

The Contribution of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) to the Anglican Church in New Zealand, 1840-1880

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The records of **The United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel** are located at Rhodes House in Oxford.

This venerable society, founded in 1701 as **The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG)**, was particularly involved in its early years in sending clergy to work in the emerging North American Church. In the nineteenth century the SPG became much more involved in missionary work among non-Christian peoples as well as supporting the developing churches in colonial territories.

While the contribution of the **Church Missionary Society (CMS)** to New Zealand is well known, the involvement of the SPG in the development of the Anglican Church here in the nineteenth century is also worthy of note. Between 1840 and 1880 the SPG made payments of well over 75,000 Pounds towards the support of the Church in New Zealand. Some sixty-seven individuals were identified as having been 'missionaries' who were partially supported in New Zealand by the SPG. Most of these were colonial clergy who were not directly involved in missionary work. For example, J. F. Churton, who came out with the New Zealand Company migrants to Wellington in April 1840, received part of his remuneration from the SPG. Some clergy working among Māori (notably James West Stack, the Māori missionary at Kaiapoi) were partly supported by SPG grants. The SPG also gave financial grants that were allocated to Māori clergy, for instance Riwai Te Ahu and George Mutu.

The clergy receiving grants from the SPG were required to write quarterly reports and send them to the mission headquarters in London.

Some of these reports appeared in print in edited form in SPG publications such as the Mission Field. The originals are bound in huge yearly volumes along with reports from clergy supported by the SPG in other parts of the world. These reports provide an extremely valuable insight into the difficulties of ministering in the colonial context. Grants were often paid to clergy involved in undertaking pioneering ministry in new areas. Their reports reflect the problems of establishing churches, building up congregations and gaining financial support. Colonial indifference and apathy along with competition from other denominations are frequently mentioned. Ministering in the raw frontier environment with long rides on horseback, crossing rivers without bridges and encountering the vagaries of the New Zealand climate are all part of the daily challenge. Insights are given into the range of pastoral problems the clergy encountered with drunkenness and its effects being noted. Some of the clergy obviously struggled in the face of pioneering privations while others thrived. Circumstances, personality and ability all contributed to the colonial clerics' achievements or lack thereof and the reports provide valuable insights into these. Glimpses are also given into the work undertaken by the wives of some of the colonial clergy.

H. H. Brown's reports from Taranaki for some twenty years give quarterly glimpses into such things as his views of the wars of the 1860s, the strength of his opposition to the possibility of Taranaki becoming part of the Wellington diocese (under Bishop Octavius Hadfield) and the rise of the movement under Te Whiti and Tohu at Parihaka. In the South Island James Stack provides sympathetic insights into the reasons

why Māori are no longer willing to pray for the Queen and into the Māori religious movement associated with Te Maiharoa.

Another dimension in the SPG correspondence is provided by the almost begging, certainly pleading, letters of the New Zealand Bishops to the SPG Secretary asking for grants. The financial demands on colonial bishops were considerable. Endowments in the nineteenth century did not bring in large returns of income. The SPG grants,

although never very large, helped make it possible to sustain new ministry ventures for example in the Wairarapa and on the goldfields of the West Coast. In 1879 when the SPG gave notice of the ending of its grants to New Zealand an SPG editorial questioned, 'is there not a danger of Colonial and Mission churches becoming enervated by too much reliance upon aid from home?' The 'aid from home' had helped the Church get established but it was now time to stand on its own feet.

Allan Davidson has written a Paper entitled

'Colonial Christianity: The Contribution of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to the Anglican Church in New Zealand 1840-80'

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