

Agency of Hope



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The Story of the
Auckland City Mission
1920–2020

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Foreword

The well-known whakataukī ‘He aha te mea nui o te ao. He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata’ (‘What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people’) places people front and centre. The story of the Auckland City Mission is a story of people, principally people who, for one reason or another, find themselves in desperate need — for food, shelter, health or safety. It is that need, and those people, that the Mission has sought to respond to for one hundred years now. Much, even most, of that response remains unsung and largely invisible because it could only be seen or measured in individual terms or in a single family’s life. The work of the Mission has never been to seek acclaim; rather, it has sought to know the quiet accomplishment of making a positive difference in people’s lives.

What provided the motivation for the roots of the Mission was the calling and work of some remarkable Anglican Christians within the Diocese of Auckland. The motivation for that work may well have been Christ’s teaching that whatever we do for the least, we do for Him (Matthew 25:40). Today, and throughout the one hundred years, a large variety of people have assisted the Mission in its work, some of strong Christian faith, some of other faiths or no avowed faith, or, as is the case with many, something ‘in between’ but still holding a commitment to the humanity of people in their adversity. Perhaps it is an Anglican perspective to hold close that other teaching of Christ that not everyone who confesses faith is as important as those who just get on with the will of God and improve the lot of their neighbour (Matthew 7:21)? Whatever the motivation, the generosity of all those people who have given and supported the Mission has to be celebrated in every age.

This book captures something of the lives of all those people who have been touched by and thus caught in the warp and weft of the life of the Auckland City Mission. There is much to celebrate and much for which we can be enormously grateful across a century.

We are also very grateful for the work of Peter Lineham. In this book he brings together both the art and the science of a professional historian. He has taken the immense amount of time to read pages upon pages of minutes and decades of accounts, as well as to seek to interpret that material into a perspective for us to see again the story of the Mission. He also assists as we look forward to the years to come.

Deo gratias (Thanks be to God).

Bishop Jim White
October 2020

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INTRODUCTION

Old Problems, New Solutions



The poor you have with you always, said Jesus. There has, alas, been no society in the world that has not included to some degree an impoverished and disadvantaged group. In the villages and towns of earlier times, the poor were still neighbours. In the segregated cities of the modern Western world, poverty is more deeply entrenched, and the rich and the poor are alienated.

Within Western society there have always been forms of poor relief. In many parts of Europe, family networks and civic institutions distributed charity to the poor from benevolent donations that had accumulated over centuries. The rise of the modern cities from the end of the eighteenth century radically increased the need for aid and diminished the value of the historic benefactions. Under the old Poor Laws of England, the destitute were sent back to their rural parishes to be cared for and controlled. The increasing poverty in the countryside in the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century, the rapid growth of towns where there were no support systems for the poor, and violent protests by the poor about their harsh treatment, forced a search for new solutions.

The new Poor Law of 1834 spread the load away from home parishes. It also sought to ensure that the poor would not become lazy or dependent. Those poor who could no longer support themselves were sent to workhouses funded by local rates. By the 1870s, the English poorhouse was the standard way to control poverty, but was detested by its inmates. Immigrants to New Zealand were determined that poverty be treated differently in the new colony.

Unfortunately, politicians in colonial New Zealand were not creative social thinkers. The towns were smaller, the air was cleaner, but there was the same incidence of poverty, and even less charity in the New World. There were no 'dark satanic mills', but there were many work injuries in an economy of manual labour, periods of high unemployment, deserted families, and cries for help. The only option available was state action. Victorian New Zealand lacked the degree of working-class activism and social conscience to urge a new response. It was significant Victorians such as Thomas Carlyle, the seventh earl of Shaftesbury (famously the

leader of the movement to abolish slavery) and F. D. Maurice whose social conscience and alarm would provoke a new activism.

Many people of all classes feared the nineteenth-century city. Living in close proximity increased the threat of disease. The urban middle class and merchants viewed the poor in the new city slums as a constant threat to their security, seeing them as dissolute, unhealthy and ungodly,¹ and violent protests by poor people demanding political rights made the rich exceedingly nervous. It was usual for the comfortably off to distinguish between the ‘deserving poor’ — whose poverty was the result of external forces — and the ‘undeserving poor’, who were impoverished through immorality, indolence or drunkenness. And while public policy was focused on reducing risks of contamination, influential voices in Victorian society also aroused public concern by their outrage at such poverty in the midst of plenty. They advocated policies to address urban crime, prostitution, child labour and lack of education, and to help the very poor improve their lot in life.

One aspect of this was the alienation of the urban working classes from organised religion, which was so often used to keep them subservient. Many organisations set out to convert the poor back to religious faith and to teach them good values. The churches in the English-speaking world were troubled by the poor, but the community expected more than hand-wringing: they expected the church to address their needs. Although the Poor Law was now a government responsibility, the new churches (Methodist and other Protestant denominations, and Irish Catholic churches) set out to provide for the poor, since the ancient and inflexible parish boundaries set physical limits on what the established Anglican Church could do. In the slums of the East End of London and in the big industrial centres, such as Manchester and Glasgow, itinerant Methodist preachers reached out with the gospel. Churches were expected to help in the control of the poor as well as care for them. It was an uncomfortable combination, and it is not surprising that among the poor, vehement hostility to religion sometimes surfaced.

Simplistic solutions to the problems of poverty were common. The Temperance Movement, which had grown markedly during the Victorian era, called on the poor to control their bad behaviour and,

Many people of all classes feared the nineteenth-century city ... and violent protests by poor people demanding political rights made the rich exceedingly nervous.

with that, watch their circumstances change. In the late nineteenth century, temperance and gospel preaching were the focus of outreach to the working classes by the various churches.²

Such movements were genuinely popular among sectors of the working class. Many lives were changed and transformed, and some did indeed escape poverty. The Irish who moved to England as a result of the Great Famine of 1845–49 formed a clearly identifiable group among the urban poor, and Catholic priests relieved many needs despite their limited resources. Sunday schools also sought to help children. Conversely, Owenites and other anti-religious socialists offered a different hope to the needy.³

By 1920, when the Auckland City Mission was established by the Anglican church, everyone in the English-speaking world knew what a city mission was. The name reflected the huge success of overseas missionary work that had taken the gospel to places far beyond Europe, advocating for ‘home missions’ or ‘inner missions’ to evangelise the godless in the so-called Christian nations. The city mission was a version of the home mission, adapted specifically for urban areas, and was an idea very familiar to New Zealand immigrants.

Back in England, it was the famous Scottish Presbyterian minister Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847) who had turned British attention to the urban poor. Chalmers had become alarmed that the poor were not attending his inner-city church in Glasgow, so from 1819 until 1823 he developed a system of parish visitors who mapped the homes of the poor, although his focus was evangelism rather than poverty relief.⁴ Chalmers wanted the local church to reach the whole community. But in 1826, after he had left the city, a Scottish Congregationalist, David Nasmith (1799–1839), conceived a new scheme, which coordinated the work of many churches, using paid visitors, as Chalmers had done, but focused solely on the poor. Nasmith called his organisation the Glasgow City Mission.⁵ His vision was ‘to promote the spiritual welfare of the poor of this city, and its neighbourhood, by employing persons of approved piety, and who are properly qualified to visit the poor in their houses’.⁶ Very soon they began to address the practical needs of the poor as well.

The huge success of the Glasgow City Mission led Nasmith to set up a similar organisation in Edinburgh in 1832. He then began to travel the world speaking of the needs of the poor in the cities, and as a result up to 140 missions were set up in most of the large cities of Britain and North America. The most famous of these was the London City Mission (LCM), founded in 1835 and still going strong.

The challenges of London were on a scale very different to that of other places. In 1835 a pamphlet by Baptist Wriothsley Noel, *The State of the Metropolis Considered*, argued that urban problems called for a different presentation of Christianity. Drunkenness, gambling, prostitution, crime and sabbath-breaking, and the lack of education for the poor, all concerned him.⁷ Nasmith’s LCM was interdenominational, being careful to work with

Anglicans and non-Anglicans alike. Paid district visitors, who were not clergymen, did most of the work. By 1860 the LCM employed 375 men and 137 women. These agents were largely from the working class, and each was expected to visit a specified group of about 500 families every month. They visited the poorest districts, and at each home they read the Bible aloud to the family and would also identify particular concerns — sanitary and hygiene issues, prostitution, drunkenness, hunger, lack of education.

While LCM agents were not permitted to distribute charity, they were urged to connect the poor to potential medical and financial assistance. Extensive public campaigning by the Mission raised awareness of the problems of poverty, and scholars have recognised how these visitors opened the eyes of the middle class to the problems of the poor. The middle class viewed fairs, race meetings and other popular amusements as the reason why the working class had no money, and they regarded socialist working-class organisations as a threat because they challenged the right of the wealthy to rule.

Later in the nineteenth century, English churches grew more willing to address social, hygiene and medical issues as part of their evangelism. William Booth of the Salvation Army and others like him preached an evangelical gospel, but regarded poverty as the greatest barrier to religion.⁸ The Salvation Army not only preached: they also helped people. ‘Soup, soap and salvation’ neatly expressed their practical approach.⁹ Alongside the city missions, specialist children’s homes, boys’ clubs, YMCAs and ragged schools (which focused on destitute children) sought to help the poor.¹⁰ Seamen’s missions were established in many port towns. In some ways these organisations undercut the role of the first city missions, a number of which closed down.

Through the Forward Movement, which set out in the late nineteenth century to establish the moral and social agenda of the Methodist Church, Wesleyan Methodists developed their own version of city missions. The Rev. Hugh Price Hughes (1847–1902) turned the Twelfth London Circuit of Wesleyan Methodists into a city mission, with a great range of outreach activities to the poor.¹¹ Then in 1887 Hughes was appointed superintendent of a new West London Mission, which held its main Sunday services in the huge St James’s Hall in Piccadilly. Other services were held in smaller halls that proved welcoming to the very poor. Hughes’ wife, Katherine, organised a sisterhood which undertook a range of temperance work, activities for girls and ‘rescue work’ among prostitutes.¹² The mission offered a crèche, a men’s labour exchange, a wood-chopping factory for the unemployed, and a medical centre and dispensary, all on the basis that ‘it is impossible to deal with the spiritual destitution of London unless you also deal with the physical and mental destitution’.¹³ Rev. Hughes commented that ‘Jesus Christ came into the world to save society as well as to save individuals; indeed you cannot effectively save the one without the other’.¹⁴

The London City Mission was founded in 1835 by David Nasmith.

RIGHT | Missionaries from the London City Mission preaching at Barnet Fair, London, in the early 1900s.

BELOW | From the same era, the Mission hall in London's East End.



ABOVE | David Nasmith, founder of the city mission movement.

By the early twentieth century, most of the successful city missions in Britain were Methodist, and led by colourful preachers. These missions developed a new theology, replacing the traditional Methodist emphasis on conversion. The Social Gospel disdained any focus on personal salvation, and boldly supported calls by the trade unions for social reform. (In America the leaders of the Social Gospel were particularly radical, believing that the city was a natural evolution of the Kingdom of God.) The city missions were often immersed in support for early Labour politics, campaigning for a better society and for a less traditional church. Jasper Calder, founder of the Auckland City Mission, seems to have read some of this liberal theology, especially from the pages of *Christian Century*, an American church magazine, and he frequently quoted Frank Crane (1861–1928), a Presbyterian minister and newspaper columnist who extolled this approach.

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Still, it is a surprise to find Anglicans founding a city mission. New Zealand is the only place in the world where Anglicans did this; elsewhere such groups were interdenominational Protestant bodies. The Church of England was deeply suspicious of such organisations, and Bishop Charles Blomfield (1786–1857) of London was horrified by the interdenominational character of the LCM. He was a high churchman who believed that Anglicans ought not corrupt the purity of the church by mixing with others, whereas the low-church approach did not see the Anglican Church as unique. Blomfield believed that city missions undermined the principle that parishes needed to be responsible for the poor in their geographical region. And there was no money to spare for home missionary work.

Slowly, though, attitudes changed. The Anglican Church Congresses often addressed the absence of the poor from Anglican churches. In 1882 Wilson Carlile (1847–1942), a low-church layman, began what he called the Church Army, an Anglican imitation of the Salvation Army (the Salvation Army was an independent sect that split from the Methodists). While many bishops initially disapproved, the movement organised teams of lay evangelists with a very different tone from the traditional Anglican approach.¹⁵

The nineteenth-century Oxford Movement gave new impetus to the high church, and some of its ritualist priests gained remarkable acclaim for their work among the poor. These ‘slum priests’ and their elaborate rituals were welcomed in the poorest parts of the cities, where their generosity of spirit and sacrificial care for their parishes held

particular appeal. Unlike the evangelicals, these priests tolerated the ‘amusements’ of the poor and did not exhort them to keep the Sabbath.¹⁶ This high-church tradition directly inspired many people in the Auckland City Mission, which was a paradoxical blend of these influences — high church and low church, Methodism and non-denominational fervour, evangelical gospel preaching and social activism.

The modern Auckland City Mission and its equivalents in Wellington and Christchurch are thus unique. It is not that Anglicans lacked social concern in other parts of the world, but rather they acted by expanding diocesan structures and they abhorred the name ‘city mission’. To explain how Anglicans in New Zealand did what the established church in England failed to do, we need to identify what was different about the social crises of New Zealand and what was different about church life in the antipodes. In the past one hundred years, the formation, growth and change in the Auckland City Mission means that it has moved some distance from these British roots. It has over this long period given rise to a large separate agency, the Selwyn Foundation, which provides villages for elderly people, and it has connected with the city as it has changed and grown, linking with the needs of Māori, new migrants, people from the Pacific, children and youth, families, the aged, people of varied sexual orientations and people facing a range of medical and social issues. Yet its awareness of the poverty in the city, and its deep sense of responsibility to address it, links the Mission all the way back to Glasgow in 1835. Despite any number of uncomfortable moments in its story, it has a heritage in which it rightly takes pride.
