked “whether it be that all real scholarship is supposed to be centered in men nurtured in the English Universities ... or ... is (it) thought the duty of the world at large to accept without reluctance or hesitation, the decisions of English scholars?” Whatever the case, Medley was sure that “the excellent bishops and divines who originated this movement have been somewhat inattentive to the circumstances and feelings of the times.” In short, Medley asked, “What of the American church, American scholars and American learning?” As he put matters, what of “a powerful, proud and sensitive race (who also) have grasped the reins of Empire?” What of “the other side of the world (where) two other vast territories are discovered, owning allegiance to the British Queen, but jealous of all that affects their rights, real or supposed, political or religious?” Finally, Medley added, “I say nothing of such small spots of the earth as that which we inhabit; supposed by the ignorance or the pride of most Englishmen to be wild and inhospitable shores, where scholarship can find no refuge, and eloquence and learning will never seek a home.”¹⁴

¹² Ibid., 12.

¹³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴ Medley, Charge 1871, 18.

Finally, Medley addressed the sentiment that translators of Scripture should be devoid of theological bias. He demurred, “if by theological bias is meant that we should enter upon the translation as if we had no Faith at all, and as if we were about to translate Horace ... I cannot for a moment assent... The meaning of the Greek or Hebrew words is indeed our first consideration, but the meaning of those words is not determined by lexicons only. New Testament terms are used in Old Testament sense. They are borrowed, not from classical authors but from ancient prophets and Psalmists. The very terms and ideas are wholly foreign to pagan literature and are strictly theological. They teach a religion which has its own nomenclature.” In sum, Medley maintained that men “cannot be properly selected as translators who deny the fundamental Faith taught by the Church and confirmed by Scripture.”¹⁵

The Charge of 1874

Medley’s 1874 Charge was a short and reflective document, a mere fourteen pages in length. By contrast, his charge of 1871 was twenty-seven pages long while that of 1868 was fully forty-seven pages in length. The 1874 Charge is mostly a reflection upon what, by that point, was an episcopate of almost thirty years duration in New Brunswick. Medley reviewed what he had found in 1845 and what had been done in light of the challenges encountered at the outset of his episcopal ministry.

In 1845, Medley arrived in a colony populated by people who originated either in France, Ireland or England and who were either “Roman Catholic or Presbyterians, two bodies irreconcilably opposed ... (to) our Church.” In addition, there were “a considerable number of Baptists and Independents.” Another problem had been that “Episcopal functions had been discharged by a very active and energetic Bishop, [John Inglis, whose] residence in another Province, and the impossibility of his attending to our wants before he had satisfied the wants of those nearest to him were hindrances to our advance.”¹⁶ Medley, whose clergy numbered less than thirty at the time, aided by the SPG, filled twelve vacancies immediately. He characterized the challenge of clerical supply throughout his episcopacy as a struggle “between a deficiency of men, when the means were forthcoming and a deficiency of means, where the men were to be found.” Medley tellingly added, “I have received numerous offers from England, which, for various causes, I felt obliged, reluctantly, to reject.”

¹⁵ Ibid., 20.

¹⁶ Medley, 1874 Charge, 4.

Medley next passed to a consideration of the Diocesan Church Society — an institution in existence upon his arrival and one which he deemed “a handmaid of the church.” Medley further characterized the DCS as “tolerant and liberal” meaning that when it came to supporting a cleric “it does not demand any particular views other than the broad comprehensive basis of the Church of England.”¹⁷ Upon his arrival, eighteen parishes belonged to and subscribed to the DCS, but only one Saint John-based parish participated. Annual income stood at approximately \$1,000.00. Thirty years later the amount had nearly increased forty-two times. The involvement of the wealthy Saint John parishes making a significant difference.

With respect to fabric, Medley reported, “The number of churches and chapels built, or rebuilt, or greatly improved and enlarged, amounts, I believe to 78, and there are not more than four (I think) in which special improvement has not taken place, in some cases, almost entirely by the aid of parishioners, in none without that aid.” St Peter’s Springhill would have been included under the heading of “greatly improved and enlarged.” Medley also mentioned the “erection of the parish church and the cathedral in Fredericton.” He was especially pleased with “the larger practical use ... made ... of the cathedral.” As he proudly reported, since 1845, “It has always been used for Divine service every day, and often twice in a day. The Holy Communion begun on St Barnabas day 1845, the day after I entered Fredericton, has never been omitted on the festivals appointed by the Church; (and) a weekly communion was begun in this Church.”¹⁸

Medley, as a Christian and a bishop, was acutely aware of the surpassing importance of the overtly spiritual life and the difficulty of measuring, in quantifiable terms, spiritual progress. He noted, “I have purposely abstained from such an attempt, because the result is not I believe to be measured by man. Love of God and love of neighbor are scriptural proofs of a lively faith in our Lord, but to count and measure such proofs as we take account of ordinary numbers, is in my judgement impossible; and presumptuous, if it should seem possible.” He did add however that people supported more clergy in order to gain spiritual benefits from them and “churches are only multiplied and enlarged in order that God may be worshiped more frequently and by larger numbers within them.” Medley observed that “even the adornment of churches manifests that loving care and tenderness which proceed from reverence towards God, faith in His promises and love towards our fellow Christians.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid., 5.

¹⁸ Ibid., 7.

¹⁹ Ibid., 10.

Finally, Medley made a revealing comment about the reality of colonial New Brunswick: a missionary's life involved "continuous labour, ... scanty remuneration, ... many difficulties and discouragements," but "because hardness is so much a part of our ordinary life, we do not go out of our way to record it." Perhaps thinking of Bishop Field in Newfoundland or Bishop George A. Selwyn in New Zealand, Medley noted that ministry in New Brunswick offered "very little of the material which enables writers to make the thrilling narratives of hair breadth escapes from ship wreck, storms or other dangers." In this regard it should be noted that engaging biographies of both Field and Selwyn were published before the end of the 1870s. To conclude, Medley observed, "if the absence of the romance of missionary work prejudices us in the eyes of some of our friends at home, and the Diocese is passed over in a few scanty lines, we have the blessed satisfaction of knowing that no work humbly and earnestly done for the love of Christ is unknown to our blessed master, nor will be unappreciated by Him."

However true this sentiment expressed by Bishop Medley may be, it remains a fact that the story of Medley's diocese and the achievements of his episcopate are little known outside the limited and shrinking confines of the Church in his adopted province. Until Dr Craig's study of 2005, the only biography of Bishop Medley was that of William Q. Ketchum published in 1893. By contrast, Bishop Selwyn has generated fully four biographies — two in the nineteenth century and two in the twentieth. There was also a collection of scholarly essays regarding aspects of Selwyn's episcopate published in 1983. In comparison, Bishop Medley has received scant attention outside the confines of his adopted province. Medley can perhaps be forgiven for his expression of mild frustration with his and the diocese's "friends" in late Victorian England. The aging bishop of Fredericton had indeed hit upon an issue which has not gone away — the general ignorance of the sacrifices, accomplishment and importance of Medley and his clergy and laity in the history of the colonial Victorian Anglican Church.