

Session IV

Bishop Medley's Closing Years and the Charges of 1880, 1883 and 1886

In 1879 Medley of Fredericton was elected Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada — a post he would hold until his death in 1892. As well as honors coming his way, the last full decade of Medley's life was a time when old challenges for his church in the diocese persisted at the same time as notable changes began to emerge. The difficulties of frontier ministry in a resource-based colonial economy persisted. On the other hand, the role of Christianity within late Victorian society both in New Brunswick and at the center of the British Empire was evolving. Medley's episcopate was sufficiently lengthy for the man to experience first-hand the germination of matters which would challenge his church in the coming decades and indeed throughout the coming century.

The Charge of 1880

Medley began his 1880 Charge characteristically with a call to holiness. What was noticeably different was the context. Times had changed and the obstacles to Christian holiness had evolved with them. Also of note is the distinct possibility that his words are to be understood as a reflection on the American experience. Medley's earlier praise of the church in the Republic to the south had become, by the 1880s, more nuanced and decidedly qualified. He stated, "of all notes of a standing and progressive church, the holiness of its members is the most important." He cautioned however, "the more ample our endowments, the more abundant our individual wealth, the larger our numbers, the more conspicuous our stations, the worse we are if we are unholy." He added, "it must be admitted that the tendency of all things around us is to forget this truth."¹ On the contrary "wealth is the universal measure of good things. Wealth is the secret of power in the Church and in the State. To gain it appears to many to be the sum total of human happiness. To lose it seems to lose all that makes life worth having." While this attitude of increased worldliness existed in New Brunswick, its manifestations certainly did not predominate — Medley was clearly referencing what he had seen elsewhere.

The changing times had also produced a new sort of popular cleric, one Medley characterized as lacking in the necessary virtue of "quietness." He explained, "The mechanical inventions of modern religionism are so complicated and its demands so incessant and imperious, that a clergyman in the full tide of popularity seems deprived of time for reflection, study and meditation. Hurried from platform to platform, incessantly framing motions and contriving constitutions, soliciting new speeches or delivering them himself, he is in danger of becoming a talking machine, suddenly set in motion, without control, direction or profitable result."² Again while unlikely to have been the case in Medley's New Brunswick, the bishop

¹ *Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese of Fredericton delivered at his Visitation, held on June 30, 1880 by John (Medley), Lord Bishop of Fredericton and Metropolitan of Canada*, (Saint John: Steam Job Print, Canterbury St., 1880), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

appears to have encountered just such a clerical creature in his travels. He was clear as to the dangers, especially for the inner, spiritual life, such busyness entailed. It is also clear that Medley had lived long enough to see the need for some qualification to his earlier, much used phrase of “usefulness” to describe the successful Christian life of service. One also wonders if the bishop reflected upon the fact how the move towards synodical church governance structures increased the opportunities for such motion-making and speech delivering?

Of familiar themes in his recent Charges, Medley was again obliged in 1880 to mention the death of several venerable colleagues. Rev Christopher Milner died at the great age of 91, Rev Abraham Wood at 87 and N. Allan Coster at 80 years of age. As well, three men ordained by Medley had also died; John Frederic Carr, C. G. Coster and Edward S. Woodman. Another familiar theme was that of tightening finances. As Medley phrased it, “A great financial crisis is now passing over our church.” Despite the “liberal legacies of a few churchmen ... we have lost and are still losing a good part of the annual donations of the Society (SPG) at home.” This at a time when “we have greatly enlarged the sphere of our work and the number of our workers.”³ Despite suggestions to the contrary, Medley was very clear that “our retrenchments should not begin with the ‘new and poor missions’ to aid which our Society (DCS) was founded, but with old and able missions planted thirty, forty or fifty years ago.”⁴ On a positive front, Medley again expressed his thankfulness for the “loving zeal and earnestness with which both clergy and laity have prompted and seconded my imperfect efforts to serve them.” Furthermore, “it is also a subject of congratulation that more young men, natives of the province, are devoting themselves to the work of the ministry.” Perhaps more striking was Medley’s observation that within the diocese, “the spirit of malevolent suspicion and perpetual insinuation of ignorance and faithlessness has been put down and received a severe check.” In its place he noted “that there has grown up among us gradually, in the course of years, a better general understanding of each other’s intentions, (and) a hearty and fraternal concord.”⁵

As for pastoral matters, Medley’s 1880 Charge touched on two that were of perennial interest and applicability: confirmation and Sunday school. Regarding confirmation, the bishop noted that while preparation beforehand is necessary “it is sometimes forgotten that the real work is after confirmation.” Medley was clear that “it is then that the most dangerous time of a young persons life begins; when the heart, susceptible of good or bad influences ... is sure to meet with counter-acting influences, with ridicule (and) with temptation in one or more of its varied forms.” Medley urged his clergy to commence “communicants classes” where “good habits may be formed and strengthened” and the pastor “looked upon not as a mere preacher, but as a guide and director, to assist the conscience in forming correct and godly determinations.” The good habits required included “daily prayer, strict honesty, temperance and chastity, constant communion (Christian fellowship) and ... early Communion.(Holy Communion)”⁶

³ Ibid., 7.

⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁶ Ibid., 7.

As for Sunday School, Medley identified three evils: “first, the danger of leading parents to suppose that Sunday School absolves them from their responsibility to teach their own children.” Secondly, that for their part, “the children should imagine that religion is only to last until they are grown up” and thirdly, “that many children who go to Sunday school never go to Church.” As for the last problem, Medley was sympathetic to the plight of children who after attending Sunday school were then expected to attend church for an hour and a half afterwards. What was worse, this experience included a sermon that was “both wearisome and useless to them, for they do not understand it.” Medley encouraged the recent development of children’s services crafted from material found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. These services were to be of twenty minutes duration including at least ten minutes of instruction. As for Sunday school teachers, Medley knew of the difficulties in that area as well. He admitted the challenges in obtaining teachers, but added that it was “even more necessary to teach the teachers than the children.” While older, more mature persons, were hesitant to offer themselves and showed little interest in other people’s children, the young inexperienced persons who offered to teach were often accepted “because there is no one else to be had.” Nonetheless, Medley insisted that in a church Sunday school no one should teach, especially the older children “who is not baptized, confirmed and a communicant (or) who objects to the use of the Church catechism.” As for knowledge, Medley thought “a person who is very ignorant of the Bible and the Prayer Book is of no value as a teacher.”⁷ As for pastoral concern, Medley urged that “it is especially necessary ... that the teacher should always visit the parents during the week if one of the class be absent on Sunday (and)... this is doubly needful when the little one is sick.”⁸

Bishop Medley devoted the last six pages of his seventeen page 1880 Charge to what he considered to be a most pressing and dangerous development — the proposed legalization, by the Dominion Parliament, of marriage to a “deceased wife’s sister” and even to “the brother of a deceased husband.”⁹ Medley was scandalized. Parliament at home and in the new Dominion was considering legislation without consultation or reference to the church’s theology or position. He began by arguing that “every one must see the necessity of some restraint on human passion in regard to marriage, for where no law existed in old times, mankind invariably ran into the most revolting excesses.” Referencing Scripture, Medley quoted, “They took them wives of all which they chose, not only as many as they chose, but without any restraint in respect to affinity or consanguinity.” Medley reasoned that to counteract this tendency God, through Moses, issued limitations on who one could marry and he referenced Leviticus chapter 18. Medley pointed out that “it is evidently governed by the principle which the Lord lays down as the true foundation of the marriage relation that man and wife become one flesh, and consequently all the blood relationships which would be forbidden are equally unlawful after marriage to relations by affinity.”¹⁰

⁷ Ibid.,9.

⁸ Ibid.,10.

⁹ Ibid.,11.

¹⁰ Ibid.,12.

Medley reasoned that Judaism was an advance over the excesses of heathenism, but even under the old covenant, “polygamy ... and an easy system of divorce, were tolerated among the Jews because of ‘the hardness of men’s hearts.’” However, stressing the difference between the old and the new, Medley pointedly stated that “the Christian system supposes a higher power of self-restraint, and therefore demands a higher, not a lower code of morals.” What Medley saw in the proposed changes was nothing less than “the word of God being entirely thrown aside as the true basis of sound legislation in religious matters.”¹¹

As for the argument being forwarded that “marriage is simply a civil contract” and thus not a religious matter at all, Medley roundly disagreed. He maintained that for Christians of any stripe, and for Anglicans in particular, not only did biblical principles apply, but the preface to the marriage service of the Prayer Book taught that marriage was “a solemn, religious obligation.” What was more, the Table of Affinity in the Prayer Book was not simply a period piece and the product of Archbishop Parker’s mind, but represented what “had always been held unlawful by the Church of England and for fifteen centuries such marriages were held unlawful in the Church at large.”¹² In sum, Medley held that “the transgression of the Divine Law always proceeds in a downward course and never ascends to the source of all purity, to Him who says, ‘be ye holy, for I am holy.’” We see here perhaps another reason why holiness of the individual Christian was so much on the mind of Fredericton’s bishop in 1880. In the end, Medley of Fredericton urged strong action — public non-compliance with the proposed new law. If passed he stated to his clergy, “you are to decline to solemnize such marriages ... you are to be guardians and defenders, not betrayers of public morals.” The basis of Medley’s concern was not late Victorian morality however construed at the time or subsequently, but a clear matter of loyalty and devotion. “If the State relax its obligations and pronounces marriage a civil contract only, the Divine Law and the law of our Church is still binding on you.”¹³ His clergy were to answer to a higher authority than the Dominion Parliament. For Medley of Fredericton, the Law of God trumped the law of man.

The Charges of 1883 and 1886

Although Medley was able to attend the third Lambeth Conference of 1888, he was too infirm to deliver Charges to his clergy in either 1889 or 1892. In 1889 his son Charles died and the bishop took this loss especially hard. Later that year he fell on the ice and injured his right hand and arm. Medley responded by teaching himself to write with his left hand. Although noticeably slowing, the following year he nonetheless traveled 282 miles on a confirmation tour of his beloved diocese. He continued to lead worship, preach and confirm throughout 1891. On February 23, 1892 Medley sent a pastoral letter throughout the diocese informing everyone that he was no longer able to “undertake the laborious journeys which, up to a later period, God gave

¹¹ Ibid.,13.

¹² Ibid., 15.

¹³ Ibid.,17.

me the strength to perform.”¹⁴ While managing to travel the sixty miles to Saint John that July to preach, Medley entered his final illness in August and died on September 9, 1892. He had been bishop of Fredericton for forty-seven years.

At Lambeth 1888, Medley, then eighty-four, was noticeably quieter during the debates than he had been in 1878. In January 1876, Medley had written an acceptance letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury’s invitation to the Conference. Not surprisingly, fully four out of the seven topics mentioned for possible consideration by Medley were issues related to marriage. These were; (1), a discussion of the ‘Table of Degrees’ of consanguinity and affinity found in the Prayer Book and its reaffirmation, (2), the duty of the Church towards a divorced person, being innocent of adultery, and towards the guilty person so divorced, (3), whether persons not originally in our communion, who have contracted unlawful marriages in ignorance, the communion to which they were attached, claiming such marriages perfectly lawful, (the person concerned) may, after some years of co-habitation, be allowed, on their repentance of their unknown error, to be admitted to confirmation and Holy Communion, and, finally, (4), respecting missionaries encountering polygamists, whether on conversion to Christianity, they must put away all wives, but one, on pain of being refused Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.¹⁵ During his 1888 trip to England for Lambeth Medley received honorary D.D’s from both Cambridge and Durham and preached at the parishes of his sons, John and Edward. He was the guest of Bishop Woodsworth of Salisbury, preached in his old parish of St Thomas, Southleigh and at St Augustine’s College Canterbury where so many of his diocese’s English-born clergy had been educated.

¹⁴ Craig, **Apostle**, 68.

¹⁵ Lambeth Conference Papers: 25, Medley to ABC Tait, Jan. 20, 1887.

Medley's Charge of 1883, extant only in abridged form in Ketchum's 1893 biography, commenced with a strong note of thankfulness to God for his continued health. Medley commented, "I do not know where a bishop can be so happy, as well as so useful, as in continuing to work with those who have been admitted by him to the ministry, and have been trained up under his own fostering care."¹⁶ Medley again mentioned the nature of the times which had changed not for the better. "With every desire to believe and hope the best of all, we can hardly fail to see a lamentable want of faith in Apostolic doctrine everywhere prevailing. There is a vague reception of one or two parts of Christianity, soothing to the ill-informed and half-awakened conscience; the rest of its teaching is denied or neglected." As for specifics, "the necessity and efficacy of Christ's sacraments are surrendered ... by some the Atonement and Deity of our Blessed Lord rejected."

Perhaps Medley's remarks regarding the sacraments are best to be understood in relation to the Cummins schism which had moved into New Brunswick the previous decade. To recap, George David Cummins (1822-1876) had been assistant bishop of Kentucky and had attended the original Lambeth Conference of 1867. In 1873, Cummins left the Episcopal church to form the Reformed Episcopal Church (REC) of the USA. A strong evangelical in disposition, Cummins had fought to impede the progress of Oxford Movement thinking and practice within the American Church. Discouraged by Tractarian success, and disheartened at efforts to impede it, he left to form a purer, explicitly Protestant Episcopal Church. At the Lambeth Conference of 1878 Medley admitted that the movement was present in his diocese but rejoiced in his 1877 Charge that "I am grateful to you for satisfying my expectation, that you would give no countenance to this attempt to rend the Church. You have all stood firm in your recorded vows, and you have carried with you the most esteemed and intelligent of the laity."¹⁷ In America, REC's Protestantism led it to deny baptismal regeneration, the apostolic succession of bishops, the Real Presence of Christ at the Eucharist and the move to replace the term 'priest' with that of 'minister/presbyter' in their revised Prayer Book.¹⁸

It is noteworthy that Medley did not say all the laity of the diocese had withstood the draw of the schism for he did write "we have suffered from" it. In his 1883 Charge, Medley spoke of "mourning over some sad instances of declension" among the laity although there is no evidence that any of his clergy left for the REC. REC parishes did however materialize. Saint Paul's REC in Moncton was founded in January 1874, followed closely by Saint John's in

¹⁶ Medley, Charge of 1886 in William Quintard Ketchum, **The Life and Work of the Most Reverend John Medley, D.D. First Bishop of Fredericton and Metropolitan of Canada** (Saint John: J & A McMillan, 1893), 260.

¹⁷ *A Charge delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Fredericton in the Cathedral, on Tuesday, July 3, 1877 by John (Medley), Bishop of Fredericton*, (Fredericton: H.A. Cropley, 1877), 8.

¹⁸ I am indebted to Twila Buttimer of PANB for bringing to my attention the presence and importance of the Reformed Episcopal Church in New Brunswick. Her 1997 paper, "Reformed Episcopal Churches in New Brunswick," given at that year's "Church History Workshop" is most useful.

Sussex Corner in May 1874 and Zion REC of Portland (Saint John) in October of the same year. These missions sprang up as a result of the zealous work of a Rev William Feltwell sent to New Brunswick by Bishop Cummins at the request of the disenchanted churchmen of Moncton. There were also brief appearances of REC churches at Chatham (1877) and Bathurst, (1878). In the case of Sussex, those who left the Church of England were upset at their rector, Medley's son, Charles. His churchmanship, combined with internal parish bickering over the construction of a new church building, all contributed to the unhappiness. Perhaps Medley's reference to being ill-treated are to be understood in light of Reformed Episcopal Church slanders towards high-church or Tractarian emphases. The standard explanation given by individuals for joining the REC was that they were "driven thereto by arbitrary ecclesiastical authority, attempting to force upon an unwilling people a minister of so-called Ritualistic proclivities."¹⁹ Medley noted in his Charge that there was little really to complain of if our "severest trial only expose us to unjust accusations, bitter and reproachful names, unworthy motives foolishly imputed, and incessant abuse of the conscientious practice of what we have vowed to perform."²⁰

Medley's 1886 Charge concluded with a similar note, he wrote, "As bishop of the diocese I only claim what seems to me to be an essential part of the Episcopal office; to mediate between conflicting opinions and to give complete toleration and support to all that may fairly be considered as within the limits of the Church in the Province of New Brunswick." Medley stressed again that "our best security is that charitable construction of the actions and motives of others which each man unquestionably desires to be practiced towards himself."²¹ Summarizing his approach, Medley noted that "a bishop can only be useful when he acts, not as an autocrat over his clergy, but as their fellow-laborer, in concert with them in the duties of their common calling."²²

To this end, Medley's last Charge, as well as containing familiar references to Sunday School, confirmation, the DCS, and the increased role of the laity also contained a great deal of counsel for his younger clergy. Concerning finances and clerical pay, Medley stated, "to the younger clergy, I unhesitatingly say, it is your duty not to marry until from your own income you have laid by something towards the maintenance of your household and the comfort of those who reasonably look to you for comfort." As with his concern for the youth of the city of Saint John following the great fire of 1877 so too with regard to his clergy, Medley's reasoning was clear, "debt is demoralizing as well as depressing."²³

¹⁹ Moncton, *Times*, January 19, 1882 obit of John Elliot former warden of St George's.

²⁰ Medley, 1883 Charge, 262.

²¹ *A Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese of Fredericton: John (Medley), Bishop of Fredericton and Metropolitan of Canada, Triennial Visitation, St Peter's Day* (Saint John: Peter Robertson & Co., 1886), 12.

²² *Ibid.*, 11.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

In his last Charge, Medley commented on the high calling of the priesthood and stressed that “the priest’s lips should keep knowledge.” What he meant was that times had changed from his early days in the diocese and the challenges in presenting the Gospel had become ever greater. A simple, plain cleric was no longer sufficient to the task nor were the people any longer willing to be content with simple teaching. As Medley pointed out, the spirit of the age was such that “Everything is called in question, and the whole world is turned loose to inquire, to agitate, to debate, to applaud or to condemn.”²⁴ A priest must know his Prayer Book but especially his Bible. Medley however advised caution. “How careful should we be that in answering the objections of the scoffer we do not insist on unwise and traditional interpretations of Holy Scripture which the text does not contain.” By contrast, “What deep knowledge is required in explaining the history and unfolding the meaning of those ancient creeds, whose root is in the Scripture, whose accuracy of definition was obtained by men deeply learned in the Bible truth, who were not only defenders of the Faith, but suffers on account of their maintenance of it.”²⁵

As in his call for holiness in a busy and more affluent age, so too with respect to his clergy’s knowledge and presentation of the Gospel, Medley lived to see what might be termed the dawn of the twentieth century. Not only in the erosion of the Church’s confidence in Scripture and the accompanying undermining of doctrinal clarity, but also in matters of what he termed public morality, Medley lived to witness the beginning of significant change. To cite only one example, in his final Charge, the bishop cited instances of marriages where “crowds of irreverent gazers” had gathered “bent on nothing but criticism on the dress.” Even New Brunswick was changing, and changing before the aging and ailing eyes of the province’s first resident Anglican bishop. And all changes were not for the better.

²⁴ Ibid., 7.

²⁵ Ibid., 8.