

Session IV

The Charges of 1862, 1865 and the Address of 1866

Bishop John Medley's Charge of 1862 stands alone among his episcopal Charges in that it is concerned with one subject only, namely finances. Specifically the need for the Church of England in colonial New Brunswick to become self-sufficient financially in light of the continuing withdrawal of aid by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in London, England. The Charge also marks a development in Medley's approach as he strove to address the laity of the diocese through his episcopal Charge to the clergy. This is a tactic which he would continue in future charges especially as the topic of a possible synod was again breached in the decade of the 1860s.

Medley commenced his Charge with an apology; "if ... at the present moment, I depart from my usual course, neither you (the clergy) nor our lay brethren will, I suppose, think it is from any less weighty sense of our ministerial duties."¹ He began by reminding his audience that the SPG was an entirely voluntary body. Its funds were not realized from endowments but were primarily the result of collections made by the English clergy in their parishes. The Society was under no legal obligation to support any missionary in the colony and while they kept faith with those they supported, the Society had, as an institution, "made no permanent engagement with the Church as a body in this province." Medley noted that during his recent trip to the mother country he had personally witnessed collections being taken up among the English poor, including the very poor, who exhibited "evident signs of want and suffering." The experience produced "an exceeding sense of shame at being indebted to any such poor people for the smallest assistance." This sense was heightened by the realization that New Brunswick labourers and mechanics "receive far higher amounts of wages"² and the fruits of the earth with which they were rewarded were much more forthcoming in the colony than was the case in England.

Medley acknowledged the struggles of the provinces' farmers, who, even if the harvest was good, received their wages in kind and not in coin. He admitted that the entire colony was suffering as a result of the "fratricidal, unnatural and most unhappy war, now carrying on in the United States," notwithstanding, the emerging crisis had to be faced. He asked only that churchmen attain to the status "which Roman Catholics, which Presbyterians, which members of the Free Kirk of Scotland, and others have attained to," namely, "that of being independent of external aid for the maintenance of our clergy." The census noted 42,000 churchmen in the colony, could not, the bishop asked, this number provide a "bare subsistence for the clergy?" As Medley framed the issue, "we only ask that there should be clergy, that they should not be driven by sheer necessity, and amidst great suffering and privation, from the province, and we ask that they should be allowed to live in decency, and we ask this not for the sake of the clergy only but for the sake of the great mass of the laity, who otherwise will be left destitute of the means of grace." He continued, "we do not ask for worldly rank or pre-eminence, we are not lording it over others or establishing any precedent hurtful to the laity."³

As for who should give what towards the proposed endowment fund Medley laid down the principle that "the gift should bear some proportion to the sum received." First capitalists, who were characterized as possessing great wealth as a result of inheritance or large businesses,

especially those who made money from Crown lands - “ a considerable share belongs to them.” Next professional men and those holding public offices should give as they are able to above what is required to support their families. In this regard Medley noted that, as opposed to England, where professional men are called upon to support, “hospitals, dispensaries, institutions for the relief of the deaf, the blind, the lame, the consumptive, schools for the poor, and soup and coal charities” such was not the case in New Brunswick. The clear implication being that these professional men of the colony, not having the usual obligations that their English counterparts shared, had the means to support the endowment fund handsomely. Finally, Medley spoke of those he termed mechanics or artisans, whose English counterparts the bishop on his visit saw so cheerfully contributing to the SPG for the support of New Brunswickers and their children. In the colony they were better paid and generally “in more independent circumstances than the ordinary clergyman and ought not refuse his aid to the fund.” What is more, Medley had been informed, and he claimed “on reliable authority, one-half of the capital of the province, if we except the wages of labour, is in the hands of members of the Church of England.”⁴ Why, he asked rhetorically, were Churchmen in receipt of over ^4,000 annually from England when such was the case?

Medley closed his case and his Charge by addressing five objections which had been raised with respect to the proposed endowment fund. First, the argument that the present generation supported the Church in their time thus it would be an unreasonable release of future generations to establish a fund which would in effect absolve them of their responsibilities in their generation. In face of the ingenuity of this excuse Medley challenged it head-on asserting that “it is a glorious thing to work for posterity without consideration for the future.” Furthermore, Medley pointed out that all evidence pointed to the fact that the present generation was actually leaving posterity “a considerable burden.” Rather than doing their share in their generation it appeared that certain New Brunswickers were “without scruple ... taking the alms of poor domestics and laborers in England to spare our own pockets, whilst our merchants in past years have made enormous profits by their ventures in ships and lumbering operations.”

The second objection raised was that such a fund would render the clergy too independent - “ they will be arbitrary, violent, and capricious, and perhaps they will bring in Popery at last.” As Medley sarcastically retorted, “of all convenient excuses for not giving, this seems the strongest - that it is Popish.” Moreover, stating what should have been the obvious, Medley noted that no man or group of men could bring “Romanism into the Church of England, so long as the laity will allow our Liturgy (the *Prayer Book*), our Creeds, and our Articles to remain just as they are. Let the Church of England alone and she will continue to be what she has for three centuries been, a sturdy and manly protester against both Rome and Geneva; but alter the formularies and I do not pretend to say what she will be.”⁵

Thirdly, it had been asserted that the clergy were not worthy of such financial aid, some had been a discredit to the ministry and others a disgrace to the Church. Medley reminded all that the clergy as a group, “lay claim to no exemption from the faults of a common sinful nature. We are like others, poor sinners, whose hope lies in the mercy of God through the sacrifice of Christ our Lord.” He however took exception to any suggestion that he had been slack in the administration of clerical discipline when matters had been properly brought to his attention. Nonetheless, he stated, “but never I hope shall it be said of me that I became public prosecutor, witness, juryman and judge at the same time; and that the clergy could never rely on me as their

protector and their friend.”⁶

The fourth objection was the assertion that the SPG would never actually withdraw its aid. Medley noted only two facts; first, the Society were not legally bound to support any New Brunswick cleric and secondly, that they had already cut back significantly. New clerics were promised support for three years only, or less, as opposed to the old standard of for life. Finally, there was the objection that times were hard, New Brunswickers were poor and all talk of an endowment fund should be deferred to a later date. Medley pointed out that the Society had already reduced aid to the colony by £1000 annually and all indications were that this trend would continue. Medley further noted that fine houses were being built and handsomely furnished, he asked “where are the parties of pleasure that are given up, the balls that are not attended, the smart dresses that are not ordered, the dinners that are not given? I find these expenses going on, as if some people were not poor. And I distrust the excuse when I see it only applies to charitable gifts.” In sum, Medley admitted, “my grievous disappointment at the manner in which this important subject has been met by the wealthier members of our communion.”⁷ As we know, Medley’s disappointment was well founded and the overall fiscal health of the Church in the province has not improved much in the intervening 140 years.

The Charge of 1865

In his Charge to the clergy of the diocese in mid-September 1865, Bishop Medley again had to address the matter of diocesan finances. His tone did convey a certain degree of exasperation with the response, or rather lack thereof, to the call to action issued three years previously. He lamented, “unhappily the history of Church-endowment seems to be the history of individual enterprize (sic) and affection, rather than that of a general duty recognized by all the members of the Church.”⁸ He again stressed that the Diocesan Church Society (DCS) was not the institution to meet the needs of the present crisis and that the sums contributed even to that organization fell far short of what should be realized from “professional sources and from commerce.” Medley had been to the SPG meeting in London the previous June where certain definite decisions had been made relative to his diocese. Four matters had been determined. First, that after January 1, 1866 no missionary was to draw upon the SPG for his salary but solely from the DCS. The SPG would give the lump sum of £2,860.00 to the bishop and the DCS with which to pay the missionaries presently supported by the SPG. This sum of £2,860 would continue undiminished for the next three years only, that is, until January 1, 1869. In addition, the SPG would continue to support two pensioner clerics and seven widows until their deaths at a total disbursement of £550 per annum. Significant restrictions on SPG aid had arrived.

In response, Medley noted two things. First, that clerical remuneration was henceforth going to be less secure than in the past and secondly, that this was an unilateral change in the relationship between the older clergy and the SPG. Medley noted that those clergy employed by the Society before 1835 had entered its service with the understanding that they would receive £200 per annum from the Society, £50 from their parishes as well as a parsonage house in which to live. Some years later this level of support was reduced 25% by the Society in response to a reduction in the Parliamentary grant to the Society of £16,000.00. The clergy absorbed this reduction. Income levels for these clerics, while secured for the following three years, might be, after that time, if they survive, exposed “to another still large reduction.” In Medley’s terms this

would result in “great embarrassment” for the elderly men concerned.⁹ Medley was not impressed by this turn of affairs. He felt it a breach of faith with those whom the Society had employed years earlier. He wrote; “the Society at home should have continued to fulfill its engagements to all those missionaries who remained in its service til death, to whom at the time when they entered that service, no hint was given that the offer of salary was limited or temporary.” In this connection Medley related a telling detail concerning the attitude of certain Englishmen involved with the SPG. He noted, that there were some Society Committee members “bent on withdrawing all aid to the North American Colonies, at all hazards, and aided in this resolve by the profound ignorance which everywhere prevails among educated Englishmen of our place, our usefulness, our feelings, and our interests; and by the conviction entertained by many at home that it is necessary, *as they more pithily than compassionately express it*, to turn the screw on and to screw us hard, or we shall do nothing for ourselves.”¹⁰

Medley noted that in the short term the solution was within the means of the diocese to achieve. If £345 additional funds could be raised each of the ensuing three years ends could be met. What would happen beyond that time frame was unclear but Medley expressed foreboding. As for the scheme of a general endowment fund he said, “the opportunity was lost, and I know not whether now it can be recovered.” He however urged, as a less satisfactory solution, “local endowments in all cases where it is possible.” While as bishop he much preferred a diocesan endowment, he noted that “parochial endowment interests a larger number of persons in its behalf; and men are often found to give or bequeath to the parish where their lives have been spent, when they would give nothing to a general fund under the control of a committee.”¹¹

The second significant issue addressed by Medley in his 1865 Charge concerned matters affecting the entirety of the emerging Anglican Communion, though one must add that people did not yet think of the Church in quite those terms. They spoke of the Church of England at home and throughout the emerging empire. A court case between the archbishop of Capetown and the Bishop of Natal in southern Africa had been appealed to England. The highest appeal court of the empire, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, had decided in favour of the Bishop of Natal, Bishop Colenso. Colenso had been disciplined by his archbishop for teachings contrary to those of the Church of England and contrary to those teachings which he had sworn to uphold at both his ordination and his consecration. The issues concerned involved the inspiration of Scripture and the eternity of punishment and salvation. The legal decision impacted upon the authority colonial bishops possessed based upon the issuance of their Letters Patent by the Crown at the time of their consecration. Some understood the finding to mean that “the powers of the Colonial episcopate are all swept away, that bishops are without title, mission, or jurisdiction, and that their powers are altogether placed in abeyance.” Such however was not the case, all spiritual powers remained intact and only that of “coercive jurisdiction” was directly affected.¹²

Medley sought to assure his audience that the decision did not undermine the entire basis of episcopal authority which in itself was simply one of the bonds of unity which held together the Church of England at home and in the colonies. He noted that the clergy were still bound by the oaths and subscriptions that they had “voluntarily entered into.” Further, he reminded the laity that a bishop was entrusted, on behalf of the laity, “with reasonable and limited power for the protection of the laity in matters of faith.”¹³ Moreover, that bishops also in the exercise of their authority were “only fulfilling the promises made at their own consecration, and the rules

set him by the Church for the common benefit of all.” Medley responded to the suggestion by some that any body of Christians could be sufficiently governed with reference solely to Scripture. The bishop noted that such was contrary to both experience and ongoing practice. In such a case who would get to determine which texts were applicable and then once chosen, who would be given the right to authoritatively interpret them for the entire grouping? In both cases what would be the Scriptural basis for claiming such authority? As Medley pointed out, “whether it be the traditional system of Roman Catholics, the Westminster Confession, the deed of Conference, the Baptist Union, or the Church of England articles and subscriptions, there is sure to be some test and some authority to enforce it.”¹⁴ Medley was explicit as to the role of bishops within the Church of England’s polity. He wrote, “the dogmatic teaching of our liturgy (the *Prayer Book*) and articles, no less than the solemn protests contained in them, require of our clergy distinct guarantees that our teachings will be in accordance with the truths there set forth; and the Bishop acts as the representative, so to speak, of the other trustees, to enforce the guarantee of fidelity to the trust.”

As for the doctrinal implications of the legal decision, Medley had sage words of advice - “we should, I think, act wisely in not ascribing too much importance to it.” He noted that it was in essence a narrow legal decision that “forbids nothing that Scripture and the Church require of us as articles of faith, and only allows doubts to be entertained, or hopes expressed, without penal consequences, but without affirming the legitimacy of these doubts, or the reasonableness of these hopes; and it is to be especially noted, that the points affected by that decision, are those on which the articles of our church supply us with no definition, and are less positive than on most doctrines of the faith.”¹⁵

While allowing for latitude on the two matters of doctrine under discussion Medley did state his position on several issues raised by the discussion. With respect to Scripture, he noted that what English speakers possessed was a translation only, not the original Hebrew and Greek, and he held that this translation could in places benefit from amendment. Furthermore, any theory of inspiration developed would be, by the masses, applied to a translation and not the original texts. This would result in the clearly erroneous position where persons would hold that “every syllable and letter of it, is as much the dictation of the Holy Ghost, as the commandments written by the finger of God on tables of stone.”¹⁶ Medley further made reference to the debates then raging over the authorship of Biblical books, the understanding of who determined what books would and would not be in Scripture and whether or not the *Genesis* account of creation was ever intended to be, in a 19th century sense a “scientific” account of creation. In sum, he concluded “after making allowance for all these difficulties, which it is worse than useless to ignore, or deny, how wide is the difference between the reverent admission, that the right conclusion on many points is a complicated and by no means easy task, and the hazardous and irreverent speculation, which deprives the whole body of the sacred volume of all historical truth.”¹⁷ Medley added, “I think we must admit, after all is said and done, that on the degree of inspiration and the mode of inspiration, we must expect honest and faithful men to differ.”

The last major subject considered by Medley in his 1865 Charge was the continuing issue of a possible synod. Matters had progressed considerably over the preceding ten years and Medley could point to the existence and record of colonial synods in both Canada and Nova Scotia. He pointed out that “no additional autocratic power is given to the Bishop by calling a synod together.”¹⁸ As to objections over an episcopal veto he was willing to grant some weight

to this consideration. However, he assured his audience that while he would want to retain the episcopal veto in the proposed synod for the colony he would be willing to avoid unduly influencing matters by agreeing to forego always being present for debate or in voting on every issue. He also noted, that as matters stood, “synodical assembly seems almost necessary if any discipline is to be exercised.”

Other matters which had changed in recent years, thus altering the nature of the debate, were actions taken in England. The two English Convocations had altered two of the Church’s canons and the question as to whether or not these canons applied to the colonies was neither known nor able to be determined. In light of this Medley asserted the uselessness of continuing to rely on Establishment and the aid and advice of “English statesmen and English lawyers.” Medley said such persons were “distracted by appeals from colonies differently situated, opposed and thwarted by political opponents, and bound by precedents which have no force or application in our case, they seem unable to help us if they would and often unwilling to help us if they could.”¹⁹

In his closing words on the issue of synods in his 1865 Charge Medley asked, “why then should we cling to ancient traditions (legal establishment) which cannot have place in this new society in which our lot is cast, instead of endeavouring manfully to help ourselves?”²⁰ It was exactly in the spirit of self-help that Medley spoke to a special gathering of clergy and laity less than a year later in Saint John on July 5, 1866. Thirty-five of the diocese’s parishes were represented although thirteen parishes, including five from Saint John, among whom was numbered the rich and influential Trinity Church, held aloof from the meeting. Medley told those gathered that in the preceding year “the position of the colonial church has wholly changed.”²¹ Medley now understood that he possessed no coercive jurisdiction over his clergy so that if they were guilty of drunkenness, idolatry or heresy - matters that are not secular crimes punishable by the laws of the land, the bishop would be helpless to deal with the offender. The cleric could say, “I do not care for your admonitions, the law protects me: I am the sole judge of my own case; I defy you.” Some argued that the power of the purse was sufficient to discipline such men but as Medley observed clergy often form factions within parishes which support them and then what was to be done? Only a synod Medley argued would possess sufficient legal and moral weight so as to aid a bishop in addressing such an eventuality. Medley pointed out that the clergy were interested in having an effective means of discipline for “no religious and pious clergyman would wish to see evil doers unpunished and sin triumphant ... and he is injured when the finger of scorn can point to scandals notorious, yet unredressed.”²² So too the laity had a vested interest in synods. “They would form, by their representatives, an important part of it. Church questions would of necessity, be discussed before them, and by them; they would gain and impart information, and acquire a greater interest, and a more settled view of the Church of which they are members.” Medley especially hoped they would gain a greater sense of the spiritual dimension of the Church and appreciate the “duty to preserve with prudent care, and hand down unimpaired to our children the precious heritage we have received from our ancestors.”

Medley urged that action should proceed upon the basis of two rules first articulated by the early Fathers of the Christian Church. First, from Ignatius, “do nothing without the bishop.” By this Medley understood, “in matters affecting the welfare of the Church, as he is your acknowledged chief pastor, take him into council, a party to your work, and you strengthen your own hands, as much as you strengthen his.” Secondly, quoting Cyprian, “do nothing without the

advise of the clergy and laity” which Medley took to mean that no bishop wishes to “stand alone ... he desires to work in concert with the other orders. He distrusts his own solitary judgement.” Episcopacy thus acting in concert with the clergy and the laity Medley termed a truly “Primitive, Limited, Scriptural Episcopacy.”²³ As for the objection that synods would allow bishops to exert undue theological influence, Medley replied that “a synod is as comprehensive as the Church itself and allows as much freedom and scope as the formularies of the Church.”²⁴ As for Medley’s concern that recent English court decisions had declared the colonial church not to be one with the church at home he assured his audience that “colonial Churchmen are everywhere (no) more unanimous than in the wish to preserve our connection with the Mother Church inviolate.” Finally, as to what a synod in New Brunswick would not do, Medley wrote, “we should not meet in synod to form new creeds, and compile a new Prayer Book; we should not desire new formularies, nor seek any other basis than that of the existing church.”²⁵ Clearly Bishop Medley had seen dangers down the road, dangers which it has taken over a century to realize but dangers which recent decades have revealed as real and very threatening. In recent years obstacles to the continued existence of the Anglican Communion and threats to received formularies, ancient creeds and the theological framework of the *Book of Common Prayer* have all arisen at our synods. Bishop Medley’s words stand as both a warning and as a challenge to persevere.

1. *A Charge delivered to the Clergy assembled in the Cathedral Church, September 3, 1862 and respectfully dedicated to them, and to all the Laity of the Church of England in the province of New Brunswick, by the Right Reverend John, Bishop of Fredericton*, (Saint John, Despatch, 1862). [A four page broadside document lacking pagination].

2. Ibid., 1.

3. Ibid., 1.

4. Ibid., 2.

5. Ibid., 2.

6. Ibid., 3.

7. Ibid., 3.

8. *A Charge delivered in Christ-Church Cathedral, Fredericton, September 13th, 1865, at the Triennial Visitation by John, Bishop of Fredericton*, (Saint John, Despatch Printing and Publishing, 1865),3.

9. Ibid., 6.

10. Ibid., 7.

11. Ibid., 9.

12. Ibid., 11.

13. Ibid., 12.

14. Ibid., 13.

15. Ibid., 13.

16. Ibid., 14.

17. Ibid., 15.

18. Ibid., 21.

19. Ibid., 22.

20. Ibid., 21.

21. “Address of the Lord Bishop of Fredericton, at a Meeting of Clergy and Lay delegates, convened by the Unanimous desire of the Clergy present at the Late Visitation of this Diocese and held at St. John, July 5, 1866,”¹.

22. Ibid., 5.

23. Ibid., 6.

24. Ibid., 7.

25. Ibid., 7.