

### Session III

#### The 1850s : Medley's Charges of 1856 and 1859

By the time of his 1856 Charge, Bishop John Medley had been in his see for over ten years. If he ever enjoyed a 'honeymoon' period in his early episcopate it had long since passed. The full weight of his responsibilities and the range of obstacles, human, natural and economic which faced the Church of England in mid-century New Brunswick were all clearly before him at this time. The range of challenges, from frontier economic depression to attitudes towards education in a predominately subsistence economy are all reflected in his Charges of this period.

In his 1856 Charge, Medley had three major areas of concern. The issues were education, both rudimentary and higher; the maintenance of the clergy of the diocese in face of the impending withdrawal of SPG funds and the related vexed question of local church government in the form of a possible synod.

Regarding education, Medley lamented the prevalent attitude which sought to separate the education of the individual from its traditional religious foundation in an effort to create a solely secular educational system. He noted, "secular knowledge alone might be useful if there were no future life, and no Christianity to direct our way thither; but to educate the child in what only fits him for this world, and leave the man to feel or grope his way after knowledge of the next world, is neither scriptural nor reasonable, and is opposed to all human experience."<sup>1</sup> As for the suggestion that parents handle the religious instruction of their progeny, Medley pointed out that this would leave the teacher doing only half a job and place a great responsibility solely upon the parents. What is more, children pay a great deal of attention to what they see actually done as opposed to what is said and if, in their teachers, "an entire silence be preserved on a subject so weighty and necessary, the effect produced will likely be that of indifference." To Medley's view, religion was to permeate life much as salt seasons food, "it dictates daily worship of the Almighty, it sanctifies every ordinary meal, it restrains us from excess, it inspires us with tenderness to our fellow students, it supplies us with proper motives to diligent exertion." The last mentioned motive is of special note in our day when explicit references to Christian faith are forbidden in public education and we resort to teaching morality or virtues divorced entirely from their grounding in faith. The question necessarily arises in the student's mind as to why; why behave in this manner? What is the grounding of all this 'good' behavior? What makes it 'good' and what makes 'good' desirable? What if I do not feel like being good?

As for higher education in New Brunswick, Medley lamented that "it is particularly unfortunate for New Brunswick that when so much political power has been placed in the hands of multitudes which are not educated, or only half-educated, there is not a sufficient body of men of thorough education to point out to many well-meaning, but most mistaken people, what the necessities and requirements of the country really are, and to shew them, that there never was a country, in which it was more imperatively necessary that the higher branches of learning should be taught." Medley worried aloud that people of talent and ability would leave for the United States where such an education could be found and that the attitude in the province was not conducive towards such persons remaining. He summarized their position saying, "it is too much to require of any man that he should remain for life in a place where he can never hope to meet with any fair encouragement or remuneration for his talents, and where the pursuits which are liberally rewarded in every other part of the civilized world meet with nothing but coarse abuse

and incessant depreciation.”<sup>2</sup>

As for the reform of the college in Fredericton, a topic of much discussion at the time, Medley lamented that it had been “attacked and depreciated ever since its formation with the most persevering industry, reformed, and re-reformed, yet still an object of relentless hostility, and faint support.” He doubted if further reform would produce more students. Of the actual population of the province farmers formed the majority and they were unlikely to send their sons to the institution, merchants wanted their sons straight out of school for desk work and lawyers “find their profession over-stocked.” He held it was “delusive and mischievous to encourage the expectation of a vast influx of students as an effect of a change in the constitution of the college.”<sup>3</sup> As for the religious dimension of the issue, the majority denomination of Roman Catholics were “never likely” to attend, the main non-Catholic body, the Baptists, were “partially provided” with an institution to suit their needs, the Wesleyans had their own “academy” and the Presbyterians had lately incorporated a “college” – in essence, where were the new students to come from? Medley highlighted the apparent contradiction between the independent action of all these groups with the call for “divesting the institution of what is called ‘a sectarian character.’” He argued that sectarian in this context meant “nothing more or less than a firm definite faith in something, believed to be true.” He argued that such a scheme “has prevented, and will prevent any party from taking a lively interest in (the college’s) welfare.”<sup>4</sup> Medley further cautioned that with respect to the dollar value utility of any college, “I do not think that knowledge, under any circumstances, is fairly appreciated by a money-value. Knowledge is not to be bought in the market, but is the result of labor and research judiciously guided, and a little sound knowledge is worth a great deal of money.”<sup>5</sup> How very relevant to contemporary debates as to the future of higher education in Atlantic Canada the bishop’s words are. If the only use and value of education is to be found in its immediate practical application then there are many faculties in our institutions which can be closed down immediately.

The usefulness of higher education was not the only topic pressing on the bishop’s mind in 1856. The issue of the ongoing fiscal viability of the Church in New Brunswick also concerned the prelate. He noted that New Brunswick had more churchmen and clerics than the three neighboring states of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont combined, although those three states had five times the population of the colony. New Brunswick’s bounty was one owing almost entirely to the SPG and he further noted that in the Republic, “the voluntary system does not enable them to overcome the many difficulties by which they are surrounded.”<sup>6</sup> Medley noted the challenge in the colony that the clergy faced where roughly 1/5 of their annual salary, provided in most cases by the SPG, went towards upkeep of a horse with all its related expenses. Without the SPG aid, the horse could not be kept, the clergyman could not visit and the missions would suffer accordingly. The SPG had warned that due to the demands on their limited resources they intended to cut back on three fronts. First, to suspend divinity student grants, secondly to grant aid to no new missions and thirdly to cease support of a cleric in a mission when that cleric either moved or died. In response, Medley again urged the establishment of a diocesan Fund of approximately £ 70,000 from which interest would be used annually for the support of the clergy in lieu of the SPG grants.

The possible establishment of such a fund with the related issue of its administration led the bishop to a consideration of the “somewhat vexed question of a synod or convention.”<sup>7</sup> He prefaced his remarks with the observation, similar to what he had stated three years previously, that “I am quite prepared to admit the uselessness of any such assembly, unless it were adopted

with general consent of the church; and I can imagine no bishop so regardless of his own peace, as to wish to force on a reluctant community what they were disposed to resist.” Medley’s concern however at this juncture was a very practical one, the matter of clerical discipline. While the church was “amply supplied with standards of doctrine...some canonical and legitimate mode of proceeding to the trial of offenses of a grave nature, by whomsoever committed, should be established in the church by the consent of all parties concerned, in person or by their representatives.” Medley argued that “such a code of Church law would be one use of a Synod.”<sup>8</sup> He assured his audience that offences would “not be differences of opinion, tolerated by the general usage of the Church, but crimes known and recognized as such by the laws of God and man; gross neglect of duty, or public scandals and offences against the society to which we belong.”

That there had been public discussion of a possible synod is clear from Medley addressing another objection, namely, “that synods would be the mere reflections of the opinions of the Bishop.” Medley noted that the proper exercise of episcopal authority would be by its very nature “simply conservative, and opposed to alteration and change, which would give time for consideration.” He also noted that on any weighty matter “each order” of the Church, that is, bishop, clergy and laity, would have its say. As for a possible episcopal veto, while not declining such an expedient, Medley simply noted that where he already had such power, namely in the DCS, he was unaware of “any measures adverse to the liberties of the clergy or laity have ever been carried.”<sup>9</sup>

Coming to the real worry voiced by opponents of synodical government Medley addressed the subject of doctrinal change. He stressed that, “apart from other considerations, this reason for the prohibition appears to be sufficient, that we are an integral, but very small part of the Church of England, and that no alteration can take place in the formularies of that Church without the solemn consent of all the parties who originally framed those standards.” Due to the tone of the times he held “it is not only not desirable to alter them, but I think not desirable for us to discuss their alteration.”<sup>10</sup> Medley words then verged on the prophetic. He suggested with respect to opening old debates which had been discussed heatedly in the previous three centuries that to do so “in the present state of the public mind, and of the press, would, it seems to me, be absolutely suicidal.” He continued, “the very form of discussion which the controversy would assume, in endless pamphlets, newspaper articles, accusations and recriminations, is frightful to think of; and I cannot imagine any man, not bent on the destruction of the Church of England, lending himself at the present time to promote the reconstruction of her formularies.” He concluded, “what peace or comfort could any of us expect for the rest of our lives, if all the questions connected with our Prayer Book; involving every point on which we are at issue either with the Church of Rome, or with the Dissenters, were thrown once into universal discussion? Nay the loss of our own peace and comfort is the least of all the evils we might expect from such an unhappy conjecture, and in my opinion, it would be next to impossible to prevent an extensive schism in some form or other.”<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly Medley did devote sometime to the charges leveled against the Prayer Book in New Brunswick of the 1850s. First, the typical morning service was too long. Medley responded, “two hours is (after all) not an unreasonably long time to spend in the service of our Maker at one time.” Services moreover at the Cathedral were not so long for there “the whole service occupies just one hour and three quarters, the afternoon service about an hour and a quarter, or even less, and the evening service an hour and a half.”<sup>12</sup> The good bishop kindly

added, “where there are three sermons preached in one day, it is not only very possible, but most desirable to abridge the length of the sermon.” The reason being, “very few persons pay fixed attention to an ordinary discourse which exceeds in length half an hour, all beyond it is waste time and labor.”<sup>13</sup>

It appears from Medley’s words that not only was Prayer Book revision being spoken of but also “reconstruction of the Bible.” He maintained that “these are not the men nor are these the times which warrant a new translation.” Medley was no conservative reactionary though nor an opposer of common sense change. He knew rather how such matters would actually be handled. First, he was wary of who was advocating for biblical revision. For “German skeptics and English unitarians” revisions would prove “a tempting opportunity for an alteration of doctrine; and what incalculable loss should we suffer if questions respecting the divinity of Christ, and the atonement by his death, are to be carried by Parliamentary majorities?” Medley’s words again approached the prophetic when he mused that such revision “would end in a separate translation by every sect, so that what is now a common bond of union, so far as it goes, would then be a watchword of incurable and interminable controversy.”<sup>14</sup>

### **The Charge of 1859**

The backdrop of Medley’s 1859 Charge was not promising. The colony was experiencing a commercial crisis, issues of unity still prevailed amongst the clergy and laity and the beloved Archdeacon, F. Coster, for so many years, rector of Fredericton, had died. The bishop described the period as a time of “particular anxiety” and “a trial which is likely to be prolonged for several years.”<sup>15</sup> Statistically the Church of England continued to soldier on in the colony. In the previous three years Medley had confirmed 1,333 persons, visited every mission and most of the stations in the colony. He had ordained twelve priests and ten deacons, consecrated six churches and four burial grounds. Admitting that the number of new churches was down he when on to own that “we have already more churches than the clergy can properly supply.”<sup>16</sup> Given that in many situations the clergy traveled extensively on a service circuit Medley advised his clergy to publish, a year in advance, their planned service schedule for all to see.

On another practical note, the bishop addressed two evils in connection with the practice of confirmation in his diocese. First, with respect to those the clergy prepared to receive the rite, “the discharging of this duty hastily, superficially, and with more regard to numbers than ... to an intelligent, serious and holy engagement on the part of the candidates themselves.” Secondly, with respect to diligent preparation, Medley advised his clergy “not to exact from them too much.”<sup>17</sup> Medley reminded his clergy, “they are, for the most part, young and inexperienced, (thus) ... professions of religious experience, and of the dealings of God with their souls, are not to be trusted.” Furthermore, with respect to holiness of life, the good bishop reminded his clergy, “we cannot expect them to forego those recreations and amusements, in which their elders and betters have always (as they suppose) innocently enjoyed.” In short, “the rein cannot be drawn too tightly without danger of a reaction.” As Medley correctly observed, “the great problem to be solved is, how to use all God’s gifts without abusing them.” To note only one example, “dancing ... is in itself no worse than, running, playing at chess, or any other game of chance or skill, though, like all other recreations it is easily capable of abuse. What is really objectionable is the unrestrained indulgence which sometimes accompanies it.” Medley prudently feared that “if we exacted from every young person a pledge of abstinence from all such recreations, we should, if we could carry

our point, only foster a morbid state of mind, or surround ourselves with persons who would deceive us, or themselves, or both.”<sup>18</sup>

As for liturgical practices, Medley continued to urge his clergy not to marry or baptize in private houses unless forced to do so by pressing necessity, nor to omit parts of the marriage service, and to abstain from preaching at every funeral. Tellingly he also urged public posting of the Prayer Book’s Table of Affinity in each church so that “loose and irregular marriages may be prevented.”<sup>19</sup> Of particular concern to the bishop, and, revelatory of disagreements within the diocese, was the fact that the Cathedral congregation contributed over one quarter of the total funds given towards the DCS. This spoke very poorly of the colony’s commercial center, Saint John. Some parishes had given nothing, and “out of fifty clergy, of whom only six or seven were curates, the names of only twenty-one appeared” in the report.<sup>20</sup> There was clearly room for significant improvement.

Assessing the state of the Church in the colony, Medley had strong words to offer. As for establishment – “this expression has conferred on it very little, if any advantage (but) has exposed it to no small share of envy and obloquy.” In England, establishment meant something, specifically “tithes are paid for the support of the clergy, and rates levied for the repair of the fabric” and often the legacy of an endowment supported the parish church. In New Brunswick, Medley mused, “we have glebes, which yield little; churches without rates to maintain them; clergy without regular and systematic provision for their support; large territorial parishes more full of dissenters than churchmen; services required in more places than it is possible to visit; parishioner living at vast distances from each other; who ask for the same care, as if they were all gathered together comfortably and conveniently in one village (and) we have also a rigorous climate, and a long trying winter to contend with.”<sup>21</sup> What is more, Medley had been in his diocese long enough to appreciate that unlike in England, “every expense connected with the fabric, or the services of the church, falls upon the same persons, who are now called upon to support their own clergy.” This was a fact “that our brethren in England ... would do well to remember.”<sup>22</sup>

The withdrawal of much longstanding SPG aid was imminent and Medley reminded “all churchmen (to) consider what must follow the abandonment of any mission, if even a poor country mission.” In his moving analysis it would mean the following: “The church is closed. The parsonage is shut up. The usual regular round of services and sacraments is discontinued. The Sunday School no longer assemblies under the approving eye, and cheerful superintendence of its proper guide. The inspired word is no longer publically read. Irregular habits are formed. Prayer is neglected and the young begin to pass the Lord’s Day in listless idleness and dissipation; or if more serious, they often join another communion. Children die without baptism. Sufferers linger on in pining sickness, longing for the well-known footstep and familiar voice of their pastor, but no one comes to read and pray, and console them. Or if a visit is paid, a new system is to be learned, the Prayer Book is laid aside as useless, their baptism is disallowed, their whole mind is disquieted, and being assured that their life has been all wrong, and their convictions of truth an entire delusion, trembling on the verge of eternity, they renounce their baptism, swallow with credulity a new faith, wild with fear and excitement, and turn their backs on all that they have held dear in religion. Meanwhile, the Church or churches, to which they have all contributed, which the Societies at home have liberally aided, to which the parishioners have pointed with pleasure and with pride, as the fruit of their labours, fall into decay; the parsonage is occupied by others, the

whole parish is a moral ruin.”<sup>23</sup> In sum, the time of crisis had come and Medley bleakly pointed out what was at stake urging especially a positive duty “on the wealthy churchmen of New Brunswick.”<sup>24</sup>

Not only was there a financial crisis ongoing but also one of personnel. Medley admitted, “for the first time in my episcopate I am unable at present to fill the vacant missions for want of men.”<sup>25</sup> To those he did oversee he had words of advice on sermons. First, that the standard required had to be higher than before. The audience was overall better educated, some had access to volumes of good sermons and the diocesan clergy had to rise to the challenge. Secondly, “time given by our hearers to serious thought is after all very short,” so they had better make the best of the half hour accorded to listening to sermons. Thirdly, Medley urged the clergy to read the Greek of the New Testament lessons as an integral part of their sermon preparation. Finally, Medley urged, style did matter. “Living as we do so near the border land, where corruptions of every kind are found ... we must beware lest we fall unawares into common place vulgarity. He noted, “already, the occasional language even of public speakers defies all grammar, and belongs to no known tongue.”<sup>26</sup>

Two major matters remained to be covered in Medley’s 1859 Charge; clerical discipline and the issue of a local sect and of a Nova Scotian convert to Rome. Respecting clerical discipline, the bishop had had several recent cases which had caused him considerable “anxiety and pain.”<sup>27</sup> Medley had been criticized by some for being too harsh and by others for being too lax in his dealings with those concerned. He gave four principles by which he proceeded. First, it was not his task to seek out offenses or to procure evidence, this was the task of the lay officials in every parish. Secondly, he was duty bound not to receive any accusation unless in writing, signed and supported by credible evidence. Thirdly, if no charge was brought but an offender admitted to the facts, as bishop, Medley had to be allowed the autonomy to act as he saw fit for the best interests of the Church. Finally, he declared that he would deprive no cleric for a single offense unless that offense exhibited “a high degree of criminality” citing the principle that “everyone is entitled to the benefit of repentance and amendment of life.”<sup>28</sup>

Sadly, Medley reported that two clergy who had left the diocese had openly associated themselves with the Irvingite sect, originated by a Presbyterian, the Rev Edward Irving. Irving had, according to Medley, “imagined that it had pleased God to revive the miracle of Pentecost, by inspiring some of his followers to speak with new tongues.”<sup>29</sup> That certain adherents further claimed that God had re-opened the office of Apostle led Medley to correctly compare the sect to the Montanists of North Africa in Tertullian’s day, i.e, A.D. 200. The other situation was that of a cleric of Nova Scotia who left the church to join Rome and who had subsequently written several very heated polemical pamphlets defending his defection and attacking the Church of England. It was apparently the circulation of the pamphlets that led Medley to comment at length in his Charge on the issues raised. Medley highlighted inconsistencies in the Roman Catholic position, especially with respect to the much discussed concept of the Immaculate Conception of St Mary as well as the absence of biblical support for papal infallibility. Interestingly, Bishop Medley also noted<sup>30</sup> and publically thanked one of his clergy for writing and publishing a refutation of the Nova Scotian’s first pamphlet. The cleric who performed this service was Dr Gray of Trinity Church, Saint John, the leader of the evangelicals in the diocese and the publisher of the newspaper, *The Church Witness*, a publication which throughout the 1850’s had been and for the 1860s would continue to be, very critical of the bishop of Fredericton.

---

1. *A Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese, by John, Bishop of Fredericton, at his fourth Triennial Visitation, holden in Christ Church Cathedral, (Fredericton, John Simpson, 1856), 6.*

2. Ibid., 8.

3. Ibid., 9.

4. Ibid., 10.

5. Ibid., 11.

6. Ibid., 13.

7. Ibid., 16.

8. Ibid., 17.

9. Ibid., 18.

10. Ibid., 18.

11. Ibid., 18.

12. Ibid., 19.

13. Ibid., 20.

14. Ibid., 20.

15. *A Charge delivered in the Cathedral, Fredericton, on Thursday, September 1, 1859, to the Clergy of the Diocese and published at their Request, by John, Bishop of Fredericton, (Saint John, Barnes and Co., 1859),3.*

16. Ibid., 4.

17. Ibid., 6.

18. Ibid., 7.

19. Ibid., 8.

20. Ibid., 9.

---

21. Ibid., 11.

22. Ibid., 13.

23. Ibid., 14.

24. Ibid., 15.

25. Ibid., 16.

26. Ibid., 23.

27. Ibid., 23.

28. Ibid., 24.

29. Ibid., 25.

30. Ibid., 29 and 37.