

[A paper given at “Christian Mission in the Public Square”, a conference of the Australian Association for Mission Studies (AAMS) and the Public and Contextual Theology Research Centre of Charles Sturt University, held at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture (ACC&C) in Canberra from 2 to 5 October 2008.]

*Planting a Colonial Anglican Mission in New Guinea before 1900:
Inhibitions to Growth*

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The problems Bishop H H Montgomery of Tasmania uncovered in leading the 1894 Self-Denial Effort in Australian colonial dioceses to raise missionary giving through the Australian Board of Missions (ABM) were not only financial and educative. Several Anglican leaders disagreed over fundamental issues of church principle believed to be at stake in *how* Anglican missions should begin and be conducted. Their disunity over Anglican missionary work in New Guinea exemplified an issue that drew Australian leaders into a much wider (and ongoing) Anglican Church debate.

New Guinea had by 1896 become the focal point of Montgomery's mission advocacy, but the Australian Board of Missions Executive Council had begun collecting funds for a New Guinea Mission in 1886.¹

When in 1890 the Anglican bishops met in Sydney to select a new Primate, they had also begun a work in New Guinea, on the invitation of the Commissioner of New Guinea, the Hon. J. Douglas, CMG, not on the mainland but in the Louisiade archipelago. Their first Anglican missionary, the Revd A.A. Maclaren, first travelled there in the Governor's company. Maclaren soon reached an amicable agreement with both the London Missionary and the Wesleyan Missionary Societies on their geographical zones for missionary work; but to get things started (Montgomery noted in 1890) Maclaren needed 'at least £4,000 to start well'.²

Following Maclaren's sudden death through malarial fever in January 1891 ('New Guinea has now a martyr of our Church'), and the illness of his colleague, the Revd Copland King, calls for prayer and money were renewed.³

¹ For a fuller account of this New Guinea mission, see David Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission: the Anglican Church in Papua-New Guinea, 1891-1942* (University of Queensland Press, 1977)

² *Church News (CN)*, May 1890, p.268; September 1890 pp.324-5. A brief account of the Anglican New Guinea Mission, compiled by the Revd Copland King, appears in *CN*, March, 1895, p.257

³ *CN*, February 1892, p.591

Montgomery's visit to the Melanesian Mission in 1892 had already convinced him that 'the work there [in New Guinea] is a dead failure' (as) 'the Clergy, including Maclaren, know nothing of natives.' Montgomery had at first wanted the area to be worked by the Melanesian Mission, who were quite ready to undertake it. 'To them it is simply going to another island - a form of progress which is of everyday occurrence.' Montgomery despaired of his Church's 'persistent stupidity in high places' (that is, among its bishops). Thus, he had complained to his English friend, Bishop R.T. Davidson in 1892:

It is difficult to see how Sydney and its Bishop can fail to grasp the situation. The 'Southern Cross' should go yearly to Bougainville - almost within hail of New Guinea. But, forsooth, we must buy another ship to go to one spot in New Guinea, and though the Melanesian Clergy have an unrivalled knowledge of native races - superior to any other Mission, because of their peripatetic habits - though New Guinea has the same races yet we refuse to utilise their immense capacities - Why?

Montgomery first thought this was 'because Melanesia is in the Province of New Zealand, and Australia is jealous!' Yet, as he had hinted, there was besides this colonial rivalry the wider issue of *how* such a mission should be led and managed - whether by a bishop of a mission on the spot or by a missionary board in the sending country. While Montgomery favoured a mission headed by a bishop, he had nevertheless refused as their visiting bishop in 1892 to become involved: 'I dare say you know that they wished me to become Bishop of Melanesia and to take New Guinea if I would. I felt no call however, and this for several reasons.' Among them were his age, his wife and family, and his prior commitment to Tasmania. Nevertheless, his personal interest in that mission field and its successful management remained very strong. The episcopally-led Melanesian Mission remained for him the proper body to undertake this mission.

By September 1894 his appraisal had changed: it became establishing a new 'Missionary Bishop' for New Guinea. Sending a bishop would (in Anglo-Catholic revival terms) mean planting the Anglican Church 'in its entirety'. A forthright (and very Montgomery-like) Hobart *Church News* editorial described New Guinea (and Bellenden Ker) as zones where pioneers and armies in the field were being outrageously neglected. It declared the problem was fundamental to the mission's success, and the problem's source lay less in churchmen's apathy than in the mode of its management. For these missions to succeed, *Church News* believed, they needed a bishop, not an ABM Executive Council, to run it.

Members of a committee in Sydney, however full of zeal, cannot conduct a mission at a distance from themselves. Our present committee would probably be the first to own it. They certainly cannot get men to volunteer; for experience has proved this painfully. The leader surely should be in the field; and the recognised leader in the Church is a Bishop. We have ourselves no doubt

whatever that till a Bishop is appointed for New Guinea, and New Guinea alone, the mission will continue to be weak and incapable of expansion.

The Melanesian Mission (so *Church News* argued) would never have succeeded so well had it been managed by an Auckland-based committee. 'Committees are invaluable in their right places as home organisers of funds, but they are not fitted to fight battles, nor to conduct distant missions.' It wanted their coming 1896 General Synod to follow 'the Apostolic Ideal' and proceed to select and consecrate the 'first Bishop of our New Guinea Mission'. Meanwhile, the Australian Anglicans' response to ABM's call remained small: only a few volunteered to serve in New Guinea.⁴

Pressure for this New Guinea bishopric led the Primate (Bishop W. Saumarez Smith of Sydney) and the Bishop of Newcastle (G.H. Stanton) to visit Australia's north in July-August 1895. *Church News* hoped their visit would result in the rapid formation of two new bishoprics, 'one for the northern shores of Australia, and another for New Guinea'.⁵

Then, in September 1895, *Church News* reported that the Revd Mr Bice, 'an experienced missionary worker', a graduate of St Augustine's College, Canterbury, 'with upwards of twenty years of island life', and Home Secretary of the ABM 1894-7, had also gone to New Guinea itself to inspect and report on the Mission. *Church News* reflected Bishop Montgomery's view:

No Bishop has ever been there!...We have no doubt that the first need is a real leader. We cannot doubt that the Church in Australia, after reading Mr Bice's report, will forthwith determine upon a New Guinea Bishopric.

This anonymous *Church News* editorial writer wanted the new missionary bishopric in Australia attached by name and reality to New Guinea and not, as was being proposed, to Thursday Island, nor to North Queensland.

Let the Bishop live in New Guinea, and then let him supervise Thursday Island and the northern shores of Australia. Churchmen will then know that he is a true missionary Bishop, whose first duty is to the blacks. They will also feel at rest when they know that the mass of natives in New Guinea are put into the charge of a real leader of the Church.⁶

Bishop Montgomery accordingly threw his energies and persuasive powers into promoting that New Guinea bishopric, as well as another one for northern Australia. His strategy faced challenge, however. When the *Sydney Record* had opposed any New Guinea bishopric, the *Church News* had countered: 'an important Mission *without a Bishop* is a sort of monstrosity,' and advanced the High Church view that a bishop

⁴ *CN, Editorials* September 1894, p.146; February 1895, p.220; April 1895, p.253

⁵ *CN*, August 1895, p.318

⁶ *CN*, September 1895, p.332

received a special 'Gift' of the Spirit for mission at his consecration. It argued that 'many faithful Churchmen are weary of the reign of Societies which to a great extent take the place which the Missionary Bishop ought to occupy.' (This exchange reflects a longstanding missiological argument within the nineteenth century Anglican Church.)⁷

Those who believed no Home Board, even one composed entirely of bishops, could be a substitute for a bishop located in the field were criticising the Australian Board of Missions as much as the Church Missionary Society. A bishop was 'no expensive luxury to be obtained when the mission has been for years in existence.' His was the necessary Third Order of Anglican Ministry, there from the beginning. Thus the *Church News* enunciated a mission strategy: 'That the first step in a new mission undertaking is the Consecration of the Bishop, and that it is the Bishop who from the first moment ought to shape the policy in the field.' For six years (they complained) their New Guinea Mission had had no bishop nor had it been visited by one. They sought a guaranteed income as more readily achievable than an endowment fund (as new mainland Australian dioceses had hitherto required), so as 'to give the Church in New Guinea its proper leader at once.'⁸ (In its arguments the Tasmanian *Church News* was unlikely to have contradicted so publicly the cherished views of its bishop.)

This topic jostled for attention on a tense 1896 General Synod agenda. Montgomery seconded Bishop F.F. Goe of Melbourne's motion to establish a missionary bishopric in New Guinea, and Montgomery and W.T.T. Webber, Bishop of Brisbane, were recognised as prime movers in the push to act 'forthwith' on the matter. Montgomery's 'restrained enthusiasm' was claimed to have elicited welcome funding towards securing a guaranteed episcopal income of £400 (raised largely from his own and fellow bishops' incomes). This forward moving General Synod decision had been preceded by important (but more administrative) debates on the Primacy, on the status and powers of General Synod, and on clergy superannuation. Expectations which some General Synod members expressed for a revitalised Australian Primacy were like the heroic expectations that were then placing on the new missionary Bishop of New Guinea - that is, he had to be middle-aged, mobile, medically fit, and unmarried!⁹

Travelling to attend another Lambeth Conference of Bishops of the Anglican Communion held in June -August 1897 in England preoccupied much episcopal attention. Meanwhile in Australia matters had been advanced, not least the New Guinea bishopric. By early 1898 Montgomery believed that both the New Guinea Diocese *and a*

⁷ See Timothy Yates, 'The Idea of a "missionary bishop" in the spread of the Anglican Communion in the 19th Century', *Journal of Anglican Studies*, Vol 2.1 (June 2004) pp.52-61

⁸ *CN Editorial*, August 1896, pp.514-5

⁹ *CN*, Account of GS debates, November 1896, pp.558-60

new 'northern Diocese' were 'indispensable'; but funds had to be found for the first before the second bishopric was launched.¹⁰

Yet nominating and consecrating the much-needed first Bishop of New Guinea proved a protracted process. That process revealed the frustration of some Australian bishops, such as Webber, Bishop of Brisbane, with their Primate's seeming procrastination in advancing the matter of a new missionary bishop for the Archbishop of Canterbury's approval. On financial grounds and on principle Smith did not share their conviction that the New Guinea mission required a bishop so early in its history. Webber (who did) had already nominated Canon Montagu Stone-Wigg in April 1896, with Montgomery's support. In June 1896 Webber had written to his fellow Australian bishops criticising Smith for delaying, and urging the immediate appointment of a bishop for New Guinea (and not a sub-committee) with the bishops themselves guaranteeing his £400 income for five years.¹¹

Smith was cautious and [unlike Robert Gray Bishop of Capetown who, without Canterbury's consent and in open denial of an unpopular Privy Council judgement, himself consecrated W.K.Macrorie in place of Dr Colenso as Bishop of Natal early in 1869] was unwilling to create a new diocese beyond his own territory or province without the consent of the Archbishop of Canterbury, nor without an adequate endowment to sustain its bishop in his work.

At the Bishops' Meeting after the 1896 General Synod, Bishop Smith had been obdurate. Webber claimed Smith had tried to 'smother' the move with 'a wet blanket', Webber believed Smith wanted it controlled by the CMS Committee, not by a bishop funded through the SPG; so (as Webber claimed) he had had to move Smith 'to action at the point of a bayonet'.¹²

It was not till June-July 1897, that Canterbury's Archbishop Frederick Temple (amidst busy Lambeth sessions) formally received Stone-Wigg's nomination. He had then duly forwarded his approval to the Australian Primate, W.S.Smith, whose tasks in England had delayed his return from Lambeth. His Australian colleagues did not wait for him. The new Bishop of New Guinea was finally consecrated on 25 January 1898, not by Smith as their Primate, but by Bishop Webber of Brisbane acting as 'Senior

¹⁰ Montgomery to R.T.Davidson, 17 January 1898, *Davidson Papers*, Lambeth Palace Library, Vol 55, ff282-8

¹¹ W.T.T.Webber, 'Letter to the Primate and other Australian Bishops, 25 June, 1896', *F. Temple Papers*, LPL, Vol 8, ff76-80; H.H.Montgomery to Archbishop F. Temple, 'Memorandum *in re* New Guinea Bishopric' [n.d.], *F Temple Papers*, LPL, Vol 8 f74. Montgomery himself pledged personal funds to help guarantee the new bishop's stipend.

¹² W.T.T.Webber, Bishop of Brisbane, to J.H.Ellison, 15 October, 1896, *F Temple Papers*, LPL, Vol 8 f70.

Bishop in Australia and Tasmania'.¹³ Montgomery was absent in Britain, but he approved.

[He had in October 1897 told his Diocese:

I record my intense thankfulness that we are approaching the day when New Guinea will have a recognised leader, and no longer depend for support on the much more difficult system of a committee which can hardly ever meet in full numbers.... We shall now have two chief missions to support - New Guinea and Melanesia. ¹⁴]

Funding problems persisted: Montgomery was saddened to read that Australia had in 1896 sent only £1300 to Melanesia 'whereas £5000 was sent out of the country through the Church Missionary Association', which he presumably regarded as a voluntary body and not the national church body that the ABM claimed to be. He hoped every Tasmanian parish would support both the New Guinea and Melanesian Missions. Yet by November 1897 the Australian Board of Missions was £1335.14.6 in debt.¹⁵

The newly appointed Missionary Bishop of New Guinea steamed south to Hobart on 31 January 1898 (six days after his consecration) to raise funds for his Mission. With Bishop Montgomery yet to return from Britain, Archdeacon F. Whittington, who was Bishop Stone-Wigg's former colleague, and Montgomery's adjutant in fostering missionary interest, chaired the meeting. The New Guinea bishop's consecration, the *Church News* editorial reflected, marked 'an epoch in the history of the Church under the Southern Cross'. He was to be Australia's first missionary prelate, duly commissioned by all fourteen Australian dioceses, and supporting his work would help unite Australian dioceses.

[His consecration marked a milestone, too.

It is no mean record for the Australasian Church to be able to point to the creation of twenty-one bishoprics in little more than half a century, but the glory of our boasting may be somewhat chastened by the reflection that of these only one - that of Melanesia - is designed especially to discharge our heavy responsibility to the thousands of heathen people whose islands we have invaded and wrested from them.]

What were alleged to be the fundamental principles of the Primitive Church were now being vindicated for, as the editorial claimed triumphantly, 'there is evidently coming over our Anglican Communion a strong conviction that a bishop is a first necessity for

¹³ See correspondence in *F Temple Papers*, LPL, Vol 8 ff67-95; and in *Davidson Papers*, LPL, Vol 51, ff262-6

¹⁴ *CN, Bishop's Letter*, October 1897, pp.736-7

¹⁵ *CN* December 1897, p.764 (Letter from the Acting Primate, the Bishop of Melbourne, November 1897)

any new field of missionary enterprise'. Bishop Stone-Wigg had 'left all' and, like a truly apostolic leader, had already 'foreshadowed his scheme of advance action'.¹⁶

The New Guinea Bishopric was thus seen as a victory for those wanting an episcopal focus for their Church's mission. Their achievement brought them pride, but left their new bishop in poverty. How far the wider Australian Church recognised and owned this episcopal initiative was reflected in the wavering financial support it received.

Fundraising for the New Guinea bishopric was not very productive. Immediate fundraising to endow the New Guinea see was soon postponed to enable a newer missionary diocese to be formed in northern Australia. Not surprisingly, by January 1900 the New Guinea Mission had accrued an overdraft of £1000 and needed £1000 to advance new work.

[The ABM's Report to the 1896 General Synod recorded receipt of the following contributions to the New Guinea Mission: (1891) £4615, (1892) £2751, (1893) £831, (1894) £448, (1895) £709, (1896) £449. Its Report tabled at the 1900 General Synod identified no separate gifts to New Guinea. Its 1905 Report revealed considerable growth in gifts to that Mission: (1901) £1270.18.4, (1902) £2380.4.9, (1903) £2815.13.0, (1904) £4680.3.3, (1905) £3698.11.10.]

Montgomery urged his diocese not to play off the needs of New Guinea against those of Melanesia. All Australians must, he insisted, support *both* missions. This required a willingness to donate to off-shore causes and to natives; even more, it needed a breadth of strategic vision and a depth of income. Pragmatically Montgomery approved in 1900 the negotiations between the local Church Missionary Association (now affiliated to the CMS in England) and Bishop Stone-Wigg to have the Association send and fund a missionary to work under him in New Guinea.¹⁷

The Australian bishops' rush to consecrate and despatch Stone-Wigg to New Guinea was, while acting on the 'missionary bishop' principle, an initiative that lacked not only the support of their Primate but also the backing of the missionary funding base that Smith's populous diocese represented. As a result it left Stone-Wigg in a desperate financial situation. A slower process might have enabled the New Guinea mission to secure broader support amongst Australian Anglicans. If the bishops' action was precipitate, Montgomery in his enthusiasm was party to it. Given the negative effects of wider economic depression and severe drought in Australian states upon all church fundraising, some new and extra-ordinary effort would be required to sustain this new and episcopally-led Australian Anglican mission.¹⁸ That is what Montgomery would

¹⁶ *CN, Editorial*, February 1898, p.802

¹⁷ *CN* December 1900, pp.193-4

¹⁸ *CN*, June 1899, p.1061. The ABM's Report to the 1896 General Synod recorded receipt of the following contributions to the New Guinea Mission: (1891) £4615, (1892) £2751, (1893) £831, (1894) £448, (1895) £709, (1896) £449. Its Report tabled at the 1900 General Synod identified no separate gifts to New Guinea. Its 1905 Report revealed considerable growth in gifts to that Mission: (1901) £1270.18.4,

himself to try to supply through his zeal in promoting Australia-wide the ABM Jubilee in 1900.

Furthermore, the episcopal pioneer principle (which Montgomery and several other Australian bishops had espoused with regard to New Guinea) was not universally applied. In the way missions were being conducted *within* existing Australian dioceses there were two major domestic or diocesan exceptions, the Australian Anglican mission to the Aborigines and that to the Chinese in their midst. Both demonstrate how, when the responsibility for such missions was laid upon already over-laden diocesan bishops, the result was that such missions faltered rather than flourished.