

The Anglican Historical Society of New Zealand *Te Rōpu Hītori o te Hāhi Mīhinare ki Aotearoa*

When was Your Last Parish Mission?

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(AHS Newsletter 37; August 2007)

We were excited about having a parish mission at Merivale. A month afterwards, in the parish magazine the vicar stated - with undue enthusiasm surely - that the great result was people now stood before singing the first verse of the hymns. As a team member myself, in a 1967 Mirfield Mission to St Peter's Plymouth, I got more of the inside view. One of the busiest fortnights I've ever experienced in church life.

So, with mixed memories I was excited to come across a scrapbook about the **first big Anglican Mission in New Zealand**.

The Alexander Turnbull Library (at the National Library of New Zealand, Wellington) holds the scrapbook kept by the Revd. Charles Bodington as a record of his mission months here. Brochures, advertisements, programmes, prayer cards, letters, newspaper cuttings and correspondence columns provide a rich source for this brief article.¹

Back in the 1880s, the new Salvation Army's direct appeal to ordinary people had raised questions for the Anglicans: shouldn't we do this too? The incumbent of Christchurch's St John (Latimer Square) the Revd. H. C. M. Watson had invited a fellow Evangelical from England to run a parish mission at the end of 1880. It was not a big splash. The Press report was slight, even the name of the missionary (Pym) was wrongly noted. Mr. Pym wanted to repeat his mission services in the diocese of Waiapu, and asked H. J. C. Harper the bishop of Christchurch for a reference. His offer was not taken up and he went home to his Yorkshire parish, Cherry Burton (population 400). A barely visible first parish mission.²

Five years later, Harper the primate of the New Zealand church, and W. G. Cowie the bishop of Auckland asked W. D. Maclagan the successor to George Augustus Selwyn as bishop of Lichfield to propose two missionaries to lead a series of missions across their dioceses. The Revd. Charles Bodington and the Revd. Edward Mason came, travelled the land, spoke, prayed, and sang, and went on exhausted to more of the same in Queensland.³ and ⁴

The Missioners wrote to convents and churches asking for prayers, E. W. Benson, the archbishop of Canterbury, provided a fine commission stamped with his red seal. Bishop Cowie hoped that the clergy in Auckland would benefit, and primarily with 'the grace of restfulness, to which our bustling colonial life is greatly antagonistic.'

Bodington and Mason left for Auckland in June 1885, via New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Honolulu.

The Missioners brought printed material, new music, prayer papers, notes on self-examination and confession, calls to renewal of baptism. A folded 'My Resolution' gives us an idea of the general tone: 'God wants your will. The question for you now is not, 'What do I feel?' but, 'What shall I do?' Specific actions are provided i.e., 'pray to God (kneeling) every morning and evening; read the Bible with attention and regularly, give up swearing, pay my debts, give away a tenth of my income.'

The Missioners were welcomed on the Auckland wharf (22 Aug 1885) and taken to stay with the Cowies at Bishops court in Parnell. Nearly all the diocesan priests (35) came to the clergy retreat

and heard a fuller expression of the manifesto for their parish missions. 'Mission services have become very common in England; and experience has shown their value in reclaiming wanderers, and in deepening the spiritual life of faithful souls and kindling in them a great zeal for Christian works ... We come to you with the Word of God as interpreted by the sober teaching of the Prayer Book. You will hear no new Gospel, but the old, old story of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit of God; the way of repentance, the power of faith, and the gifts of grace.'

The round of parish missions then began. St Matthew's was first, and the press reporters took notes. Bodington asked the crowd, 'What am I, where am I going, and what am I doing?' Special prayer boxes received requests and questions. He talked on 'Doubts and Difficulties of the Day', and Mason (with warnings against Christadelphianism), compared Buddhism, Confucianism, and suggested that if Our Lord had come to them and not to Judaism he would again 'not have destroyed but sifted out the better parts, and purified and refined them.'

On to All Saints Ponsonby, St Lukes Mt Albert, St Judes Avondale, St Peters Onehunga, St Thomas Union Street, and north to Te Kopuru, Mangawhare, Dargaville, Aratapu, Helensville, Devonport, and Parnell. And then south to Panmure, Otahuhu, Ellerslie, Cambridge, Hamilton, Thames, Te Aroha, New Plymouth, and back to Auckland's St Pauls. Each day they proposed to have a eucharist, meetings and addresses (some 'for women particularly', others 'for men'), and at the end of each series, came the invitation to a renewal of baptismal vows and to provide a written response: do you wish to be baptised, to be confirmed, to teach Sunday school, to join this or initiate that - 'Return this to the Parson or place it in the box in the church.'

Newspaper cuttings reported each local parish mission, often printing the whole address, and

counting the attendants. Correspondence columns began to report warm appreciation of the 'great and good work.' The scrapbook holds dozens of handwritten letters. Bishop Cowie wrote that he hoped they would have a break, as some of the far-off areas were hard work, and full of Dissenters hostile to the Church.

Then trouble struck. The tone of letters in the papers shows tensions building up. The Herald (12 Dec) printed a private correspondence: a Hamilton resident accused Mason of 'cruelly taunting people' by using the word 'Dissenters' and by stating: 'Wesleyans are no more a church than the SPCK (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge) or the SPG (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) or the GFS (Girls' Friendly Society).' Another: 'For a clergyman with his surplice to walk at the head of a number of the male members of his flock, and to sing sacred songs and hymns, is not the means whereby the poor and neglected may be induced to embrace religion.' But worse tumbled out. Robert Maunsell, the veteran CMS missionary, regretted subscribing five pounds to their coming. They were not following the Bible but taking the Prayerbook as their guide: 'I deeply regret the introduction of these schismatical teachings on confession, the Real Presence, and the place of bishops.'

The divisions became formalised. In December 1885 the Herald published more. One correspondent had hoped for 'teachers of the pure Word of God' but these were teachers of what is not the Word of God, and they were sectarian in teaching about confession and absolution. Yes, they were Ritualists. After rows with Bishop Selwyn in Lichfield, Bodington had been taken to court - he was lucky to get off on a technicality the first time, and the second time to be saved by the intervention of the archbishop of Canterbury. Others mention his errors - he was guilty of having lit candles at the service, and of taking the eastward position, and having a mixed chalice. This was 'ecclesiastical millinery.'

Bodington defended himself and Mason, pointing out that they were only quoting the teaching of Anglican Prayerbook. Which brought the response: then this Popish Prayerbook should be changed fast. Which brought the response: this trouble was being stirred from 'Dissenting Brethren' and not loyal Anglicans.

After twenty parish missions across the vast diocese, they returned to Parnell. A formal letter of thanks from the parish clergy was presented to Bishop Cowie for his inviting the Missioners. In 'astonishing and sustained labours,' they had given 'clear and unfaltering expositions of Holy Scripture as interpreted by the sober teaching of the Book of Common Prayer.' Many were more closely following 'our Blessed Lord in this branch of His Holy Catholic Church.' Evangelicals (but not Maunsell) were among the 26 signatories, but that number is down on the 35 priests who came to their initial clergy retreat.

Maunsell had not gone. He provided two long unsigned articles for the Herald in which he outlined all the errors of Ritualism and the Protestant rebuttal. The Grand Orange Lodge (27 Jan 1886) formally voted unanimous thanks 'for his able advocacy in the press of Protestantism, in contradiction to Messrs. Mason and Bodington, Anglican missioners, who, they believed, were indoctrinating the church of England with Ritualistic and Romish principles.'

The Evangelical bishop of Nelson A. B. Suter returned from the Auckland general synod meeting (where he had preached for Cowie) and had plenty to say. In the Nelson Church Messenger (May 1886) he wrote about the men who 'seek to dethrone Christ from his mediatorial throne, and they do so - often unwittingly - by exalting other human mediators, confessors, and directors in His place.'

This was too much for Cowie. He wrote directly to Suter (13 May 1886): 'You stated in print and in public, 'Earnestness and eloquence must not be taken in exchange for truth' and imply that the

Missioners attempted to do exactly that.' Had Suter heard them, talked to them? Was he the person to sit in judgement on these men? Cowie had been there, and 'found them fully worthy of the high commendation given them by the Archbishop and the Bishop of Lichfield. 'You say some of the clergy declined to sign the memorial to them.' Does this prove that all the other signatories had betrayed the truth? In fact, two clergy had declined to sign: one had had some personal unpleasantness with one of the missioners; the other one was an inexperienced though faithful young man who had until recently been a Presbyterian. Before trying to injure Bodington and Mason he should have consulted the bishop of Auckland to ensure he was correct in his charges; it was 'scarcely brotherly for a Bishop after being welcomed to this pulpit (i.e. at general synod) by the Bishop and clergy of another diocese, to go out of his way to censure their highly esteemed coadjutors; who had, moreover, as you knew, been recently thanked, officially and publicly, for the faithfulness of their ministrations. But it is not only our Missioners from England that you have thought to disparage. You say also, 'There is still a body of laymen in the Diocese of Auckland who resent any departure from what is known as truly Protestant worship' implying that the Bishop and the clergy generally of this Diocese are chargeable with practices which these good laymen rightly resent. Such an insinuation is quite unwarrantable, and I challenge you to substantiate it' ... 'This tendency of your innuendoes is, I consider, very mischievous, and is calculated to stir up strife ... and if the result of them should be mutual suspicion and the hindrance of the Church's work among any of the people of this Diocese, I shall consider you to be mainly responsible for the same' ... 'I feel very strongly about (this) and feel myself and my clergy greatly aggrieved by you.'

The Scrapbook provides nothing further.

Meanwhile a calm, pastoral letter was issued by

H. J. C. Harper to his diocese of Christchurch: he commended the series of mission, for here was a chance for all to avail themselves of a 'special means of grace.' The Missioners then did visit every parish in the diocese, doing just as they had done in Auckland. In an interesting initiative Bodington gave an address on the wharf in Lyttelton.

One damaging complaint hit the headlines. At Christchurch St Lukes, W. H. Hargreaves heard Mason state that those who said the baptised were not 'children of God' were 'Liars.' He demanded an apology. Which did not come. Archdeacon Lingard the incumbent stated his complete support for Mason, who was thoroughly loyal to the Prayerbook - which any Anglican should be, and clearly Hargreaves was not. Hargreaves would not stop, and in a final flourish attacked the bishop of Christchurch for allowing 'diametrically opposed' teachings to flourish - on one side, the Book of Common Prayer, and on the other side, the 'true faith' from the one true Bible. The New Zealand Methodist (08 May 1886) highlighted all this, with an editorial note that they understood Harper to have requested the Missioners to refrain from extreme statements.

Otherwise, all was calm. As the months of mission closed, the packed cathedral (Monday 14 June 1886) supported an address of thanks from the parish clergy. In his own closing address, the primate said: 'We have learnt from you ourselves. I myself, old as I am, have learnt much, and only wish I had had the opportunity to learn more, for we all have much to learn as long as we live.'

In September 1886, Bodington was welcomed home to Staffordshire, providing reports of his foray among the exotic and strange colonials. In his diocesan newspaper, Harper added further comments on the Missions: the greatest value was the encouragement it had given to isolated clergy.

Canon W. B. Stanford (in charge of training the clergy) had more to say. The missioners had taken on 'a herculean task of eight months' labour, and by the end their lack of spirit and freshness was proof of exhaustion. Next time, we should have only a few separate parish missions and have a major mission centred at the cathedral. Before the next one, we should all extend the range and variety of hymns for so many hymns were unknown to us. The singing was poor.'

Endnotes

¹ Bodington, Charles (Revd.) fl 1863-1916: *Scrapbook of New Zealand Mission* (fMS-020) Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library, Wellington.

² PYM, Charles Melville; see: http://anglicanhistory.org/nz/blain_directory/bibliography.pdf

³ BODINGTON, Charles; see: http://anglicanhistory.org/nz/blain_directory/bibliography.pdf

⁴ MASON, George Edward; see: http://anglicanhistory.org/nz/blain_directory/bibliography.pdf