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CHAPTER 1
In Search of Henry Major
Clive Pearson

"Major needs to be done". The name Henry Major is not well known these days in New Zealand. That this should be so is perhaps no surprise. For most of his long career Major lived and worked in England. It was there that he acquired his reputation for being first the prophet and then the apostle of English modernism. There are now few reminders of his being raised in the 'backwoods' of Katikati, his tertiary education in Auckland during the 1890s, and his ministry in selected spots around the North Island – Remuera, Waitotara, and Hamilton. Those who gaze upon the plaque dedicated to his family in Katikati or browse the relevant parish histories are not made aware of his most contentious of ecclesiastical careers. The present lack of a public profile has left Major to the preserve of a passing interest for a small coterie of church historians and his family's memory. It is time for this particular episode of historical amnesia to be redressed.

Following his departure from a rat-infested, roof-leaking vicarage in Hamilton at the close of 1902 Major pursued further studies in Oxford. He took leave of New Zealand for what he thought would be a regulation period of degree work that was designed to make him familiar with the 'new truths' of a biblical higher criticism. The intention had always been to return. The Bishop of Auckland, William Cowie, had argued the case for a three year course back in 'one of our ancient universities' and believed that such studies would benefit the church in New Zealand as a whole. What transpired was rather different. Major was offered the position as Vice-Principal of Ripon Clergy College with which institution, in various forms, he would be associated intimately for the next forty years. So close was the relationship between Major and Ripon Hall that Michael Brierley has recently argued that the two were virtually synonymous for the length of this period. That decision to remain in England was based upon an assumption that it was better to work towards the theological reform of the established church at its centre rather than remain closeted away on the margins of empire. The best way to pursue that task was through a life-long commitment to theological education and ministry formation.

Major gradually emerged as 'the organising genius' or 'sergeant-major' of the Modern Churchmen's Union. This coalition of the liberal-minded strove to influence the Church of England in a direction that sought to accommodate 'the new light' that was also to be found through the 'science of (comparative) religion', psychology and evolutionary science. In the wider sweep of history the English modernism Major represented was a response to the Victorian crisis of belief. Its intention was to mediate the new via media Major defined as now being necessary between traditionalism and secularism. For Major there was no going back to New Zealand other than for an extended visit of several months in 1929.
The supportive correspondence with a handful of former colleagues and members of the Hamilton congregation sympathetic to his 'important work' back in England diminished over the years. The more common response to his modernism in 'one of our great dominions' at the height of his career was likely to be dismissive and then, later, a fading into ignorance. There was not even in the land of his upbringing the equivalent regard he received in Australia where Samuel Angus identified his theological cause with that of the more widely known Major.

In the absence of any widespread recognition, Ian Breward advised me as a prospective doctoral candidate that "Major needs to be done." Why this doyen of church historians on both sides of the Tasman should make this claim was due to the awareness that Major was a significant ecclesiastical figure in the first half of the twentieth century. For the historian the importance of this prophet of modernism lay partly in the intersection of his biography and a number of key events that punctuated his self-confessed pilgrimage. The most notable was the heresy hunt initiated against him in 1921 in the wake of the Girton Conference of that year on Christ and the Creeds. 'Lucky Old Major' was cited by the Revd. C.E. Douglas for beliefs which seemingly called into question the physical resurrection of believers and apparently ran the risk of 'importing the teaching of a heathen mystic (Gautama) into the Christian Religion without warrant of reason or of observed fact.' For historians of the Church of England the case itself has attracted little more than a passing interest: it was quickly realised that Douglas had selected the wrong beliefs - and, besides, the tendency has been to focus more upon the exchange that arose out of the Conference between Major's highly respected modernist colleague, Hastings Rashdall, and Charles Gore, the recently retired Bishop of Oxford over the issue of freedom of inquiry. But that is not the end of the matter. The case against Major had raised the question of whether or not heresy hunts were the best means for exploring and adjudicating upon matters of doctrinal difference. The link has then been made between the 'Girton stir', in which Major was such a pivotal figure, and the Church of England's decision to set up an Archbishops' Commission on Doctrine for the sake of the future resolution of contest issues. Whether this scholarly consensus can actually stand too close a critical scrutiny is a moot point, but one which does not take away from the public persona of Major.

There was a range of other critical episodes that marked Major's career as a modernist that demand attention in their own right. For the 'future historian' Major himself invoked, these events constitute his modernist career. The study of his life is one the most accessible ways of exploring the aims and methods of an ethos that organised itself into a formal association. For those of us resident in Aotearoa-New Zealand there is an extra interest. The more frequent scholarly practice is to explore how Christian beliefs, values, architecture and denominations were exported from the United Kingdom to this country. How well did they settle? How well have they travelled across time, place and cultural diversity? In the case of Henry Major the direction goes the other way. Major's importance lay on another stage - and yet he remains a part of the ecclesiastical history of Aotearoa-New Zealand, for it was here that he was nurtured in faith and laid the foundations for his theological understanding.
The study of this 'organising genius' is not confined to the historical. Major and his modernist quest is also of a theological interest. At face value this may seem like an unusual claim. The contemporary rhetoric is of postmodernity and, by definition, then, Major's modernism is well and truly out of date. Much of the scholarship on which Major established his core convictions has now been superseded and seems rather innocent in the light of present-day non-realism, postcolonialism and deconstruction. With the benefit of hindsight his 'Gospel of Freedom' for the 'modern man in the street' has the feel of a theological position that was at its most convincing in the period prior to the outbreak of the First World War. That now familiar post-prefix was indeed first used back in 1914 and it was partly in response to Major's kind of modernist agenda. There is an irony here. Its author was J.M. Thompson whom Major himself had defended and dubbed as the 'first Modernist martyr'.

The theological benefit that can be extrapolated from Major's life and times is of a different order. It can better be described as falling inside the category of a sociology of belief and takes its place inside the dialectic between theology and the emerging discipline of generational criticism. The widespread opinion that modernism has now run its course means that we are in a position to evaluate how a particular liberal movement and ethos negotiated the hermeneutical tension between received theological traditions and what is reckoned to be contemporary knowledge. This dilemma was the subject matter of Major's own modernism. It is not peculiar to his ecclesiastical setting, of course. How the tension is played out in a specific context always reflects the accidents of time and place but the interpretive task is embedded within the life of faith and the very idea of 'good news'. Major was wrestling with what Jürgen Moltmann has identified in the last decade of the millennium as the 'therapeutic relevance of the gospel.' For the good news to be good news it must address those aspects of the human condition lived out in a particular time and place that require healing, restoration, forgiveness and the salvific presence of Christ. Of necessity faith must be rooted in the past and engage our here and now. The modernist option Major advocated is like a case study of this hermeneutical task that is common to all who aspire to follow the way of Christ. Its appeal lies in how explicit was the desire to mediate 'new truth'.

That this form of modernism has run its course allows us to consider several related themes. The 'future historian' Major intimated would be on his side can just as easily become a discriminating theologian who has an eye on a number of generic concerns that transcend the first half of the twentieth century. How plausible is a reconstruction of the Christian faith that is oriented towards the future rather than towards history? Where does eschatology fit in, especially if the preferred understanding of the future is more inclined to be one of an evolutionary idealism? What happens if and when the interpretation proffered itself becomes dated? How does it then function as a critical foil for a rising generation conscious of a much changed society and fresh theological insight?

For myself these were key areas of interest that lay behind the decision to explore the life and times of 'the apostle of modernism'. The underlying assumption was that the study of Major might well have a continuing significance for the practice of faith. The hermeneutical tension Major faced is still with us. The problem of relevancy remains. How to move into a new future is still a highly contested affair and the focus of sharp ecclesiastical politics. It is still easier to 'play the man' and misrepresent the prophetic than really address the issues
at stake. What is the proper location of theological education and the shape of ministry formation remain open questions.

And then there is the less well recognised dimension to Major's modernism. There was a basic tension in his position. Major was adamant that theological and ecclesiastical reform was essential. Hidden away in his rhetoric was the desire to be 'comprehensive' and embrace as broad a constituency as possible. In today's terminology Major's intention was to be inclusive. The desire was to move into a new future for faith in a manner that attracted a wide constituency. Here he failed. The politics of theological change are extremely fraught and more complex than Major ever realised. Nevertheless his activism furnishes a helpful window through which to examine how the practice of faith sets about the task of negotiating its way through rapidly changing contexts.

There is much merit in Breward's suggestion that 'Major needs to be done'. His modernist's pilgrimage is a neglected feature of the theological and ecclesiastical history of Aotearoa-New Zealand. Its importance is not confined to this domestic setting, however. In a way that is rare for a churchmen from this country Major occupied an acknowledged space on a larger horizon. Such was the strategic position he held for so long in the life and aspirations of English modernism Major is, arguably, the best representative for the study of the merits, or otherwise, of this particular twentieth century theological option.

Introducing ......

Major, then, was the prophet of English modernism. This was the label that he himself was prepared to assume in the course of his delivery of the prestigious William Belden Noble Lectures delivered at Harvard in 1925. On that occasion Major had donned 'the hairy garment of a Modernist prophet' and described the movement's origins, aims and methods. For him the prophetic in this instance was a matter of interpretation rather than prediction, though elsewhere he was always keen to discern the 'signs of the time', which way the tide was flowing and which brand of the Christian faith the future would justify. Nowhere had this been more evident than in his editorship of the monthly magazine, The Modern Churchman, which he founded in 1911 (partly with his wife's money) and continued to edit through to 1956. It still continues to this day, albeit under the title of Modern Believing after a brief spell in these days of inclusive language as The Modern Churchpeople. Every month Major cast his eye over the ecclesiastical and theological landscape in order to discern those tell-tale 'signs' and write in such a fashion that his critics dubbed the magazine 'the yellow peril', partly on account of the colour of its cover, and partly because of its tone and temper. By way of comparison the Harvard Lectures were a more critical exposition. They had been rather necessary insofar as, Major observed, a number of able English churchmen had made the trip across the Atlantic to talk about English modernism, but not as a self-avowed advocate. His lectures were subsequently published by Harvard University Press and remain the most extensive and authoritative description of the modernist position by one of their own number. They still feature on reading lists on both sides of the Atlantic in courses on the twentieth century history of the Church of England.

In due course the prophet became an apostle. This was the term those inside the Union or sympathetic to its ideals bestowed upon him. The most obvious analogy was with the apostle Paul, though the formal link was seldom made and Major himself was much more
of a devotee of the gospel of *Mark* than he was of the Pauline corpus of epistles.\textsuperscript{12} The apostolic designation testified to the more itinerant and epistolary aspects of his leadership. In those Harvard Lectures Major had referred to his tendency to 'roam his native heath.' For the sake of the modernist enterprise Major travelled widely within England to set up local branches, establish networks, and ensure the success of the annual conferences for which he again was primarily responsible. At other times he kept the postal service in business. Major was a prolific writer of letters. The more formal correspondence to do with the College, the magazine and the Union were matched by a private concern for former students and how they were faring in their placements. Now and then he came to the assistance of clerics who were under great pressure in their parishes because of their beliefs. On a surprising number of occasions he fielded enquiries from an educated laity seeking to have a more thoughtful faith and who found themselves in a kind of solitary confinement in the congregations to which they belonged, left alone to negotiate their way through a crisis of conscience of whether to remain or leave. Once again it was Major's initiative which led the Union to set about the task of making modernist insights available through a mix of monographs and pamphlets. To a degree that escaped his critics, Major's apostleship was characterised not simply with a zeal for the cause, but with a deeply felt, genuine pastoral concern for those struggling to understand their faith in the light of new knowledge. Major created spaces, made time – and wrote a great deal, often far from the public gaze.

The ardour with which Major advocated his modernism was such that he established a public reputation for himself. The various dimensions to his prophetic vocation meant that he was often in the news, and, on several occasions, was the feature of attention in the national broadsheets. He had the capacity to divide opinion. Major was often talked about by those who had never met him and for whom he was the representative voice of an ethos, a tendency, maybe a movement they did not like. The most concerted campaign waged against him was organised in response to an invitation the Church Congress extended to him in 1928 to furnish an Anglican interpretation of the faith. The hall at Cheltenham was full to overflowing; there were people seated in the aisles and each one had received, on entry, a handbill explaining why Dr. Major was wrong, even before he had opened his mouth. The immediate effect of this invitation and the subsequent protest was to drive the Prayer Book crisis from the front page of the *Church Times* and generate headlines right round the English-speaking world.

Major never climbed the ecclesiastical hierarchy beyond the level of being a canon of Birmingham cathedral. Archbishop Randall Davidson insisted at the height of one particular controversy that Mr Major was not a leader in the church. And yet few principals of a theological college have ever generated the kind of response he did. Was this reaction because his advocacy named a raft of fundamental issues that Anglicanism needed to negotiate for the sake of its moving into the future and doing so in the most comprehensive mode possible? Was it because in the naming of these matters, Major stood for a possible option with respect to the much-vaunted Anglican *via media* that forced decisions – either for or against him – to be made? And, was it because he had this skill of organising which meant that he was not a lonely, isolated individual but someone who could gather together networks of the relatively similarly minded?
On being neglected ...

The writing up of church history in both New Zealand and England seldom does justice to the high profile Major acquired back 'Home'. With only a few exceptions he has been either excluded from the script or caricatured in a most unhistorical manner. This relative neglect is not true to the way in which he was perceived in the inter-war years especially. On his one and only visit back to this country in 1929 The New Zealand Herald had placed him among 'the little band of New Zealand men who have made their mark in England'.

The reference was intended to make readers aware of the whole of Major's achievements and the representative nature of his personal modernist pilgrimage. Its positive nature was not enough, though, to counter the capacity Major possessed to elicit a sharp division of opinion. It was possible to define your theological position by taking sides - either for him, or against him and what he stood for.

The reputation that arose of Major being the enfant terrible of the Church of England is rather misplaced. The rhetoric surrounding him often outran his own intentions. There have been few people more devoted to 'this the most splendid church in Christendom', he would say, citing Dean Church; there would be few theologians more committed to its future; but Bishop Gordon Fallsow was justified in observing in his funeral address that Major had been the most pilloried cleric of his day. His personal bad press consisted of letters addressed to 'Dear Judas' and 'The Anti-Christ'. In the Church Times he was reputed to be the 'devil of Oxford', a thorn in the flesh, and eccentric. Evelyn Waugh would have his characters in Brideshead Revisited make slighting references to the beliefs and practices to be found at Boars Hill where Ripon Hall eventually came to rest after its original Oxford site was taken over by the Bodleian Library. In Oxford itself the college's motto, Nisi dominus, was interpreted by critics as 'everything but the Lord': it referred, of course, to Psalm 84, 'Except the Lord this house is built in vain'. The allusion had actually been back to the words that are still to be found on the front of the Town Hall, on the south side of the Market Place, in Ripon itself.

Such damning impressions masked a rich personality which led former students to refer to a 'lovable saint and not the heretic of the headlines'. From the moment of his appointment to Ripon, it was evident that Major attracted great loyalty from his students. To them he was 'the Vice'; they warmed to him in a way that they did not warm to the two principals who preceded him in that role. Former students like the First World War poet and chaplain Geoffrey Studdert-Kennedy, 'Woodbine Willie', reckoned that Major's lectures on the philosophy of religion were of critical importance in forming his ideas. The correspondence secreted away in the Cuddesdon archives testifies to Major's willingness to make a stand for those whom ecclesiastical convention might have shunned or lack of financial well-being excluded. The rather rare relaxed atmosphere and relative freedom Major oversaw at Ripon during his best years created a theological environment where ideas could be played with and future priests were discouraged from becoming affected in their office. The most obvious testimony to the extent to which Major commanded a deep-seated respect, even when he was the butt of caricature behind his back, is his guest appearance as Dr. Henry in a pseudonymous novel written by one of his students. Here Ripon became York Hall. Dr. Henry is described as a man with 'versatility of conversation', 'perfect manners', 'gentle and
dignified,' a marvellous old saint,' though 'his life has been one of long endurance of ranting opposition.' In a manner that anticipates Fallows' eulogy of Major three decades later, Dr. Henry is pilloried.15

Back in the land of his early ministry references to him are incidental and occasional. In the writing up of New Zealand history in general there is no awareness. One recent Auckland Master's thesis on Katikati makes no reference whatsoever to Major's formative years in the settlement. It is quite a startling omission given the memorial plaques to the family in the local Anglican church, not to mention a street name that testifies to the presence of New Zealand's most widely known theological figure overseas during the first half of the twentieth century. At the best of times the professional practice of the discipline in this country is often inclined towards what Allan Davidson has described as a form of myopia with respect to religious themes.16 The cumulative effect of this condition is that many historians simply do not recognise the significance of what is in front of them. This blindness is not helped by the lack of attention so far given, even in the more ecclesiastical studies, to the history of religious thought in New Zealand and how men and women came to hold their personal patterns of belief.

On the surface there was little to suggest that the younger Major would become the most well-known representative figure of English modernism. It was a long way from walking the dogs with his brother on a Sunday afternoon in Katikati, the muscular Christianity he established in the gym during his curacy at St. Mark's, Remuera, and the weekly sermons he preached as the Vicar of Hamilton at the turn of the century and which were published in The Waikato Times, to the senior combination rooms of Oxbridge colleges, assorted cathedrals, historic churches like the University Church (Oxford), Westminster Abbey, St. Martins-in-the-Fields and St. James, Piccadilly and the occasional London club. The only published recognition of him, apart from a seriously word-limited entry in The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography and 'passing asides by Peter Matheson and Ian Breward,'17 are by Davidson and Lloyd Geering.

Writing up the history of St. John's College, Davidson described Major as the College's 'most distinguished and controversial theologian.' There is a brief discussion of his theological development and modern churchmanship. Of particular interest is the decision made by the Governors of the College not to appoint him as Warden in 1902 which would effectively have consigned his English modernism to the realm of the hypothetical, for that was the year he would set out for Oxford to make good the serious defects in his Auckland degree. The subsequent fear of his theology was evident, first in 1922, when Davidson recounts how the writings of modernists, including Major and another with close New Zealand associations, Charles Raven, were dismissed at a refresher course for the clergy on the basis of this group being 'a small and not very distinguished minority.'18 It is a familiar enough strategy that is inclined to repeat itself. The local horizons allowed critics to play the man and not recognise the issues.

Seven years later Major's return visit to New Zealand provoked a public protest. He was snubbed by St. John's, even though not long before he had been invited to Harvard to deliver the William Belden Noble Lectures. In the collection of sermons he preached during that visit and which were published subsequently both in New Zealand and Oxford, there is no
reference to the College where he received his initial theological training. Davidson cites a letter to the effect that Major 'should have liked greatly to have addressed its students in Chapel, but I could not invite myself'. The fact of the matter is that Major made his New Zealand colleagues nervous. His visit to Auckland led local evangelical leaders to organise the Great Bible Demonstration of March 1929. More than 3,000 people crammed into the Town Hall to hear the Baptist Joseph Kemp, in particular, address the theme of 'The Menace of Modernism'. On his return to Oxford Major commented that nothing had really changed in the theology being done in Auckland. It belonged to another era.

Strictly speaking this was not entirely true. Davidson describes how new texts and fresh insights were woven into the St. John's curricula but the pace at which this was done was slow. Some of the writers, who had been included by the 1920s, were no longer in their heyday and, in fact, near retirement, if not already dead. In this kind of environment Major was an acquired taste and very few in New Zealand would have had a sufficiently sympathetic critical understanding to know how to situate him. It seems as if student engagement with their respective fields of study was somewhat limited due to the need to cover the curriculum set by external moderators.

At the very least the response Major received on this visit was a clarifying exercise for some of his fellow modernists. They had been labouring under the impression he was an Australian and were only put right by the appearances of Thirty Years' After, the sub-title of which read 'A New Zealander's Religion'. It seems as if no one back in New Zealand was ever made aware that this particular volume was also translated into Japanese by P.T. Imai, under a title which, when translated, read Christianity for the Men of Modern Mind.

For Geering, Major is 'of great interest to us in New Zealand'. There may have been no place for him in the institutional life of theology in this country, but in the wider world Major inhabited, Geering identified him as one of several figures seeking to transform faith in the light of the modern knowledge of the twentieth century. Geering placed Major inside the schema of a deep-seated intellectual crisis where the Christian faith needed to negotiate its way through various dogmatic alleys and denominational roadblocks in search of 'the open road'. That Geering should have seen some merit in Major is, of course, a potential liability for his present reputation. Ever since his own heresy trial Geering has been the yardstick for determining where Christian thinkers in this country are to be found on the theological spectrum, much to the surprise of those who live further afield. Like Geering, Major was concerned for a constituency that included the well-educated secular domain and the disillusioned, and was not confined to the constraining ecclesiastical politics of his day.

That Major should now be so neglected is also a product of Anglican historiography. The problem resides in who writes up a church history. In this instance the inside running was with those arguing from an Anglo-Catholic point of view who just happened to be the natural opponents of the modernist cause. The issue at stake between the two is well depicted in a 1924 parody. To the Anglo-Catholic the modernist was out 'to kill a dogma a day'. They wanted to create a church 'so low you could step over it without noticing it was there'. The appropriately named Father Waggett painted the following picture. The scene is set around the hearth of their home, the Progressive Parlour. Presently, there is a step on the
gravel and the eldest boy rushes out to greet the homecomer with the old question; "Daddy, Daddy, what did you do in the great conference?" Soon, he rushes back in triumph crying, "Farver has killed another dogma." You hear the shrill delight of the children. Mama has a throb of pride and gratitude in her good grey eyes, and then with the other elders of the High Brow family, goes back to the evening's work of knitting new negations for the little ones. The modernist response was of Anglo-cat and his close relative Pontificat. Both of these creatures exhibited a feline aversion to the full light of day. That light was the New Truth which had come from biblical criticism, the new science of comparative religion, evolution and so on. Poor Anglo-Cat decorated in his ruffled vestments found the light too strong, too bright. He blinked, then slunk away into a more comfortable world of half-light and shadow - a true obscurantist.

From the modernist perspective, at stake was how to mediate new knowledge to the church. The fear was that otherwise the church would die; die from the head down. How could the ecclesia adapt in a world which had suffered an acute Victorian crisis of conscience? How could it reform its life and structures and once again take its place at the heart of national life? For those whose thoughts were fed on a diet of evolution the alternative option was the galling prospect of 'Christianity being all played out.' Would it take its place among extinct things, like the flora and fauna of earlier times, doomed because of its lacking the power to adapt itself to changing conditions? The language here is that William Boyd Carpenter, the Bishop of Ripon, and taken from his Bampton Lectures. It was in his theological college that Henry Major from Katikati would teach.

The tendency until relatively recently has been to caricature and stereotype modernism - or deal with it en passant. The principal point of interest has been the Girton Conference and its aftermath. The intention has been invariably designed to expose the flaws and heterodoxy of a movement which was reckoned to worship the spirit of the age. There has not been a comparable interest in why modernism arose and what was the full nature of its agenda. There had also been little concerted interest in the modernist cast of characters. Who was attracted to the movement and why? What roles did they perform? How did the modernist ethos influence the whole of their theology and their churchmanship?

Writing about themselves ..... 

The possibility of this neglect being addressed was raised with the publication of Alan Stephenson's Hulsean Lectures on "The Rise and Decline of English Modernism." For the first time the archival material of the Modern Churchmen's Union itself was drawn upon. The result was a very sympathetic account that filled in some conspicuous gaps. The most notable included descriptions of the decision to form an organised movement in the late nineteenth century and the pivotal role subsequently played by Major. Previously there had only been a pamphlet on the origins of the Union written by P.H. Bagenal and reprinted in several forms. Stephenson also explored how this modernism gradually became 'old' and how it should be seen in the light of the new radicalism represented by John Robinson's Honest to God.

The theme and method of these Hulsean Lectures were not received without controversy. The metaphor of rise and decline could lend itself too easily to the conclusion that the Modern Churchmen's Union (and, by extension its aims and principles) were obsolete. Stephenson's
argument that these modernists were the twentieth-century equivalents of eighteenth century evangelicals and the Oxford Movement was reckoned to be exaggerated.\textsuperscript{33} His rather anecdotal style also lent itself more to chronicle and was inclined to be introverted. It made no real attempt to set modernism inside the wider context which Major had defined for it midway between secularism and Romanism.

The practice of looking upon Stephenson's work as definitive has been unfortunate. It has meant that English modernism has not yet been subject to the kind of searching inquiry William Hutchison has performed on its equivalent in the United States.\textsuperscript{32} The a priori theological objections and the sneaking suspicion that modernism was a 'relic of peculiar times' were not allowed in this case to stand in the way of a full inquiry. The 'modernist impulse' was considered in its dual role of social critic and advocate of a theological immaneitism. Its spread into seminaries and theological faculties was traced, and so was its search for an 'exportable Christianity' or mission theology. All the while, the modernist message was related back to what was happening elsewhere in theology and also to cultural change. This then was a comprehensive treatment of modernism over a period of time in which those key questions were addressed in a context of what actually happened. It went well beyond the scope of Stephenson's model of rise and decline. It shows what is possible in the historical study of modernism – the differences between its American and English forms notwithstanding.\textsuperscript{33}

Nor has there been the comparable kind of comprehensive study made by Kenneth Hylson-Smith on evangelicals in the Church of England. Once again this is a good model. This movement is situated inside the politics and culture of the day; Hylson-Smith makes use of disciplines like sociology in association with critical historical research. Evangelicalism is explored in terms of its formative years, its growth and influence. There is substantial coverage of the intersection between evangelical scholarship and its understanding of preaching, mission and social work. Hylson-Smith also deals with disagreements within evangelicalism and sets about the task of placing the movement and its ethos inside the wider life of the church.\textsuperscript{34} This kind of work on English modernism is still waiting to be done.

Over the past several years there have been a number of more positive signs. On the wider horizon there has been a renaissance of interest in the theological ideas developed in the Church of England during the foundational years of modernism. The most notable studies have been Peter Hinchliff's \textit{God and History} and Mark Chapman's \textit{The Coming Crisis}. Together these two works describe the way in which new understandings of history and eschatology raised a raft of fresh questions for theologians in the period prior to the First World War. The emerging ethos of modernism was formed in and through these challenges. Major is only mentioned briefly in Chapman's discussion of responses to Albert Schweitzer and not at all by Hinchliff, though 'fellow travellers' like Hastings Rashdall, William Sanday and B.H. Streeter are. These texts describe the theological territory of the late Victorian and pre-war period in a fresh, imaginative way that was not present in Stephenson's \textit{magnum opus}.

These monographs deal with an historical theology; they can also be set alongside recent work which has been arguing the case for a recovery of a liberal or modernist theology.\textsuperscript{35}
The most surprising in the light of the past neglect is Paul Badham's *The Contemporary Challenge of Modernist Theology*. The first couple of chapters could have been written by Major himself in terms of their themes: what is modernism? why modernism was, and is, necessary. The balance of the book is designed to show how some of those stock modernist concerns to do with the relationship between science and faith, religious experience, the humanity as well as the divinity of Christ and the immortality of the soul, 'world religion,' have once more 'come to the forefront' of debate. The way in which these discussions are now constructed differs from the categories in which the modernists of Major's vintage expressed them. Nevertheless, they represent more generic concerns that must almost invariably intend the desire to bring a 'traditional Christianity ... up to date and in line with the rest of modern knowledge'.

That last sentence was written in 1998. It could so easily have been written by Major ninety years before and, indeed, most of his substantial corpus of writings relied upon the intention Badham described. Yet Major is hardly mentioned in this work which was written to celebrate the centenary of the Modern Churchmen's Union. Here is an irony. The apostleship of Henry Major has almost become a liability. It has been so for some time and made itself felt in both the journal and annual conferences which Major actually initiated.

The most vivid example of this relative demise is the centenary lecture delivered by Adrian Hastings. On this historic occasion Major was dubbed the 'sergeant-major' who demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of English modernism. The dilemma for someone who has buried themselves away in the archives of this subject was the emphasis Hastings placed upon Major's failures of the 1930s. There was no attempt to explore why Major held firm to some of his convictions. Nor was there a flesh and blood concern for his increasing age, his hardness of hearing and his declining sight. There was no awareness of the ambivalence that existed in the relationship between Major, Bishop Barnes and modernism. There was, indeed, a lack of balance that did not sufficiently attend to the role Major had played in the emergence of the modernist heyday of the 1920s. In Hastings' opinion this decade was the 'great age' of the Modern Churchmen's Union. It had been able to attract during this period 'numerous distinguished figures' and played its part in forcing Anglo-Catholics and evangelicals 'to rethink some of their views and, in some cases, to turn into 'Liberal Catholics' or 'Liberal Evangelicals'. Major had made this 'great age' possible. Those who had been members of the Union during this period and the decade before would not have forgotten to labour this point.

The dilemma of the centenary lecture was its focus on Major's weaknesses. The decade selected by Hastings made Major fair game for attack. It was not his best period. David Pym has mapped out how he lost touch with the possibility of a redeemed modernism represented by Alan Richardson and which might have attracted a rising generation. Hastings was indeed close to the mark in saying that so much of the conventional modernist agenda in a time of deepening political crises now seemed to be concerned with 'parish pump disputes,' though this was an accusation that could have been levelled in any number of directions. The particular criticism that the lecture aimed at Major was his hostility to Anglo-Catholic and Roman Catholic ideals. The contrast was made with Walter Matthews and Norman Sykes who aspired after a 'wider and more tolerant form of Modernism which
shall include Anglo-Catholic Modernists as well as Liberal Evangelicals. Matthews was deemed to possess a 'circumspective and forward-glancing eye' whereas Major, with Barnes, represented a more rigid option.

In the course of a lecture like this it is not possible to delve fully into the issues raised. How might this more critical reading of Major, for instance, explain why he did not see himself as a liberal protestant? How did others in the contemporary life of the church negotiate the tension between the desire for theological reform and the call to be comprehensive? It is arguably the case the play on Major's name and allowing him to be the sergeant-major is a disservice. It only allows one part of character and role to emerge. There is no awareness here of how the younger Major would have welcomed Hastings' brief study of the word 'modern' and its various derivatives and their usage in Christian history; nor did this model of the sergeant-major allow Hastings to catch a glimpse of how and why Major would have agreed with his own conclusion that modernism must of its very nature be 'tentative, explorative, challenging, willing to find itself wrong, open to diversity of interpretations, never completed.'

Perhaps now is the time to create a more sympathetic place for Major. Breward's suggestion that 'Major needs to be done' is not true just for the sake of the history of theology in New Zealand. The modernist movement was inclined to think in terms of personality. It esteemed character alongside its passion for critical scholarship. Major brought both of these concerns together in a way that established networks for those who often saw their work in a more individual light. Major thought of himself as 'pygmy' in comparison with 'giants' - like Rashdall whom he dubbed modernism's 'ablest champion'. There is something self-effacing about this remark. Rashdall always recognised the importance of Major and was his most frequent advocate and advisor. The difficulty is that so much of what Major meant to modernism is hidden away in minutes and correspondence, in his teaching and the things he made happen. Some recovery work has begun. Michael Brierley's history of Major's principalship of Ripon Hall is invaluable. It is arguably the case that the history of English modernism requires a fuller length biographical study of Major. Such a publication could not but help map the network of modernist scholars, the ecclesiastical politics of their day and explain more fully how they formed and why they were willing to be organised. Major's reputation would also be rescued from the fate some foresaw.
Notes for Chapter 1


3 Major was convinced that the establishment of the Doctrinal Commission was 'the supreme achievement' of the Girton Conference. See: 'The Doctrinal Report (1922-1938)', The Modern Churchman, December 1956; p.211.

4 Major invoked 'the future historian of contemporary religion' in his address to the annual conference of the Modern Churchmen's Union of 1932. On that occasion the theme had been 'the new reformation.' The intention was to forestall the Anglo-Catholic celebration of the centenary of the Oxford Movement the following year. It was widely suspected in modernist circles that this event would be exploited by those eager to undo the Reformation settlement and commit the national church to 'medieval beliefs and rites.' Major feared that such action would only further alienate 'the educated classes' and convert the Church into a dwindling sect on the margins of an increasingly secular society. The now familiar alternative he proposed was a simplified faith freed from 'the fetters and the impedimenta of the past.' Major predicted that subsequent history would vindicate his 'reduced religion' which some already reckoned to be out of date. His firm belief was that an impartial verdict would conclude that the most pressing of current religious concerns had been the growth and rival claims of modernism, secularism, and 'Romanism.' See Major, H.D.A., 'The New Reformation,' The Modern Churchman, August-October, 1932; pp. 410-421. In a letter to The Times, 16 August 1932, Major argued that modernism alone was making a 'positive and permanent contribution' towards a faith for a new age.

5 There was considerable debate during Major's lifetime over the definition of modernism. Was it a method, an ethos, or an ecclesiastical party? The general tendency was to favour the former. The received theological judgement is that the party activities in which modernists indulged were either a mistake or a temporary expedient. A.M. Ramsey expressed the 'semi-official view' that modernists 'to their loss, became a party, though perhaps this was inevitable.' See From Gore to Temple: The Development of Anglican Theology between Lux Mundi and the Second World War, 1889-1939, London, Longmans, 1960; p. 65.

The practical effect of its ambiguous usage was that modernism became a 'strange' and 'unhappy word.' It was so freely bandied about that it meaning became uncertain. Whether it was best seen as a tendency or a party was sometimes lost sight of in a maze of polemic. To be modernist could simply mean seeking to be relevant in the present age. In this case its political function was designed to wrest the initiative away from the organised movement and show that 'we are all modern now.' On other occasions it retained its original pejorative sense. Then modernism became a synonym for being 'vague' in religion and for being at a point on a 'sliding scale of error.' See Pettit, W.H., 'Science and Evangelical Theology', Times Literary Supplement, December, 1927; p. 212. This difficulty with the word was further compounded because of the distinction some critics then made between a 'genuine modernism' and 'modern churchmanship.' See Vidler, A.R., Twentieth Century Defenders of the Faith, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970; p. 123. The former referred with approval to the work of Loisy and the 'original' Roman Catholic modernists; the latter consisted of 'fellow travellers' in the Church of England who were reckoned to be liberal protestants in disguise.
The need for a definition was a matter that Major often addressed. One of his most extended treatments of this subject is to be found in the first of his Harvard Lectures for 1925. Here a range of writers were in a way that is in keeping with the synthetic temper of Major's mind. It was a frequent trait of his to identify and make use of isolated statements from writers and hold them together in an almost episodic manner. There was no intention of critically evaluating one definition and its merits in the light of another. In this instance modernism represented the desire for a 'transformed Christianity', an 'attitude of mind that corresponds to our time', an orientation, a 'new spirit', an 'attempt to reach a new theological synthesis', a 'defence of religion', an apologetic. See, Major, H.D.A., *English Modernism: Its Origins, Methods, Aims*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1927; pp. 9-15.


8 The tendency of Moltmann's 'therapeutic relevance of the gospel' is towards soteriology. The primary axis of Major's religious thinking was more inclined towards the incarnational and moral.


12 Major only occasionally wrote on Paul. His overriding hermeneutical concern was to demonstrate how 'the essential elements in the Gospel of Jesus' are to be 'found unperveted in the Gospel of Paul'. The kind of literary and historical criticism he put to use on the synoptic problem was exported to the Pauline epistles where he set about the task of distinguishing between the permanent and the passing. Major was inclined to play down the Pauline ideas of justification by faith, the expiatory sacrifice of Christ, predestination and universal judgement. What Major privileged was Paul's theology of the Spirit, the comprehensive nature of the church and the moral dimension of personality. See 'The Permanent and the Passing in the Pauline Gospel', *Religions*, 19, April, 1937; pp. 7-20.

13 *The New Zealand Herald*, 16 February, 1929.


15 Michaelhouse, J. (McCulloch, J.) *Charming Manners*, London, J.M. Dent, 1932; pp. 55-65. McCulloch referred to Major more explicitly in his autobiography, *My Affair with the Church*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1976. 'What I got from Henry Major above all else was the assurance that a man might live a life in Anglican orders, and combine independence of mind and personality with sincere Christian devotion and unfailing loyalty to the authentic ministry of the Church' (p. 25). McCulloch found Major's 'personality ... singularly attractive. At the time of my first meeting with him (c.1932), he must have been verging on seventy, but like Moses of old, his natural force was unabated. Our friendship was immediate, despite the considerable disparity

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in our ages...’ McCulloch welcomed the opportunity ‘to sit at the feet of Gamaliel’ (p. 25). At the
time McCulloch was a deacon who was out of favour with the ecclesiastical authorities. It was ‘Dr.
Major who listened with his usual gentle patience to my doubts and fears, and somehow turned
them into strong reasons why I should hesitate no longer, as they were themselves evidence how
deeplv I cared’ (p. 26).

16 Davidson, A.K. 'New Zealand History and Religious Myopia', in Mapping the Landscape: Essays
in Australian and New Zealand Christianity, edited Emilien, S., and Emilien, W.W., American

17 Matheson, P., 'The Contours of Christian Theology in Aotearoa New Zealand,' in Mapping
the Landscape, op. cit., p. 263: 'H.D.A. Major, one of the most brilliant minds of the period,
found no hospitality for his Modernism in New Zealand and had to work in Britain.' Matheson
describes this period in New Zealand theology between 1919 and 1960 as one ‘remarkable for its
lack of originality and drive’. Ian Breward reckons Major to be one of the 'region's most notable
liberals' who had left New Zealand to 'become influential in England'. Breward, I., A History of the

18 Davidson, A.K. Selwyn's Legacy: The College of St John the Evangelist Te Waimate and Auckland,

19 ibid., p. 160.

20 This institutional lack of appreciation Major experienced was not confined to him. The
equivalent story for the Presbyterians was J.M. Bates whom Matheson refers to as ‘another fertile
thinker, (who) was kept out of the professorial chair he so richly deserved,' op. cit., p. 163. Bates
had done postgraduate study in Zurich under Emil Brunner, one of the two leading Neo-orthodox
theologians of the inter-war period. Later in life Brunner enquired after where Bates was teaching
in New Zealand and was astonished to find that he was not, despite having been short-listed on
three occasions and clearly been the better candidate for the position of Professor of Systematic
Theology at the Theological Hall, Knox College, Dunedin. See Pearson, C.R., The Theological Case

21 In a collection of newspaper cuttings from his trip to New Zealand Major kept an account of the
farewell sermon given by the Revd. A. Thornhill of the Unitarian Church in Ponsonby. Thornhill
spoke of how, on coming to New Zealand, he had expected religious thought here to be ahead of
England, but was astonished to discover that it was, so he claimed, 'fifty years behind'.

22 It seems as if the work of Charles Gore was now being highly esteemed. This should come as
no surprise. The Bishop of Oxford was, arguably, well regarded in the Anglican communion in
general. Major and Gore, of course, were on opposite theological sides, though Gore's practice
was to engage more directly with the philosophy and theology of Major's confidant, Hastings
Rashdall. To put these matters into perspective, it is worth noting that Major had been once
indebted to Gore's thinking on how creed and conduct should be consistent one with another.
The critical factor from the point of view of Major's relationship to St. John's in the late 1920s
is that this debt had been forged nearly thirty years before when he was the Vicar of Hamilton.
Major's decision to throw in his lot with the Churchmen's Union in 1907 was like taking leave of
the position that Gore had espoused.

23 W.G. Monckton, the Vicar of Takapuna, was one of the few to invite Major to preach in his
church. Later, Monckton wrote: 'You do not know what a pleasure it is to us who are so remote
from the caravans of the world's thought to have the privilege of meeting a scholar from the
old land. We had got into a narrow groove in which such questions as whether we should have

27
flowers during Lent or purple hangings in Advent seemed the vital matters of the day'. Monckton to Major, 12 August, 1929; H.D.A Major Papers.

24 Davidson suggests that this 'restrictive educational approach probably contributed to the failure of students trained at St. John's to make any significant New Zealand advances in biblical or theological study'. op. cit., p. 141


26 Waggett, P.N., Speech to the English Church Union, June 15, 1926, The Church Union Gazette, July, 1926; p. 143.


33 It would be most useful if further research was done on the link which did exist between English and American modernism. There was a network of trans-Atlantic contact and support. Its most visible sign was the formation of an American Modern Churchmen's Union in the wake of Major's lecture tour of the north-eastern seaboard in 1925. This theme is not dealt with in Hutchison's work because he did not concern himself with modernism in the Episcopal Church. Major believed that the basic difference between the two forms of modernism was due to the cultures in which they were set. English modernism was identified with a national church and a civilisation deemed to be 'practically complete'. Its two-fold task was to revivify the established Church and inspire a truly modern Christian culture. In comparison, the United States was a 'civilisation in the making'. To an English modernist like Major, it was full of 'energy and enterprise' but still had 'quite a long way to go'. It meant that modernism in America was more likely to be pragmatic and be inclined towards a social gospel. 'Notebook: Impressions of My American Visit', H.D.A. Major Papers. Also, see: Major, H.D.A., 'Fundamentalists and Modernists in America', *The Interpreter*, 20, April, 1924; pp. 192-200.


The criticism levelled against Major for his opposition to the catholicising tendency should be seen in the light of a wider unease within the Church of England during the inter-war period. It was not at all clear where the boundary line might fall between Anglicanism and Romanism. Even leaders of the Anglo-Catholic movement were apprehensive. Kenneth Ingram warned of too 'uncritical (an) imitation' of Roman methods and how this might run the risk of archaism, clericalism, and ultra-dogmatism. See 'The Future of the Catholic Movement', Green Quarterly, 4, Spring 1927; p. 101. Charles Gore identified a 'half-Romanism' as the betrayal of a true liberal catholicism which he believed to be 'the mission and meaning of Anglicanism'. See The Anglo-Catholic Movement Today, London, A.R. Mowbray, 1925. Maurice Relton argued that it was an Anglo-Catholic duty to define their attitude towards Rome. It was time to declare 'quite definitely where the line is to be drawn'. See Relton, H.M., 'The Catholic Position', The Church Union Gazette, 66, August, 1925; pp. 149-151.

Relton took Major to task for making it seem as if all Anglo-Catholics were 'more Roman than Rome'. Major was, of course, aware of distinctions but was more inclined to concentrate upon what he saw as the likely end of the tendency. It was a short step then to the conclusion that Anglo-Catholicism was essentially 'Romanising' regardless of individual shades of meaning. Major made a distinction between Romanism and an English modernism which he argued was the 'true friend' of a 'genuine catholicism'. In a way that might surprise Hastings, the sharpest criticisms of his writings on this tendency came from evangelical critics who were left 'terribly disappointed' that he did not go further in his critique.

The most vehement and concerted attack Major made on 'the lure of Rome' was his The Roman Church and the Modern Man, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1934. In his opinion this church conjured up images of excessive authoritarianism and obscurantism. How far it was out of tune with the New Light was seen in its repression of Loisy and George Tyrrell and its adherence to doctrines like papal infallibility. In much of what he said Major was merely repeating the standard Anglican apologetic. Where his modernism made a difference was in his placing Roman Catholicism on an hierarchical scale of religions. Then it was perceived to harbour characteristics more appropriate to a primitive or lower form of religion - for example, in its defence of miracles, its elaborate ritual, and its asceticism. Major contended that the unfolding evolution would show that the Roman Catholic Church was ill-equipped to become the religion of the race. For this reason he opposed any move within his own church which might be construed as Romanist.

Hastings is unaware of how Major had not always been so rigorous in his suspicion of the catholicising tendency. Hidden away in his correspondence are a number of occasions when Major intervened in order to keep in check the more overtly protestant and evangelical emphases within the movement. One such instance was his fear that the Modern Churchman's Library series of books might create 'the view that we only stand for the Protestant side'. The next proposed text by J.R. Cuhu was felt to be far too that way inclined. See Emmet, C., to Major, H.D.A., 11 January, 1918, H.D.A. Major Papers. Major and Percy Gardner believed that there was a 'chronic danger' that the Union might not be able to negotiate this 'Scylla and Charybdis'. It was felt that an excessive protestantism would do the movement much harm and Major strove to represent a more catholic dimension. See, Gardner, P., to Major, H.D.A., 10 January, 1918, H.D.A. Major Papers. The more hardline position Major espoused in the 1930s should be seen partially in the light of the attacks made upon him by English Church Union for the preceding.

Mark D. Chapman has been more perceptive in recognizing that Major was not a liberal protestant in disguise. See his The Coming Crisis: The Impact of Eschatology on Theology in Edwardian England, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, p.100. Major himself frequently
argued that it was misleading to identify English modernism with liberal protestantism. See his
*English Modernism*, pp. 28-38. In his own theology he placed a great deal of emphasis upon the
religion of Jesus and the spirit-bearing fellowship of the church.