

BOOK REVIEW:
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND THE MIDDLE EAST
BY CHARLES THORLEY BRIDGEMAN
(NEW YORK: MOREHOUSE-GORHAM, 1958)

*By Duane Alexander Miller*¹

This is a short volume, and one that is not very easy to find. My library in San Antonio, Texas, was able to get a copy through Inter-library Loan (ILL) from the University of the South in Sewanee, itself an Episcopal institution. In spite of the difficulty in locating a copy, the book is interesting and useful given its brevity.

Bridgeman is one of the few chroniclers of Episcopal mission in the Middle East, itself a rather recondite topic. The multifaceted efforts of the groups associated with the Church of England, like the Church Mission Society (CMS) and the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) and the London Jews Society (LJS, but now know as the Church's Ministry to Jews or CMJ) have been documented extensively elsewhere by authors like Kelvin Crombie and Kenneth Cragg. The less widespread and comparatively meager contributions of the American Episcopalians has not been a topic of research by and large. Bridgeman, who in addition to this short book published articles² in the *Historical Magazine of the Episcopal Church and Anglican and Episcopal History*, was himself a missionary in the Israel-Palestine for many years. In addition to his articles in those two journals and the book being reviewed here, he authored *Jerusalem at Worship* (Jerusalem: Syrian Orphanage Press 1932) and *Ancient Christian Churches in the Near East* (New York: Near East Society 1951 or 1952) and *Religious Communities in the Christian East* (Cairo[?]: Nile Mission Press 1940[?]). He held the position of residentiary canon at St George's Cathedral in Jerusalem and was Archdeacon in Syria and the Lebanon. Thus he is

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² For example 'Mediterranean Missions of the Episcopal Church from 1828-1896' in *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* Vol 31:2, 1962, pp 95-126.

well suited to be one of the few voices, albeit not a recent one, contributing to scholarship regarding Episcopal mission in the Middle East.

As a person who lived in the diocese of Jerusalem for roughly five years and who has written both on the history and the present realities there³, one of the most striking features of this short book is the sense of how he is writing about a church in an in-between stage. The archbishop of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East was still, when he was writing, British. But the first Arab bishop, Najib Cuba'in, had recently been ordained as bishop of Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Indeed, one of photos contained in the book is of Archbishop MacInnes, wearing his miter and holding a crosier, holding the hand of the newly consecrated Cuba'in in front of St George's Cathedral.⁴ Bridgeman shows us a church that is becoming indigenous, that is the process of shifting from being foreign led to being led by indigenous pastors.

The ecclesiastical structure that Bridgeman knew is also different than the present arrangement (as of 2011). Bridgeman describes to us a curious structure wherein the bishop in Jerusalem is the metropolitan or archbishop, with regional bishops serving under him in Cairo, Sudan, Iran, Cyprus and the Gulf, and Jordan-Syria-Lebanon. As of 1974, Sudan was not even part of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East, rather it became a province within the world-wide Anglican Communion. Also, the ECJME no longer has a metropolitan or archbishop. Rather, the office of presiding bishop can belong to any of the four diocesan bishops. Presently it is Dr. Mouneer Hanna Anis, the bishop of Egypt, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa who is presiding bishop. Before him it was Clive Hanford, who from 1996 to 2007 was bishop of Cyprus and the

³ For instance, 'Morning Prayer, Low Style, in the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem: Church of the Redeemer, Amman, Jordan' in *Anglican and Episcopal History*, Vol 76:3, Sep 2007, and 'The Episcopal Church in Jordan: Identity, Liturgy, and Mission' in *The Journal of Anglican Studies*, FirstView article, 30 July 2010.

⁴ For an account of the installation of the present bishop in Jerusalem, Suhail Dawani, see my article 'The Installation of a Bishop in Jerusalem: The Cathedral Church of St. George the Martyr, 15 April 2007' in *Anglican and Episcopal History* Vol 76:4, Dec, pp 549-554.

Gulf. Finally, the diocese of Jerusalem once again includes all of Israel-Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. The situation is not ideal because Syria and Lebanon do not acknowledge the existence of the State of Israel. Practically speaking, the only place where all the clergy can meet together is Jordan. Members of the church with Lebanese or Syrian citizenship may well live their entire life without being able to ever visit the diocesan cathedral. Finally, if the bishop is not of Israeli citizenship, then there is always the possibility that the Israeli government will deny him the needed visa to enter Israel, and by consequence the contested area of Eastern Jerusalem where the cathedral is located.

Bridgeman was also writing well before the Islamic Revolution in 1979, which led to the decimation of the diocese of Iran to the point where it is, today, barely in existence at all. Bridgeman is able to report, correctly, that Iran, in all the Middle East of his day, was the one place where significant numbers of Muslims converted to Christianity, and we are treated to a photo of 'Iranians of Moslem and Zoroastrian background at worship in C.M.S. Church, Isfahan' (34). One's attention is immediately drawn to the several Persian carpets on the floor of the church. Indeed, the inclusion of various pictures, like All Saints' Anglican Cathedral in Cairo and Emmanuel Church in Tel Aviv, is of particular value. The cover of the book has a photo of St George's Cathedral in Jerusalem, but before the entire area around the church in East Jerusalem had been built up resulting in the congestion associated with that part of the city today.

The book makes no claim to be an exhaustive piece of scholarship, and Bridgeman approaches the various missionary strategies used by Anglicans and Episcopalians without much criticism. Rather, the book's purpose seems to be to acquaint the average Episcopalian with the connections between his church and the Anglicans of the Middle East. With this goal in mind he provides a short history of how the Anglican churches came into being in the Middle East, and then provides us with a tour of the different dioceses and regions as they existed in the late-50's. He mentions on several occasions the importance of the Good Friday offering, gathered on Good Friday of each year in the congregations of the Epis-

copal Church of the USA, the funds are used to support the Middle Eastern churches. He is showing people what they are getting for their money, to put it bluntly, and while he does not make a hard sell, he implies that more is needed.