

Notes and Comments

JOHN MEDLEY AS DEFENDER OF "RITUALISM": AN UNPUBLISHED CORRESPONDENCE

I

IN AN EARLIER DISCUSSION of the work of John Medley,¹ the first Bishop of Fredericton and one of the early leaders of North American "Anglo-Catholicism," I drew attention to his forceful defence of "Ritualism"—i.e., of the attempt, inspired by Tractarian ideas of Church and Sacraments, to enrich Anglican worship by the revival of traditional liturgical ceremonial, long disused in the Church of England.² In these notes I want to illustrate this aspect of his churchmanship by presenting a group of letters written by Medley to William Ewart Gladstone during the critical years 1874–78.

The modest effort of the earlier Tractarians to promote closer adherence to the Prayer Book had received some support from the bishops,³ but the situation soon changed. On the one hand, the "No Popery" frenzy set off by the establishment of a Roman Catholic hierarchy in 1850 made "Romanizing" a popular target for demagogues. On the other hand, the "High Church" clergy of the newer type were finding unsuspected riches in the Prayer Book, especially in the "Ornaments Rubric" with its reference to customs antedating the radical reforms of Edward VI's last years, and the services in their churches unquestionably looked more "Roman" as a result. Eventually mobs began to riot in London churches—notably in St. Barnabas', Pimlico (1850–51), and St. George's-in-the-East (1859–60)—and lawsuits were brought against several incumbents, beginning with Robert Liddell of St. Paul's, Knightsbridge (1854). It is hardly surprising that the bishops should have turned on the "Ritualists" as troublers of Israel.⁴

While the earliest court decisions did not altogether discourage the ceremonial revival, the judgment of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the "Purchas case" (1871) was almost wholly negative, and the opponents of "Ritualism" took heart. Their success seemed assured in 1874, when the Prime Minister and the Archbishop of Canterbury (Tait) carried the Public Worship Regulation Act, designed to facilitate the prosecution

1. "A Tractarian Patriarch: John Medley of Fredericton," *CJT*, 6 (1960), 15–24.

2. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 20f.

3. Both Bishop Blomfield of London and Bishop Phillpotts of Exeter spoke to this effect in their 1842 charges.

4. For a clear outline of events, cf. S. L. Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement* (2nd ed., London: Mowbray, 1932), ch. vi: "The Revival of Ceremonial."

of priests who ignored the Privy Council—or, in Disraeli's notorious phrase, to put down the "Mass in masquerade."⁵

The catch was that the "Ritualists" had been handed a persuasive case. Despite the evident concern of most of them to give outward expression to theological principle, it had formerly been relatively easy to attack them as mere antiquarian legalists or aesthetic faddists. But now they were being invited by clumsy opponents to take their stand on the original high ground of the Oxford Movement, as defenders of the *prima facie* meaning of the Church's own standards against the doubtful interpretations of a secular court and the high-handed action of a secular legislature—connived at, admittedly, by crown-appointed bishops, but never submitted to the Church's elected synods.

Bishop Medley was a prominent spokesman for those who were outraged by the official policy. For the remainder of his long episcopate, he used his considerable influence to defend the "Ritualists." Our concern here is with one step in his campaign: his approach to Disraeli's great rival, himself a distinguished Anglo-Catholic layman.⁶

II

(i) Medley first raised the issue with Gladstone in a letter dated at Fredericton, 19 June 1874.⁷ This letter is worth printing in full.

I trust that you will forgive me for expressing an earnest hope, that your powerful & eloquent voice may be raised against a bill so destructive of all principles of true liberty, and so harassing to a great number of the loyal sons and servants of the Church of England, as the proposed Bill for the Regulation of Publick Worship.

Though neither I, nor the other clergy of this Diocese will be immediately affected by it, I think it behoves every one who has any toleration in his breast to do his utmost to stop it. A wise conciliation may do much with people not entirely unreasonable: but this Bill will render all government by Bishops in England well nigh impracticable. And the very fact that no consultation was had with the clergy at large is of itself most objectionable. If you can find time, will you do me the great favour to read through a Canon of Discipline passed last Nov[embe]r in this Diocese by the Synod.⁸ It was framed by our Chief Justice and carefully considered being printed some months before it was formally proposed for adoption, placed in the hands of all the clergy &

5. Cf. W. F. Monypenny and G. E. Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield* (6 vols., London: John Murray, 1910–20), v, 325.

6. For Gladstone's attitude towards the P.W.R.A., cf. John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (3 vols., New York: Macmillan 1904), II, 501f., 514. Letters from W. Upton Richards, of Margaret Chapel, Marylebone (predecessor of All Saints', Margaret Street), in the "Gladstone Papers," Vol. 277 (Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 44,362), fol. 253f., 321f., and Vol. 278 (Add. MS. 44,363), fol. 261–63, testify to Gladstone's close links with the "Ritualists" as early as 1845.

7. "Gladstone Papers," Vol. 358 (Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 44,443), fol. 301f.

8. Cf. *Declaration of Principles, Constitution, Canons, Order of Proceedings, Rules of Order, &c., of the Diocesan Synod of Fredericton, together with the Acts of the Legislatures Connected therewith* (Saint John, 1876), pp. 12–26.

laity, & debated for two full days. I wish especially to call your attention to Page 12, as a contrast between our method of "aggrieved parishioners" & the Archbishop's—& this method proposed by a layman of eminent legal attainments, who is well known to have a great dislike to what is called Ritualism, but who knows well what the fundamental principles of justice are.

I must again apologize for this intrusion on your time, but your past kindness emboldens me to ask your attention to the matter.

(ii) In his next letter (Fredericton, 12 August 1874),⁹ Medley acknowledges Gladstone's "kind reply" and further criticizes the proposed Bill. The relevant paragraph follows.

It is difficult, until I see the whole Bill printed, for one at this distance, to catch the whole scope of the measure, but I incline to think with you, that its authors will not find it the measure which they contemplated. And unless I am greatly mistaken, it will prove to be as much a thorn in the sides of the Bishops as of the other Clergy; or if not this, yet it will be inoperative to a great extent. It is not easy to see why some of the Judgments of the Judicial Committee are to be enforced in a particular direction, when the authors of the Bill (as originally introduced) are notoriously neglectful of other parts of the same Judgments. I would go further: and w^d ask whether an excess in Ritual intended to magnify, perhaps unduly, one of the Sacraments, be not a much lighter offence than a studious endeavour to abolish, or render nugatory, one of the Creeds?¹⁰ Nor do I see why Bishops should be exempted from that obedience to Law, which they so strenuously enforce on the second order of clergy. The whole result is (morally) very unhappy: as tending to produce that mistrust, which every loyal son of the Church would wish to avoid. We must all heartily thank you for your faithful and noble efforts to avert the evil, and I trust they may be partially if not wholly successful.

(iii) Medley's third letter (Fredericton, 22 October 1877)¹¹ encloses copies of an address to his clergy and of his sermon to the Canadian Provincial Synod (September, 1877).¹² "The sermon," he writes, "has excited some attention and criticism, in consequence of my having taken a different line from most of my brethren." He asks whether Gladstone agrees "in a general way" with its line of thought.

(iv) As Medley's next letter (Fredericton, 14 December 1877)¹³ makes clear, Gladstone did approve of his sermon.

I thank you very gratefully for your kind and welcome words about my sermon. The Publick Worship Act is much to be deplored, not only because it is so manifestly unfair, but because it is difficult to repeal such an act, and, perhaps, harder to amend it. The numerous blunders committed may possibly lead to something more like a fair view of things. . . .

9. "Gladstone Papers," Vol. 359 (Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 44,444), fol. 191-93.

10. Medley is referring to contemporary debates in England on the use of the "Athan-Asian Creed." Cf. Leonard Prestige, *Pusey* (London: Philip Allan, 1933), pp. 150ff.

11. "Gladstone Papers," Vol. 370 (Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 44,455), fol. 206f.

12. *A Sermon Preached before the Provincial Synod of Canada* (Montreal, 1877).

13. "Gladstone Papers," Vol. 370, fol. 322f.

I hope to see Dear old England once more next year, though I do not expect very much from the Lambeth Conference. Still, it seems one's duty to attend. . . .¹⁴

(v) On 22 July 1878, Medley writes from Lambeth Palace to apologize for failing to get in touch with Gladstone, and says that he is sorry to trouble him now, but that he would appreciate at least a brief interview.¹⁵

(vi) On 23 July [1878], Medley writes again to accept an invitation to dinner.¹⁶ A jotting on a blank leaf indicates that others invited include the Bishop of Bombay, the Dean of Christ Church and Mrs. Liddell,¹⁷ and "Mr. Ruskin." Gladstone's respect for the Bishop of Fredericton is obvious.

III

A note should be added on the sequel to the "Ritualistic" crisis. Between 1877 and 1887 five parish priests were jailed—one of them for nineteen months¹⁸—under the controversial Act, and on 15 December 1887 the tragic death of the former Vicar of St. Alban's, Holborn, A. H. Mackonochie, in the snows of Inverness, gave "Ritualism" a martyr.¹⁹ In 1890 Tait's successor at Canterbury (Benson) began the emancipation of the "Ritualists" with the primatial judgment in the case of Bishop King of Lincoln. In 1906 the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline unanimously reported that "the judgments of the Judicial Committee cannot practically be enforced."²⁰ In 1962 the "innovations" of the mid-nineteenth century are freely used in almost every part of the Anglican Communion, and would be identified by most observers as characteristically Anglican.

One could point several morals, but there is room here for only one: John Medley was something of a prophet.

EUGENE R. FAIRWEATHER

Trinity College
Toronto

14. On Medley's defence of "Ritualism" at the 1878 Lambeth Conference, cf. W. Q. Ketchum, *The Life and Work of the Most Reverend John Medley, D.D.* (Saint John, 1893), pp. 221, 334f.

15. "Gladstone Papers," Vol. 372 (Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 44,457), fol. 140f.

16. *Ibid.*, Vol. 701 (Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 44,786), fol. 61.

17. The parents of "Alice in Wonderland." The Dean is of course the Liddell of "Liddell and Scott."

18. S. F. Green, Rector of St. John's, Miles Platting, Manchester.

19. Cf. E. F. Russell (ed.), *Alexander Heriot Mackonochie: A Memoir* (London: Kegan Paul, 1891), ch. xvi. It is interesting to note that as an Oxford undergraduate (at Wadham, Medley's own college) Mackonochie collected money for the new diocese of Fredericton (*ibid.*, pp. 17f.).

20. Quoted in Ollard, *Short History*, p. 194.