

The New England Company's Unitarian Purge, 1894-7

Abstract

For the better part of seven decades the English charity the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England and Pars Adjacent in America had operated the various stations which they called corporately "The Grand River Station". Their object was to "Civilize and Christianize" members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy known as the Six Nations. The work was undertaken through agents, teachers, supplies, buildings, capital expense, and other employments designed to achieve this immense and complex task. Throughout its history the Company was heterodox: Church of England membership was not the premium aspect of belonging to this august group of mostly very prosperous banking, trading, and manufacturing families of Dissent: Unitarians and Quakers had figured very prominently among them since the later Seventeenth Century. For although the original 1649 Charter under Oliver Cromwell was re-issued under Charles II as a fully Royal document, the strong filament of Dissent ran through the Membership. By the later Nineteenth Century, 1894-7, a kind of intellectual and religious crisis beset the Company's purpose. This paper charts a debate, opening to question the role of non-Trinitarian members, those unable to take a religious test subscribing to the doctrine of atonement. The argument here lays out the layers whereby an almost somnolent disregard for such doctrines was replaced abruptly by tests in belonging based on a complex series of definitions of the nature of trust: ultimately coming down to the question as to whether, outside the doctrines and ambit of the Church of England were the Company serving their goals with the members of the Six Nations.

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The Rev. Robert Ashton as Superintendent of the Mohawk Institute, the cynosure of the Company's education mission since late 1872 described in a letter to Archdeacon V. C. Davis of Grace Church, Brantford the nature of his ministry. This was a species of an episcopal visitation, an annual reporting on churches and ministries. Ashton wrote on February 21, 1896 in his capacity as "Incumbent of the Mohawk Glebe". When Ashton reported to Davis he revealed his attitude to the Diocese. Ashton owed oversight to the Bishop (Maurice Scollard Baldwin), his stipend paid entirely by the New England Company, his work for the Company was in "practical" matters.¹ In effect, he did not retire from the "Mohawk Glebe" until 1915, long after his health and abilities were able to sustain work, long after he was actively engaged in practical matters. In practice, since his ordination as deacon by Baldwin in 1886, Ashton said Divine Service at the Institute and occasionally at the Mohawk Chapel, the 1784 church about a mile along Mohawk Road known as the "oldest Protestant Church in Upper Canada".

Ashton's 1896 answers to Davis suggests he was exasperated; a certain tone was already set between himself as chief Company representative and the Diocese. Ashton bristled at even having to answer the Diocesan Commissioner, much less to look into the Company's long-standing missions in 1896. He took the opportunity to impress on the Diocese the importance of the work being done by the NEC. So, a few days later, 24 February, he Davis a long addendum to his official reply in which he rehearsed the Company's history for the Archdeacon's benefit. According to a Company history, the Company agreed in 1828 that its

¹ Chancellors' Files, 1896-1922 vol. 1, Cronyn Archives—HUC CH-2011-18-02 from Box 20 Shelf 368 Box 1. Cited by date. These papers are not part of the Litigation fonds and bear no TRC digitization numbers.

“Missionaries should in matters spiritual take his Lordship’s direction and in other matters the direction of the Co:.”. He continued,

I have been pained when the Synod passed votes of thanks to the S. P. C. K. and other societies yet remained persistently silent as regards the most venerable entity of the S. G. P. I. A. Yet this society has expended more than half a million of dollar in the Diocese on behalf of the Indian Missions and today you are appointed by the Bishop and Ex(excutive) Committee to ascertain what relation the missionaries appointed by and obeying the Bishop, but paid by the N. E. Co. hold to the diocese.

Furthermore—in an accusatory tone—Ashton said that the work of “Indian Missions” undertaken had been “outside”, not within the Diocese. The NEC has taken on the work. It predated the origin of the Dioceses of Huron and Toronto. Moreover, its servants were persons of influence: the NEC missionaries had provided an archdeacon of Brant (Nelles) and a long time member of the Executive Committee (himself), built five churches and four parsonages—and yet the silence on the Company’s work remained. Clearly Ashton was galled. He was incredulous that now a commissioner was looking into this, his anger barely contained.

Twelve years later, matters had changed in almost revolutionary way. In the same annual reportage Ashton wrote in a very different tone to Dr. Mackenzie, Bishop David Williams’ (1905-31) archdeacon of Brant. First, there had been problems with Bishop and mission. Ashton referred to the mess that Baldwin had created when sending his retired clergy into the mission, they were old and unfit. Now the same dreary questions, once answered, had raised all of the same questions yet again. The strong impression is one of considerable tensions throughout the preceding dozen years. Ashton complaining that the Diocese did not regard the Company as quite legitimate as a mission society. Ashton, in turn, did not regard Diocesan appointments as suitable in any way for mission work. Nor were the appointments regularized by the NEC in accordance with the Diocesan canons on such matters. Why were things not so regular? A long-stranding issue of Diocesan and Company struggles, largely resolved was coming to the fore in Bishop Williams new 1908 canons whereby the Diocese ran the fabric of the churches. While Ashton no longer insisted missionaries could be any Protestant denomination, he now raised the lingering question against episcopal authority on behalf of the New England Company. Ashton, as will be discussed, in 1896 found himself entirely on the wrong foot on matters of doctrine—the “Unitarian purge”. Would matters now tilt towards the power of a bishop, something Ashton as the longtime kingpin of the “Grand River Stations” might resist? In other words, the deep grain of doctrinal change was cutting in many directions.

There was a shameful, later, presenting issue a few years later by which time the Six Nations Confederacy took over in 1906 the lands of the Six Nations parishes. The question of stipends and rates and who was to pay them remained, a niggling reminder in the opening struggle between Bishop and Company. By 1910, the question of Rev. Isaac Bearfoot (1840-1911), an Onondaga priest, Huron College Divinity graduate, former school inspector on the Six Nations and now rector at the Company’s Cayuga mission was offered by the Diocese an inferior stipend to those of his far more recently-appointed colleagues, a fact taken up on his behalf by the other leading Company missionary, the Rev. James Leonard Strong (serving at Kenyengeh 1891-1921). Both men held licenses of the Bishop; both men, by the canon, had obedience, as well as duties to adhere to mandated by the Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of Huron. A difference from other stipends was surely racist, a fact alluded to but never stated

explicitly—where the Company to top up Bearfoot’s pay, an act of very minor kindness which was small in value but great in gratitude to a man who had been a backbone of the mission. A fracture was opening and the bishop wanted the Company to make up the shortfall, a move Ashton brusquely dismissed, the bishop merely having pay the difference “under the Canon”, which he could have realized by asking the Company to advance the money. “To my knowledge,” he continued, “there are certain of the clergy that object to the N. E. C. nominating the missionaries, they think that the whole of the appointments should be in the hands of the Bishop, so that the Mission might become an “Ecclesiastical Knacker Yard”.² In 1908, Ashton was still arguing for the exceptionalism of the New England Company.

But there were larger questions at play, the strong nationalist Indigenous policies of the late 1860s and 1870s were now echoed in the formation wider theological questions of the newly-formed “Canadian” General Synod of 1893, the mandate under which the Company’s operations fell increasingly in the 1890s and after. The Indian Act in 1884 and again in 1895 prohibited traditional rituals, especially potlaches. The ‘peasant’ act of Hayter Reed in 1896 was causing havoc in Indigenous communities across Canada by deepening poverty. Culture, land, and resources were disappearing at the crucial moment when legislation deprived all First Nations males eligible to vote of their franchise in 1898—a move which must have cheered the Ashtons of this world who had had a very difficult time with activist scholars and leaders from within various First Nations communities as well as an increasing number of academics interested in their ethnography, language and history. And, here, a radical change internally in the Company’s composition corresponded almost exactly to a Canadian, “national” polity of church into which all communicant Anglicans would be expected to co-exist from 1893. This, at the exact moment with the British Trustees Acts of 1891 and 1892 introduced their own species of religious tests, stipulating that all trustees or members of charities must espouse a particular intention in full accordance with their objects. A heterodox English charity sat most uneasily at all of these interstices. A sense of orthodoxy was descending from various quarters on men who had spent little time on record debating such matters.

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W. L. Carpenter, Company visitor, had given in 1884 a worrisome description of a Longhouse ritual of the Onondagas, most favourable to the ritualistic solemnity and spiritual integrity of the participants³:

I then discovered near at hand a group of young men dressed up, ready to lead the so-called dance, and I persuaded them to stand also (photo 26). They then all entered the Long-house, and the “dance” commenced. One or two old men sat astride on benches in the centre, beating drums &c., and the dance consisted in a procession round the room led by the dressed-up youths, in slow measure, and short steps, varied occasionally by a movement of rotation on the axis of the body, accompanied by an interjectional cry. The procession was joined at intervals by any one who felt moved to do so. I was strongly reminded of St. Paul’s words to the Athenians, “Ye are too superstitious...whom therefore ye *ignorantly* worship” &c. and I mentally compared this processional dance

² Chancellors’ Papers Pt. 1, by date, Ashton to Mackenzie, enclosure, of date 21 May 1908. HUC Cronyn Archives.

³ HUC Cronyn Archives, HCH 2003/43/14/20799 (Box 2- Shelf 368 Box 2), 1884 Spottiswoode, London,

and song with the ritualistic procession and hymns in some of our English churches, for the worship was evidently spiritual, not idolatrous.⁴

Such observations can hardly have gladdened some of the Company's members, or delighted others. Either way, this picture may have been a lightening rod for the various positions among the members on the questions of the validity of non-Christian religions, one which went directly to Carpenter's own very distinguished background as a grandson of the Rev. Lant Carpenter of Bristol (1780-1840). Carpenter's Unitarian heritage here seems to have intersected most approvingly with what might be seen as non-Trinitarian Onondaga devotion; the movement so spiritual, as to be descriptive of a ritual nearly "High Church". When contrasted with criticisms from the Six Nations about how little the Institute had contributed to the "Christianization" of the Six Nations, and with Ashton's own uneducated Protestantism, given in papers of morning and evening prayers for private devotion at the Institute, it is to be wondered if the sort of ritual elsewhere looked exactly Anglican or "spiritual" to Carpenter.

As a Unitarian of distinguished intellectual family and connections, Carpenter's world posed possibly worrying aspects for other members of the Company, especially in his interpretation of the Six Nations' education and culture at Company hands. He was of an intellectual, broad, liberal, family—as were most of the Unitarian members. Ashton had not been exposed to this kind of culture before. One Carpenter cousin was a notable Comparative Religion and Sanskrit scholar who identified "theism" as common among Buddhists, Hindus and others; who wrote of the emotive content of religion, troublingly close to Carpenter's description of the Onondaga ritual if interpreted in the stricter terms of a decade later.⁵ Joseph Estline Carpenter had noted that "the first objects of the comparison [of religions] are thus found in the outward acts which fall more or less clearly within the sphere of religion, the places where those are performed, the persons who do them, the means required for them, the occasions to which they are attached". There were of course "gradations of complexity". There had to be comparisons. While Carpenter detailed very little about the riveting Onondaga ritual he witnessed. In the absence of written religious literature and the contemporary scholarly classification as "ethnic" because of linguistic limits within cultures, certainly Carpenter's description did not suggest a dying religion. Nor was it encouraging of the mission's work.

These difficulties were hardly located in a single example. Indeed, throughout the later-Nineteenth Century, and long before, the acceptable limits of language, liturgy, and practice had strained cross-cultural relations in places where colonization had already imposed vast restraints. In a latter-day version of the Jesuit *querrelle des rites*,⁶ The Lambeth Conference of 1897 had addressed these widespread and dangerous waters of comparative religion: the bishops, scholars and laity there gathered roundly denounced Christian delusions over Indian religious matters in a Resolution (number 15): "That the tendency of many English-speaking Christians to entertain an exaggerated opinion of the excellencies of Hinduism and Buddhism, and to ignore the fact that Jesus Christ alone has been constituted Saviour and King of mankind, should be vigorously corrected".⁷ Still another Company Unitarian influence, James Martineau⁸, one of the

⁴ P. 20 *ibid.*,

⁵ Joseph Estlin Carpenter, 1844-1927, *Comparative Religion*, London, 1910, in the Home University Library of Modern Knowledge, hardly a Christian organization for education.

⁶ [Louis Wei Tsing-sing](#), *La lutte autour de la liturgie chinoise aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, Bruxelles, 1965;

⁷ <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127725/1897.pdf>

⁸ 1805-1900,

controversial members proposed for election to the Company in 1895, had written of reason as superior to Scripture, of God made manifest in humanity—this was a man of extraordinary influence and eminence; of whom Prime Minister W. E. Gladstone said was the greatest intellectual of his age. But the Company preferred the Gladstone who said that the devout Trinitarianism of the 1640s and 1650s had produced the very “kernel” of it all—meaning the Empire.⁹ A wide reading, even a slippery one, was possible: was the kernel more valid than its variations?

The ‘spiritual’ Unitarian view was, by contrast, apparently without limitations of doctrine; now dangerous, inimical to the Company’s “Christianizing” influence; for no one suggested a “non-Trinitarian” was not civilized, merely capable of endangering the Christian impetus of the empire. In other words, contrary to Carpenter’s espousal of the “Pagan” on the Six Nations, there was, finally, nothing to be learned there. A dichotomy had been drawn ever more tightly around the Sacraments of the Anglican imperial cause. Was it the view of the Company incorporate that *these* rites were “idolatrous”? Such were the delusions and snares of the Unitarians. In Company Member Duncan Milligan’s words, would the Six Nations’ Anglicans despise this?

Carpenter’s description of the young Onondagas’ ritual “as varied occasionally by a movement of rotation on the axis of the body, accompanied by an interjectional cry” would be replaced with correct (with legal precedents) Anglican posture, vesture and prayers. Different criteria were, thus, in place at Company visitor, W. F. Webster’s 1908 visit. Although Ashton had been ordained by Baldwin in October 1886 as deacon, he could never use the Queen Anne’s plate sacramentally.¹⁰ Ashton said Divine Service as his journals attest. But he was using the reserved sacrament in 1896. Other priests had to be drafted in to celebrate the Eucharist. What richness of ritual, “non idolatrous”, by contrast, was presented by the Onondagas. Nor was this a Trinitarian approval: the unity of procession and intention, the inward devotion, was what had impressed Carpenter. This approval of “spiritual” was distinctly controversial. It was partly to a new national Canadian church that the Company 1895-7 sought a uniformity of members and approved practice. Partly, more importantly, it was to satisfy to the satisfaction of the Charity Commissioners that the doctrines and practices of the Church of England brought them within the correct theological ambit. Young Indigenous eyes had to see the corrective performative motions and utterances of these practices. To fail to do this was, obliquely, criticizing the *Solemn Declaration*, the Imperial experiment. The edge of the failure of evangelism was plain to see in Carpenter’s description, in the refusal of Christianization by significant minorities of the Six Nations. Ought this to be tolerated?

These twelve years had seen a seismic shift in this interpretation. The Canadian Church of England was now uniting under provinces once extra-provincial to Canterbury at this time. The General Synod of the Church of England in Canada in 1893 was formed under an oath called the *Solemn Declaration* which forbade religious complexion outside of the international sphere of doctrine. This was specifically Trinitarian and vested in episcopacy. This amalgamation of two metropolitan sees posed a difficulty. While it did not affect the charitable status of the Company

⁹ LMA CLC 540/MS 07920/7, p. 165.

¹⁰ Chancellors’ Papers, Pt. 1, HUC Cronyn Archives, Ashton to Davis, 21 Feb. 1896, “I was ordained under Canon 18 of Provincial Synod—which admits to Deacon orders without surrender of worldly calling,” if approved by the Bishop.

in Canada, it shifted how the Company would be subject to a different form of oversight, under the Church of England in Canada.¹¹ There would be no religious “test” as such, but it would be expected that the doctrinal instruments of any charity would follow a certain pattern.

In 1893 a Canadian National Church of England was established. Its formational document, the Canadian *Declaration*, affirmed the Book of Common Prayer in averring that Scripture contained “all things necessary to salvation”. The Lambeth Conference of 1897 would directly prohibit any exaltation of the Indian religions as being in any sense equivalent to Christianity (there was a distinct scholarly view in this direction). By implication anything described as ‘religious’ in Indigenous culture was going to be relegated to the “primitive” in these contemporary schema—“animism” at best in the nomenclature of the burgeoning field of Protestant comparative religions. Fossilized or in a museum was even more ideal. The opening formula in the *Declaration* spelled out a problem for the Company:

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The definite Trinitarian formula implied a subscription to the ancient formula. The question would form itself: was the Company incorporate capable of a unanimous subscription? The Canadian Church as now formed in 1893 imposed an oath, almost a test, of doctrinal unity.

We declare this Church to be, and desire that it shall continue, in full communion with the Church of England throughout the world, as an integral portion of the One Body of Christ composed of Churches which, united under the One Divine Head and in the fellowship of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, hold the One Faith revealed in Holy Writ, and defined in the Creeds as maintained by the undivided primitive Church in the undisputed Ecumenical Councils; receive the same Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as containing all things necessary to salvation; teach the same Word of God; partake of the same Divinely ordained Sacraments, through the ministry of the same Apostolic Orders; and worship One God and Father through the same Lord Jesus Christ, by the same Holy and Divine Spirit who is given to them that believe to guide them into all truth.¹²

What shape this doctrine would take was nearly impossible to determine in the extraordinary politics of English religious life in the 1890s, in the question of Home Rule for Ireland (thus giving Catholics significantly greater Parliamentary weight) and the non-Conformists themselves. In the election of the Marquess of Salisbury as Prime Minister¹³, his two Trustees Acts of 1891 and 1892, sought to define exactly how the “religious” trusts would work by cleaning up any anachronistic memberships and purposes—as a High Church Tory, Salisbury’s administration wanted clean, doctrinal form in trusteeships.

But the leavening theological implication of the *Solemn Declaration* pointed directly at the twin difficulties of the 1892 Act now facing anyone who could not subscribe to a belief in the Holy Trinity: subscription to the ancient formulae as well as the intentionality of their trusteeship

¹¹ The amalgamation of the former Metropolitan Sees of Canada and Rupert’s Land. The British Columbia missionary Dioceses retained the oversight of the Archbishop of Canterbury which may have been an easier choice in the 1890s when a second residential school was envisioned by the Company at Kuper Island, then at St. George’s Lytton.

¹² <https://www.anglican.ca/about/beliefs/solemn-declaration/>

¹³ His third term 1895-1902, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, 1830-1903

became mandatory and intrinsically connected conditions. Trustees were now defined theologically:

The governing body of the institution may be any body corporate, council, public authority, local authority, commissioners, directors, committee, trustees, or other body of persons, corporate or unincorporate, willing to undertake, or elected or appointed for the purpose of undertaking, or having, the government and management of the institution.¹⁴

Thus, from October 1894, the Company was riven with unavoidable questions about its significant anti-Trinitarian members and their willingness to undertake Christian mission. The presenting issue was the proposed election of James Martineau as member in October 1894. Was a Unitarian suitable?¹⁵ After a century of Unitarian elections, the question was now being raised. In December 1894 the Charity Commissioners were asked for their opinion based on Company documents.¹⁶ The key element here was the impossibility of admission of Unitarians in the 1649 original Charter as the Long Parliament had already passed ordinances for the sequestration and punishment of persons professing this belief in 1648.¹⁷ Particular pride was given to the Company's role in the execution of John Biddle, an early colonial Unitarian.¹⁸ This exclusionary clause was held to bind for the duration of Company history, appearing as late as the 1845 trust documents for the Mohawk Glebe.¹⁹ Indeed, the preambles to each trust, Charter, Boyle and Williams were adduced for their references to the Holy Trinity—Williams being Presbyterian and famous. "It is impossible to believe that this Royal Charter intended Unitarians to be members of the Company, and be eligible for the offices of Governor and Treasurer..."²⁰ Nor were funds raised or given by Unitarians. "The cause of our having to make this appeal is not any difference of opinion between Churchmen and Trinitarian Nonconformists, for the only Nonconformist trustees who are not Unitarian are amongst the strongest objectors to any increase or perpetuation of the Unitarian element which in some unknown way have been imported into

¹⁴ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/55-56/29/section/3> 55-6 Vict. c. 29, s. 3

¹⁵ LMA CLC 540/MS 07290/7 pp. 131-2, 17 October 1894. The debate questioned whether Martineau would be a "fit person".

¹⁶ Ibid. 12 December, p. 135 Company to Charity Commission, notation by Clerk in the Minutes. Then, as ever, these "documents" were reprinted versions of historical material printed many times in Company publications, but they centered here on the Trinitarian language of the Charter, of John Eliot's "Tracts" beginning in 1631 (with specific reference to the Trinity), pp. 6-12, of Busk's *History* (1884, London, Spottiswoode) as well as the three big Chancery cases in which the Company was found to be following their trust intentions, 1792, 1808, 1836. Henry William Busk had published all of them in his 1884 *History*—he was Unitarian, had been a member of the Company for fifty-three years, and as his preface stated, "my father and brother having been Governors for over twenty-one years, and my uncle and his son having been Treasurers for over fourteen years", the Busks and their Unitarian relations had the longest service record of a particular family at that juncture.

¹⁷ There was much discussion of this and of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, summoned by the Long Parliament in 1643 for re-investigation of the ordinances of what had been the Church of England; the intention was a mixture of Scriptural scholars and theologians would re-define what was meant by the term Church of England, a re-investigation of Reformation methods and content. Naturally, several eminent divines were associated with the Company, but all historical sources defined them as Presbyterians. By the Nineteenth Century, Presbyterians were increasingly identified with Unitarianism, and, by extension, a brand of atheism. This notable elision was not addressed in the "Memorial".

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 166.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 167.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 168.

the Company”.²¹ However this had happened, the numbers were clear: the Company stood in danger of a takeover.²² Rather astoundingly, the presence of Unitarian members was said to be “naturally opposed or indifferent” to religious questions critical to the conversion by the Company’s “objects”.²³ Such objections had not been voiced in a century.

The NEC’s deliberations on “Church of England” trustees appears to have begun with a solemn removal from the safe of the original Charter on 15 December 1893.²⁴ This chapter closed with new members, and adherence to the doctrine of the Trinity consonant with the Act of 1892 and *Solemn Declaration* (with all of British North America as its purview). These efforts were capped with a new Supplemental Charter in 1899. This, in effect, freed them from the tensions, activism, and political sophistication of the Six Nations. They might now build churches—the 1906 solution—and get out of the Institute—impossible legally—and move their resources to day schools or other missionary endeavours among the transitory First Nations of the west whence they might be removed from ‘colportage’, nomadism, to education and agriculture.

This “Memorial” had, a year later, in October 1895, been presented for discussion by to the Company’s body of final deliberation. It opened wide the possible consequences if the Company were to be dominated by non-Christians.²⁵ Eleven Christian members had signed the original “Memorial” in October 1894. They had filed this petition before the Chancery Division of the High Court of Justice.²⁶ In October 1895 the motion on the floor now accused Trinitarian members guilty of impropriety if they voted for a Unitarian.²⁷ The “Memorial” called such applicants for future membership—and existing members—evidence of long-standing guilt of a “serious breach of trust”. There remained eleven “non-Trinitarian” of twenty-five members of the Company in the following year, 1896, for the term was the sole description used by the eleven who signed the “Memorial” in 1894. A further six Unitarian members tried to find a middle way. They acknowledged that Unitarians had never imposed their beliefs and had contributed enormously, pleading “non-interference”²⁸—particularly Isaac Solly²⁹ and H. W. Busk,³⁰ two governors of long standing, both historians of the missions. “Throughout the last half of the eighteenth century there were always some of the more liberal English Presbyterians on the Court”.³¹ The Whiggish, Liberal progressive strain of longstanding Company membership was also at stake. The Unitarian side acknowledged that the “Memorial” was possibly friendly

²¹ Ibid. p. 169.

²² Ibid. p. 170.

²³ Ibid. p. 172.

²⁴ LMA CLC 540/MS 7920/p. 120 Company meeting of 15 December.

²⁵ The entire “Memorial” of a year before was reproduced by the Clerk in the Minutes of 9 October 1895 for discussion by the Company, *ibid.* 165-174.

²⁶ Ibid. 174, Percival Bosanquet, H. C. B. Bowles, H. F. Bowles, M. P., H. H. Browell, John W. Ford, G. B. Hudson, M. P., H. F. Kemble, Duncan Milligan, H. J. Noel, Froome Talfourd, J. R. Vaizey.

²⁷ Ibid. 9 October 1895, p. 195.

²⁸ Ibid. pp. 174-178 dated only as “March 1895”. This was reproduced with the “Memorial” for Company discussion 9 October 1895.

²⁹ 1769-1853, his sister was married to Dr. William Lister, FRSE (1756-1830), both progenitors of a substantial line of Company members including H. J. Lister, member in 1896 for the “moderates”. Company Charter Clerk, Walter C. Venning, DCL, mother was a Lister.

³⁰ <https://archive.org/details/sketchoforiginre00buskuoft/mode/2up>, H. W. Busk, 1884, *A Sketch of the Origin and Brief History of the New England Company*, (London, 1884) printed by Spottiswoode, as was Carpenter’s *Report* of the same year.

³¹ Ibid. 177.

on the part of Anglican members. But if it were not, this was an occasion for “sincere regret”, for they did not want to partake in “sectarian self-assertion”.³² A further, final, rebuttal by Duncan Milligan, honorary chief of the Six Nations and member of the Company’s lengthy 1889 deputation to the Company’s missions in Canada, had already hardened the opposition. He set out the matter as insoluble in the summer of 1895.³³ He took the moderates’ reply in a lengthy point-by-point consideration, wondering how the Company could place itself in the hands of those who “reject almost all the most vital articles of his creed”. Non-interference did not imply the kind of Trinitarian subscription which was now mandatory. He concluded,

The effect on the Indians themselves can be more easily imagined than described. They will be only too likely to despise the Company for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England and to discredit its message, while Christianity itself will be put to open shame.³⁴

One member, Sir James Lawrence (d. 1897), a Unitarian philanthropist and former Lord Mayor of London, went as far to say he would not abide by a ruling contrary to the Unitarians by the Commissioners. The church he had funded, Unitarian, in London, had in 1870 given over their pulpit to the Indian social reformer Keshub Chandra Sen, a leading member of the universalist Hindu movement Brahmo-Samaj. A worrying debate, fully within the context of a European discourse of religious classification, opened further the question of permissible approaches to the plethora of “religious” or “spiritual” influences nudging at the edges of the heterodoxies. The small majority of the Company in 1896 had begun to fixate on heterodox, polytheistic and other classifications as worrying in the work of their “Protestant” charges. Such discourses were becoming common and popular. Doctrinally conservative Anglicanism, ramified by contemporary colonial practices, was their answer. The Church of England members of the “Memorial” inveighed against membership by men who could not subscribe to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the doctrine of Atonement. Indeed, it was the Unitarian membership which had throughout the Victorian age a history of great intellectual distinction—in social reform, in law, in comparative religion, in science. These members were now questionable in official capacities such as trustees. It was noted in the course of the debates at the Company the great absenteeism of this group (widely a problem since Meyer and Heywood operated solely on their own terms), and spoke to the intensely intermarried and inter-related nature of what might be called the Victorian Company’s endogamous Unitarian-Quaker core membership: Listers, Solllys, Vennings, Carpenters, Busks, Hoares, Gurneys, and related Barclays, Cadburys.

It was the aristocracy of “non-Trinitarian” Dissent, and now its history was being eradicated. The Trustee Act’s (1892) nomenclature around “willingness” centred on something the Company now acknowledged (by the Memorialists) but which had been long avoided, they said, through the fault of sheer good manners; the intentionality behind the word “Christian”—rather than Anglican—an interpretation of the Company’s trust purposes in doctrine in ways more severe than anything seen since 1662. This potential difficulty was now erased by the sole election of Church of England members. Doubtless this newfound doctrine was raised with Ashton in his visit of 1896. This was obvious in the Diocesan queries of 1908 he answered for Archdeacon

³² Ibid. 177-8. Signed by David Ainsworth, M. P., James Heywood (FRS), longstanding Treasurer of the Company since 1870 together with James Meyer as Governor (1868-189...), H. J. Lister, H. S. Lister, S. W. Preston, Russell Scott.

³³ Ibid. 179-190.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 190.

Mackenzie. The question over heterodox religious Company membership was met (and would be raised again by an agitating Methodist on the Muncey Reserve in 1913) at the highest political and legal levels to bring its trusts in line with the doctrines of its “purposes” as solely, intentionally, Christian. Moreover, steps would be taken to ensure a particular hue of Anglicanism. By implication, these changes would conform to the doctrines of the *Solemn Declaration*, a set of doctrines the Company could not avoid if its charitable “Church” status were to be preserved at home and in Canada. When R. G. Fox, a Darwin by relation, was elected by fourteen members—the Unitarians—against eight objections, in 1896, it was clear that a line had formed, the Company was divided.

The proposal of election to Company membership of the Prime Minister’s son, Lord Hugh Cecil in February 1897 resolved the impasse.³⁵ This was the polar opposite of a Unitarian influence. Robert Wigram, a wealthy heir to a London docking fortune, seems to have been the mover. Cecil was young, of the highest old aristocracy, and a leading member of a staunchly conservative group within the House of Commons and the Church of England. His father was considered “High Church” having been interested in the Tractarians while at Oxford. The latitude of Gladstone, his predecessor (d. 1895), whose interest in Catholic and non-Anglican power had been shaped by many advisors, including the Catholic historian, Lord Acton, was replaced by a rather narrower definition. There were of course resignations within the Company, of H. J. Lister and H. H. Browell as auditors, one Anglican and one Unitarian, left voluntarily to be replaced by a neutral, professional third party.³⁶ In general the Unitarians’ replacements were drawn from unimpeachably more conservative quarters, a peer (the 9th earl of Stamford)³⁷ or heirs to peerages (Lord Balcarres, Viscount Bury)³⁸, Parliament and the wider families of the nobility (John Gilbert Talbot).³⁹ A month or so later Percival Bosanquet, High Sheriff of Hertfordshire was nominated by Cecil; one of the leading Anglican “Memorialists”, Wigram, made two further nominations: Samuel Hoare, MP (a safely Anglican member of the Quaker banking dynasty which had become Anglo-Catholic a half century before) and Frederick Heygate Lambert, RN, whose family had clerical connections.⁴⁰ When George Heath, Unitarian, resigned it was accepted; at the same time, the ancient Froome Talfourd’s resignation as Christian was not.⁴¹ It was, in effect, a Cecilian cabal designed to appease the Act defining

³⁵ 1869-1956, later Lord Cecil of Quixwood, proposed in February, elected in April.

³⁶ Replaced by non-member W. B. Peat, 1853-1936, founder of Peat, Marwick, later KPMG.

³⁷ 1850-1910, a member of the Bible Society and Cecil family descendant in the line of the earls of Exeter, very distant relation of the Prime Minister.

³⁸ James Lindsay, 1871-1940, future 27th earl of Crawford and 10th earl of Balcarres; one of his aunts was related to Lord William Cecil’s wife, Emily Bootle-Wilbraham, Lord Hugh Cecil’s sister-in-law

³⁹ LMA CLC 540/MS 07920/7 p. 232, Cecil, Balcarres and Talbot were nominated 9 Feb. 1897. Rt. Hon. John Gilbert Talbot, 1835-1910, MP, JP, son of Hon. John Chetwynd Talbot and Hon. Caroline Wharnccliffe, MP for Oxford University, 1878-1910, m. Hon. Meriel Lyttleton. Prime Minister Salisbury was Chancellor of Oxford, 1869-1903.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 240, 2nd June 1897. Samuel Hoare, 1st Baronet (1841-1910) was a great-grandson of John Gurney Hoare, Company member (who died during the debates on the use of trust monies in building the Cayuga Glebe), and Samuel Hoare, leading members of England’s Quaker banking aristocracy. Bosanquet’s connection with Hertfordshire put him directly in one of the Cecil family’s areas of great political influence.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 199: Talfourd (1807-1902) was one of the few Company members to have had extensive mission experience, particularly in Lambton County, Ontario. He had built “Froomefield”, for himself and his brother Field, whilst carrying out mission work near Corunna and Walpole Island in the 1850s, where he had built St. Mary’s Church and became “Indian Visiting Superintendent” in 1854. <http://mooremuseum.ca/virtual-exhibit/froomefield> accessed 12 July 13, 2020, 10:54 am CDT.

charitable trustees corresponding exactly to the Canadian innovation in the *Solemn Declaration*. Now, proposed members had to be vouched for theologically by their proposers; correct elections were minuted over objections from the Unitarians who viewed them as humiliation.⁴² A history of the Company, extemporised during the course of the debates, identified the previous regime, under James Meyer, as lacking in discipline in these matters—Winnifreth called it “authoritarian”—which would now be corrected. Unitarian influence came at a “period of great slackness in the Company’s operations, when from various causes its funds were allowed to accumulate for many years, and its missionary work was very limited in extent”, around 1800.⁴³ In effect, the “Memorial” called a halt to innovative ideas and patterns of influence, some of which had possibly spilled over into the Six Nations in the 1880s and after. The Charity Commissioners ruled that, legally, the Company was a Church of England charity. With very minor exceptions (a few Methodists or Scottish Episcopalians) their agents had been found to have had impeccably Church of England credentials and origins under Charles II—the lawyers were not historians, for that King would have despised many of the founders’ theological positions. The Company as described by Ashton to Mackenzie in 1908 was irrevocably changed from the membership, and ideas, of 1896, denominationalism imposed at all points. Ashton’s irritation was not just with the Diocesan commissioner and the Bishop, but with a whole series of radically changed circumstances.

iii

In the midst of these profound shifts, Ashton was summoned to England in 1896, a visit which saw a new theological view of his mission as wholly Church of England. His rather casually dismissive remarks to Archdeacon Davis on this aspect of the mission and its missionaries—himself included, of course, as “Incumbent of the Mohawk Glebe”—earlier that summer had to be entirely recanted. Here was a very different church polity which Ashton had rehearsed so abruptly on the Company’s behalf to Archdeacon Davis in 1896: “I send you a copy of its history and charter from which you will see that it is not bound to support any particular denomination of Christians, or in fact to work through clerical agents at all.”⁴⁴

If it supports Missionaries of any particular ~~denomination~~ Church it does so for and on behalf of the people ministered to and not on behalf of the particular denomination of which the latter are adherents.⁴⁵

Now, following the “purge” of 1896, he responded in 1908 to Archdeacon V. C. Mackenzie, acting as Bishop Williams’ agent: “On appeal to the Commissioner of Charities, it was decided that the New England Co. was a Church of England institution and that none but members of that Church could hereafter become members of the Company, and none since have been elected”.⁴⁶ This had not been an easy decision. The pitched debates of the late 1890s closed the historic connection with “Dissent” permanently as long as Dissent was not defined as “anti-Trinitarian”, thus Quaker or Unitarian. Gone were the future elections of wealthy and venerable Quakers such as the bankers Gurneys and Hoares, the intellectual Unitarian Carpenters with their connections to James Martineau, Joseph Estline, Mary Carpenter and other distinguished thinkers of

⁴² Ibid. p. 192

⁴³ Ibid. p. 170

⁴⁴ Chancellors’ Papers, Pt. 1, Cronyn Archives, Ashton to Davis, 21 Feb. 1896.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

decidedly advanced views; and there others too numerous to mention, although the Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson and Chief Justice of the United States Oliver Wendell Holmes were names used by the pro-Unitarian element as having had influence on the Company.⁴⁷ Veering into Presbyterian and Unitarian denials of the Holy Trinity, hitherto unmentioned in Company annals, now posed a danger for several powerful reasons wholly outside of the members' control.

No detail was too small in answering how this question had resolved itself in the practice of ministry twelve years later. When Company Member and lawyer W. F. Webster was sent in October 1908 to staunch the growing militancy in the Confederacy over the Company's right to claim title on its various properties, past and present, he reported fully, for the first time in Company history, the precise nature of the priestcraft, postures, and ecclesiastical furniture. In 1906 the Company was flush with money derived no doubt from the sale of its freehold 33-acre Babcock property to the family of Ashton's son-in-law, William Foster Cockshutt.⁴⁸ The Company canvassed then a wide variety of western bishops, and its own missionaries. It decided to shift its resources from Ashton's Institute to the task of building new churches on the Six Nations, which was part of the purpose of Webster's visit—to see what was being done, by whom, consonant with the new orthodoxy. Webster's inventory in 1908 listed the use of candles (always unlit), frontals, and other ecclesiastical hardware in each of the parishes of the Six Nations including the Mohawk Chapel. It cannot be known if any missionary had innovated their liturgical styles in the previous dozen or so years. What is important is that Webster felt he had to anatomize them. While this was an excellent way of signalling the various needs of congregations to the Company, there was also a theological purpose.⁴⁹

Ashton, now a priest from 1903, did not "adopt the eastward position" at the altar according to Webster. There were no lit candles, no vestments, no kneelers or hassocks at the Mohawk Chapel. Ashton's former posture as deacon, it can be surmised, was at the north end of the altar, closest to the congregation, occupying the power position as holder of the benefice opposite the priest⁵⁰; the priest, thus, would not be distinguished by anything other than touching the paten and flagon during the consecration of the elements. By 1904, when Ashton's campaign to make the Mohawk Chapel a Royal Chapel, the lifting of the Queen Anne plate in celebration of the Eucharist cemented in young Indigenous eyes the marriage of Institute, Company, and Crown, all in Ashton's hands. Nor would the priest be distinguished as the sole person kneeling (no hassocks) during this prayer. By these tiny details, Ashton may have inserted himself as superior,

⁴⁷ This was a lengthy debate starting in October 1894 with a "Memorial" signed by members of the Company opposed to limiting election to Church of England laity, LMA CLC MS 07920/7 fols. 165-174, and following for many pages, as the debate consumed most of the following year in anticipation of the revised Supplemental Charter of 1899. Roman Catholics were expressly forbidden. All Chancery cases were cited (1792, 1808, 1836) as well as statutes of 9 and 10 William III c. 32 (1698) disallowing from such a charity "Anti-Trinitarians"—apparently although toleration extended to them, the violation of "Christian" as a legal term was fully so in those denying the Trinity. As Ashton noted, the result was the election from 1896 of members who were solely (almost) Church of England—some other proposed names were struck on the basis of their denomination. The Company would go again to law, the Charity Commission's counsel, in 1914.

⁴⁸ The massive Cockshutt Plow Company would form a dominant sub-theme in the remaining years of Ashton's incumbencies, leading to wider, intractable litigation.

⁴⁹ Webster, 1908, pp. 17-18.

⁵⁰ Where normally these positions would have been reversed, with the priest as incumbent, and the deacon a liturgical assistant.

at least in optics years before. To the congregants—the children of the Institute alone, a strange rule introduced without anyone’s permission as to who might gather in the Chapel. Webster’s placement of Ashton at the altar does allow for this interpretation. Moreover, the Royal “pious objects” of the Queen Anne Communion silver would, by this arrangement, have been entirely visible throughout, itself a somewhat worrying (and tensely legal) debate in the 1890s.⁵¹ Despite use of the resplendent Queen Anne silver, antedating the Company presence among the Six Nations by well over a century, there was a dilapidated 1861 Prayer Book, an equally disreputable looking 1869 Priest’s bible, containing the *Apocrypha*. Only an English service without translation, 11 am on Sunday, save for the three winter months, was given at the Chapel.⁵²

Farney, at the new Ohsweken church, St. Peter’s, “celebrates at the north end of the east side of the altar and does not use vestments”.⁵³ Huron, and the missions, were unrelentingly “Low” or veering to Protestant in practice, entirely consistent with a strong Church of Ireland influence felt throughout the Huron Diocese. Webster’s description of temporary altars such as he found at Ohsweken, St. Luke’s Delaware, and other improvisations gave the Company’s missions a somewhat transitional air. The buildings, the postures, the books, windows, seating: all were in this way “pious objects”. Whether they were working or not was an open question.

This question of Company doctrine was not new, but had not encountered anything like extra-provincial jurisdiction outside of Canterbury in Canada and, thus, on the Six Nations. Now, the Canadian church was becoming “national” and new standards had to be accommodated. This was why Canon Davis was questioning Ashton in 1896, and why the Company was questioning its own religious composition. The Bishop, Baldwin, was conscious of his Plymouth Brethren sympathies and not about to oppose these changes for fear of exposing his own very Evangelical position to untoward criticism and notice.⁵⁴ Huron was “Low” in doctrine, but high in rituals: the importance of the Bishop, the Eucharist, doctrines on the Atonement—all matters raised with equal edge at the Company’s debates 1894-7.

And this appeal to legislative prohibition was in advance of the “expansion” of the Company’s missions geographically in 1899 which, as Ashton had to have known, would have removed their primary charitable efforts away from the Six Nations but still within British North America—the Company shuttered the Garden River mission in 1870 at exactly the time a new diocese,

⁵¹ The exposure of the Communion plate, paten and flagon, might lead to a veneration of the actual objects, veering into troubling conclusions. As E. J. Bicknell put this Nineteenth Century fear of polytheism, a tendency to “Jesus-worship” (or, worse, Catholicism), “a perverted and sentimental devotion to our Lord, not as the revelation of the Father and one with Him, but as a tender and not too exacting Saviour who will be a refuge from the Father’s holiness and justice”. One wonders if the presence of Bearfoot at such Eucharists did not cause Ashton to be identified with the Biblical God of retribution with Bearfoot, or the presiding priest, as the “tender” influence. E. J. Bicknell, *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, London, 3rd edition, 1955, p. 25 on “The Being of God”. Edward King, Bishop of Lincoln, had been prosecuted by Archbishop Benson of Canterbury for not allowing the Communion vessels to be on display, indicted on two counts, largely to avoid a public trial. [George William Erskine Russell, *Edward King, Sixtieth Bishop of Lincoln: A Memoir*, Longman-Green: London, 1912, p. 69.](#) In effect, thereafter the vessels had to be seen, hence Webster’s careful description of the position of the Company’s missionaries at the altar. To hide them was to be a Ritualist, a connotation far from the Company’s embrace of the “Protestant” element of the Church of England.

⁵² Ibid. p. 17.

⁵³ Ibid. p. 18.

⁵⁴ Baldwin was an Evangelical, a Derbyite in practice.

Algoma, was partitioned from Toronto, raising new canonical implications. From the 1890s St. George's Lytton and from the 1870s Kuper Island had begun under Company missionary Rev. Robert J. Roberts to function (albeit within the diocesan boundaries of the CMS mission diocese) within New Westminster, and had become the new sister school to the Mohawk Institute, St. George's, Lytton. The 1906 report had weighed in heavily that the NEC ought to expand its missions in the Prairies; Ashton was enlisted to help devise the new Elkhorn school in Manitoba in 1896, giving his imprimatur to the former teacher H. J. Fairlie, and Anglican priest, he had dismissed from the Mohawk in 1880 for his excessive cruelty to the children.

This opportunity was one of the reasons the Company entertained and cultivated Canadian prelates—to understand the shape of a new, non-colonial polity. Immediately following the Unitarian purge, in the summer of 1897, exactly at the same time as the Cecilian cabal, the Company took the opportunity of the Pan-Anglican and Lambeth Conferences. With the presence of many Canadian bishops, a meeting of the Primate of all Canada, his Grace the Archbishop of Rupert's Land, together with the Bishops of Huron, Saskatchewan, New Westminster, was arranged in London to consult on the future of the Company's missions in Western Canada.⁵⁵ The Primate's address on the floor of the Lambeth Conference conceded that the successful growth and fundraising among the Canadian churches would be wholly insufficient to replace the support of the English societies—the SPCK, SPG, and above all the CMS. After all, the Imperial representatives were then all making strong cases for their own missions in India, Japan, China, Australia and elsewhere.⁵⁶ When asked about future schools at the bishops' private meeting at their headquarters, it appeared from the Clerk's record that the Company seems to have decided on supporting Elkhorn, in south-western Manitoba, near a major hub of the Canadian Pacific Railway—a concern close to the Company's planning. This was at the urging of Archbishop Machray—while New Westminster, John Dart, (still functioning under Canterbury's oversight) argued for Lytton BC (where the new NEC school, St. George's would eventually be established). Saskatchewan (Cyprian Pinkham) argued for a school for the Peigan Reserve outside Calgary. Baldwin of Huron proved something of a cipher, endorsing Ashton's existing regime at the Mohawk. A new residential school or other form of mission was clearly planned.

There had always been the question raised since David Thorburn's day as Visiting Superintendent in the years 1841-61, as to how successful exactly the Anglican mission to the Six Nations had been. After Nelles' and Elliott's extensive early conversions in the 1830s and 1840s, there did not appear to be a serious census-taking in the later decades, in part because so many Company resources had rested with Ashton at the Institute, where a curriculum of Scriptural History and a steady diet of Divine Services had been seen as adequate for the inculcation of Christian, Anglican, modes of life. But in 1898, for example, David Boyle's report on the "Pagan Iroquois" was appended to the annual Report on the Six Nations educational system.⁵⁷ "The wonder then is not that Iroquois Paganism has been to some extent modified by

⁵⁵ They had already met with Dr. Perrin of Columbia Diocese, a CMS foundation under Canterbury, in October 1894 about the Rev. Robert. J. Robert's expansion of his mission at Kuper Island, LMA CLC 540/MS 07920/7 fol. 154.

⁵⁶ <https://archive.org/details/lambethconferenc00lambe/page/32/mode/2up?q=Buddhist> cf. Machray's address on the state of missions in Canada, pp. 58-62

⁵⁷ <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.00921/14?r=0&s=1> "On the Paganism of the Civilized Iroquois of Ontario", 1896, David Boyle, Curator of the Archeological Museum of Ontario.

Christian influences, but that it has been modified so little,” he opined.⁵⁸ Alluding implicitly to the radical shifts of Anglican doctrine over Scriptural reading and scholarship, he mused whether any form of Christianity or Islam had been so little altered in the last century as the rituals and forms of the “pagan” worship on the Six Nations. Such a judgement could not give ringing endorsement to the work of the Company, its missionaries, or its institutions. Here he was echoing Carpenter’s far less ‘expert’ or sustained conclusions of 1884. The religious universality admired so much by a Unitarian-Universalist in 1884, even if misunderstood, was taking on the shape of an enemy. Webster’s advice—taken—to the Company in 1908 to desist from the use of the word “Pagan” in favour of “Deist” or “Theist” was an attempt, not at universalism, but to avoid earlier imbroglios where Company missionaries had been keen to rush into theological debates thinking they were identical to political debates. A strict neutrality was, yet again, urged on all Company employees, for example, when Webster was asked to commit the Company’s support of the “De-horners”, agitating for the removal of the hereditary Confederacy Council.

There were certainly tensions in the Anglican Church, the Church of England in Canada: after the CMS’ announced removal, Samuel Hume Blake chaired the “Special Indian and Eskimo Committee” for the Canadian General Synod (1905-10). He deplored this expansion of Indian Residential Schools as vested in the jealous missional ambitions of the same diocesan and jurisdictional competition as the Company encountered in 1897. Partly this lack of any central government organizing principle, in Blake’s estimation, showed the incoherence of these schools as missional. He faulted the system as flawed theologically. He would take aim, specifically, at the western Bishops, particularly Cyprian Pinkham of Calgary and various schools in Rupert’s Land and Saskatchewan.⁵⁹ Blake viewed Indigenous evangelization and the education of Indigenous children as entirely separate concerns. But these had, by default, fallen firmly into the deleterious conditions and neglect of the Indian Residential School by bishops and civil servants who lazily equated those two policies. They were separate and had never been adequately funded as such according to Blake. The Company was in 1908 coming strongly to Blake’s view.⁶⁰ W. F. Webster’s observation in 1908 that the Mohawk Institute was a functionally useless deployment of Company’s funds—a ‘reformatory’ in his dismissive term—is one indication of this shift.⁶¹ Ashton, himself, then in his mid-60s, in ill-health, was now unlikely to have pursued the opportunities of the 1890s. Faced with educational strictures—and conditional funding—from the Department of Indian Affairs in the 1908 “regulations”, wholly removed from his former latitude on the Six Nations and Institute, he posed another restriction on Company expansion.⁶² If

⁵⁸ p. 272.

⁵⁹ The mission of Anglicans to Saskatchewan, the so-called “Barr Colony” instigated by Company missionary Isaac Barr, 1902-3, and taken over by Bishop George Exton Lloyd had not yet been taken up. But by 1908 when the Company’s conferences took place under the aegis of Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, at the House of Lords in April and June of that year, Lloyd and others were among the invitees, including the new Primate, of Rupert’s Land, Samuel Matheson, who was vacillating over the removal of Anglican Indian Residential Schools from Manitoba. Matheson, [Samuel Matheson](#), 1905-1931; [Metropolitan of Rupert's Land](#), 1905-1931; Primate of All Canada, 1909-1932

⁶⁰ ““Samuel Hume Blake's Pan-Anglican Exertions: Stopping the expansion of residential and industrial schools for Canada's Indigenous Children, 1908”, in Lofft and Powers, essays from Tri-History, forthcoming.”

⁶¹ Webster was elected a member with J. E. Vaizey and Edward Rawlinson Ford—all Church of England members—3 April 1895, *ibid.* p. 148.

⁶² *Report of Mr. W. F. Webster Upon his visit to the Mohawk Institute Brantford and the Grand River Reserve*, October 1908, Spottiswoode & Co., London, UK, p. 3—Ashton was not sure on his feet and his hands occasionally

the NEC was expanding, they would have to do so without Ashton. Blake would have approved this, and suggested as much in his conversation with Webster during his visit. The unstated failure of the Institute under Ashton was never articulated. But it marked two decades of conflicted identities by the Company, the Government and the system he had orchestrated: an Industrial school for Indigenous children awkwardly blended with missions on the Six Nations.

It had not always been this way. In 1896 Ashton might have been poised, in his fifties, as a leader in the Company's directions. Much of the later 1890s were taken up with new ideas and vistas. The Company's Supplemental Charter of 1899, for example, was re-drafted to allow far greater geographical scope in following the expansion of Canadian missions⁶³—they would take up Blake's opposition to solely residential and industrial schooling in 1908.⁶⁴ This was one position the Company had taken since the doctrinal deliberations of the 1890s and changed circumstances of the Canadian church.

Rumours of the English societies' removal from the Canadian scene—the CMS announced it would withdraw its missionary support entirely by 1920—was much on the collective minds of the Company and the Church in Canada with opportunities opening for the NEC. On the floor of the Lambeth Conference of 1897, for example, Archbishop Machray, the Primate, hoped the English societies—without mentioning the NEC among them—would be able to lessen their gifts in time as Canadian evangelism increased.⁶⁵ This was rhetorical, for without the huge annual donations, mission on the scale now being attempted would be impossible.⁶⁶ Whether these funds were earmarked for Indigenous or settler Machray did not stipulate, but the shift was to the latter. The NEC trusts were solely for the former. The eventual withdrawal—finalized in 1902—of the huge Church Missionary Society grants would, he felt, pose immediate disaster if they disappeared too quickly.⁶⁷ The Company's meeting with Canadian Bishops, the doctrinal tightening, and eventual move to the center of Anglican evangelism—the Pan-Anglican

shook. This debility only increased in the next few years. Despite Webster's clear recommendation that if nothing changed in the use of the Institute Ashton could be retained, he warned in veiled terms against employing his son Nelles Ashton as successor. For Ashton's debility in signing documents:

⁶³ During litigation over trust properties in 1928, the Governor Ernest Mathews put the Company's position with respect to the amended Charter very clearly (LMA CLC 540/MS 07920/10 insertion at pp. 6-7): "the Court of the Company would wish to emphasize the fact that since the new Charter of 1899 they have been under no obligation to spend a single penny on the Grand River Reserve Missions in preference to any other Missions to Indians in British Columbia or elsewhere".

⁶⁴ LMA CLC 540/MS 08005 copy of the 13 June 1899 Supplemental Charter: "The yearly revenue issues and profits of all and every the manors, lands and hereditaments and also the goods, chattels, money and stock of the Company may notwithstanding the said Charter of King Charles the Second from time to time be faithfully laid out disposed employed and applied in promoting and propagating the Gospel of Christ until and amongst the heathen natives in any part of British North America and in civilizing teaching and instructing the said heathen natives and their children not only in the principles and knowledge of the true religion and in morality and knowledge of the English tongue and in the liberal arts and sciences but for the educating and placing of them or their children in some trade mystery or lawful calling".

⁶⁵ <https://archive.org/details/lambethconferenc00lambe/page/60/mode/2up?q=Canada> p. 61 of *Full Proceedings*, Machray's address. [Robert Machray](#), 1865–1904; [Metropolitan of Rupert's Land](#), 1875–1904; Primate of All Canada, 1893–1904 (1831-1904)

⁶⁶ <https://archive.org/details/lambethconferenc00lambe/page/60/mode/2up?q=Canada>

⁶⁷ Machray's address <https://archive.org/details/lambethconferenc00lambe/page/60/mode/2up?q=Canada> p. 59-60.

conferences of 1908—were all hopeful aspects for radical changes for the Company. Without admitting it, Ashton’s understanding of episcopal, and other, “spiritual oversight” had taken a dramatic turn from 1896 to 1908, partly in the direction of the Bishop of Huron, with far tighter doctrines and power. It is doubtful the Company reckoned with the influence of Bishop David Williams and the pressure he would bring to bear on the implications of these changes.

There was the related issue of modernity and its own pernicious influences. At the Lambeth conference a Japanese representative had put the matter in a nutshell:

Can it be a matter of surprise that a leading politician, now representing his country at a European court, wrote the other day: “The age in which we live in a scientific age, and such questions as the existence of God, Hell, Heaven and the soul excite no more real interest than the discussion of such abstract topics as time and space.”⁶⁸

These were not idle outward forms without consequences. If the Company were unable to fill in these theological realities, their mission according to new tractates was a waste. This was not only in the element of pernicious modernity over which the Company had little control. The Unitarian foreign mission, containing in 1895 no less than seven NEC members as vice-presidents had denounced Trinitarianism as “a delusion and a snare”.⁶⁹ These charges cut both ways.

⁶⁸ <https://archive.org/details/lambethconferenc00lambe/page/32/mode/2up?q=Buddhist> p. 33, *Lambeth Conference*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 9 October 1895, p. 195.