



# eColenso

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# The New Zealand polymath: Colenso & his contemporaries

Wellington 16–18 November 2016

# The fall...

**“that I might know myself”\***

William Colenso had an affair with Ripeka (Rebecca) Meretene, a servant in his house (actually close to being an adopted daughter—shades of Woody Allen); a son (Wiremu) was born. She later married Hamuera (Samuel) Te Nehu, also Colenso’s servant. Elizabeth Colenso was aware of the affair (which continued), as was Hamuera, but the secret arrangement seems to have been secure among the four of them—for a time.

## The confession

On 5 February 1852 Colenso wrote in his journal,

“This day my old Native steward, Samuel... left me, no more to return! My supposition, when he last returned, (that he had not come back to stay,) appears to be more than true; as he had merely returned to gather together all that he could.... Never have I been so greatly so outrageously abused to my face; never had to do with such stubborn outrageous mischief! such threatenings, such base ingratitude—(Et tu Brute!)—thus am I justly punished.”

According to James Hamlin (see letter of 20 December 1852 below), the affair began in 1848, but it was in February 1852 when Colenso refused to give up Wiremu to Hamuera and Ripeka, when “threats of a full disclosure were held out” (“such threatenings... thus am I justly punished”). Indeed, Colenso wrote to Selwyn that Ripeka did tell all during February.

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\* —too readily lifted up with the gracious successes which the LORD had given me in everything I put my hands to—what needed I more than to be made humble and kept so; that I might know myself.  
—William Colenso 1852.

*Noverim te, noverim me:* I would know you [God], I would know myself. —St. Augustine.

In July Hori (George) Niania Te Aroatua (Te Hapuku’s cousin) wrote to Donald McLean,

Waipukurau.  
July 24th. 1852

To McLean,

The Governor, Greeting! My address to you is this,—What we have to say—Te Hapuku and us—is in reference to the land which Te Wiremu Potangaroa has sold to you, ours as well as his, viz.—that it was through us, the natives of Heretaunga, that you were enabled to purchase it.

In the same manner it may be through them that the Wairarapa may be bought. In reference to this latter, we propose £5000, and £600. If you agree to this there is but little doubt that we may accomplish the Wairarapa in the same way as the floods sweep obstacles into the sea.

I have another thing to say in the shape of an accusation. What I am now going to reveal to you is strictly true. Mr. Colenso has committed adultery with a native woman of our tribe. Her name is Ripeka. If anybody should say it is false, don’t you believe them. It is quite true. I could not make a false oath; and since because it is true, I have written you this letter, that you may hear. If any white people should bring the report, don’t disbelieve it. Our thoughts are yours in reference to this matter. If you choose to make a great matter of it; or if, on the contrary; well. Our own thoughts however, are inclined towards making a great matter of it; and to distinguish between right and wrong; and because he also has endeavoured to keep us down, and he to raise himself up.

Let not his misfortune and evil fall upon us.

(Signed) Na Hori Niania.

Colenso had no choice but to confess. He therefore wrote to Bishop Selwyn,

Waitangi, Hawke's Bay  
September 7, 1852

The Right Reverend  
The Lord Bishop of New Zealand

Private

My Lord,

1. I am most unwilling to cause your Lordship any pain, especially at such a time as that of your return from a long and dangerous and trying voyage, (knowing, too, as I do, of the many peculiar cares & trials, which you have to bear,) but my situation is, alas! such, that I have no alternative left me.—And I would rather, for many reasons, that your Lordship should hear the unlooked for and dire tidings directly from me, than from others of the Mission, or from uncertain report.

2. A few words, my Lord, will suffice to inform you of my having sadly deviated from the path of morality:—I have had connexion with a young Native woman, by whom a child has been born.

3. The young woman, Rebecca, we brought with us from Te Waimate: the child was born in May, 51, and is, consequently, now 16 months old.

4. The whole matter was fully disclosed by her to Mrs. Colenso, and assented to by me, almost immediately after the birth of the Child. It was not, however, publicly mentioned by the mother, until some time after your Lordship left us. I believe it was kept (by her) so long secret, out of affection for me.

5. I have never at any time, nor to any one, from first to last, enjoined silence, nor have I given any intimation that way.

6. Owing to the repeated and serious illness of the mother, the

child was weaned at the early age of 6 months; from which hour Mrs. Colenso has brought it up, shewing it great kindness.—

7. In the month of February last, the mother was determined to leave us, and to go to reside at Patangata; when, because I would not give up the child, to be taken thither, she, out of revenge, disclosed the whole matter.

8. At the Native villages she remained till May, when she again returned to our house; where she at present dwells.

9. Hitherto a few only of the Natives have fully believed her statements, and, although I have preserved a guarded manner in reference to the subject, I have never in any way denied the truth of the same.

10. The ill report, with no small addition, has been common talk during the last six months. The 2 R. Catholic Priests, and the foreigners generally have done all they can to spread it, and to make it (if possible) worse than it really is.

11. I had never intended to conceal the matter, in fact, I could not have done so. I did, I confess, think that it would be better made known at some future period, than during the past year.—Perhaps, in this I, also, erred.

12. I believe, that if your Lordship in your last visit here could have prolonged your stay I should have made you then acquainted with the matter: or, if my Archdeacon had been at his Station or had come here last month instead of the Rev. Mr. Grace (perfect stranger), I should have informed him of it.

13. The sudden and wholly unexpected arrival here of Mr. John Fairburn, on the night of the 4th inst., (who leaves us in a few days on his return,) affords me an opportunity of putting in practice what I had already determined upon—namely, to acquaint your Lordship of the whole affair.

14. I have but one prevailing desire concerning this matter, which is, to make the fullest possible reparation in my power to the Church for my error.

15. My sin has long ago been felt by my own conscience and by me repeatedly made known to GOD, to whom I have often bitterly confessed it. I dare, however, to hope, that it will be found among my many other grievous yet pardoned errors.

16. I am of opinion, that it would be well shortly to assemble several of the Native Teachers and Chiefs, and before them to own to the general truth of the report,—namely, as far as to my having had connection with Rebecca, and the birth of the child,—and to inform them, that I have written to you, my Bishop, who sent me hither, concerning the matter, and that I shall quietly await your judgment. I am not, however, quite certain that I shall so act; for as I am at a great distance from your Lordship, and as I only wish the Church's welfare, I must, in this, be guided by circumstances.—I did think of ceasing forthwith from every active duty; but, upon reflection, I considered that such a proceeding would be improper.

17. I intend, however to send immediately a notification of a similar nature to Archdeacon Hadfield and to the Rev. Messrs. Cole & Hamlin.

18. I do not think, that the step I am now considering, namely, the assembling of the Native Teachers and Chiefs, and my acknowledging to the general truth of the report,—will be preventive of any serious evil to the Church here; and that because it has already been so long talked of; as well as from their general attachment to me, which, I believe, will, in great measure, still remain.

19. It is not, my Lord, fitting, that I should now say any thing in my own favor, for I have erred, & that grievously. Notwithstanding, however, I venture to think that I could tell your Lordship a few things, which would inform you as to how I, who never before was guilty of the same crime, came to commit such a deed, and which might, perhaps be urged in extenuation.—

20. Whatever decision your Lordship may be pleased to come to concerning me, I trust to be enabled not only to bear but to agree in. Should you deem it necessary to deprive me entirely, I hope you will be able to send a Minister in Priest's orders hither, to look after this portion of your flock.

21. It has, more than once occurred to me (during the past year), to disserve myself from the C.M.S., as well as to resign my Deacon's Office; but upon mature consideration, I have been (and am) loath to do so, and that from principle:—even as I stated (when writing upon another subject,) in a letter to the C.M.S. in February last, that,—“I still considered myself to be the property of the Church.” For, unworthy though I am, I quite believe with Hooker, that “they who have once received this power, may not think to put it off and on like a cloak.—Suspensions may stop, and degradations utterly cut off the use or exercise of power before given: but voluntarily it is not in the power of man to separate and pull asunder what GOD by His authority coupleth.” (Book V. xxvii.3.)

22. As a matter of course I cannot at present form any plan as to my own future movement, neither would it be proper for me to think of doing so, as such must, in a great measure, depend upon your Lordship's decision respecting me. Thus much, however, I may perhaps, at present say, that I have not the least desire to remove from this neighbourhood.

23. In consequence of my having a very short time in which to prepare and write this (to me) important letter, and having my time and thoughts fully occupied withal, I fear it will not be written so clearly as it ought to be.

24. I must beg to be allowed to leave your Lordship the communicating of the unwelcome contents of this letter to both the Parent and Central Committees.

25. Should anything happen to me, before I can possibly hear

from your Lordship, I pray you, my Lord, to look kindly upon all my children; for I have (notwithstanding my error) served both the C.M.S. and the Church zealously and faithfully.

26. And now, my Lord, in conclusion, allow me to hope for your attentive consideration of the whole case.—My prayer is, and shall be, that you may be entirely guided in your judgment by Him—“unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid,” to do that alone which shall be for the advancement of His glory, the good of His church, and the welfare of this people: for I have this confidence in you that, if I must deem myself little worthy of great things, you will not deem me worthy of utter ruin.—

And am,  
My Lord,  
Your unworthy servant & Deacon,  
William Colenso.

### **The Bishop responds**

Bishop Selwyn asked Revs Kissling, Lloyd, Abraham, Burrows and Thatcher to examine the confession and then he replied to Colenso in a registered letter,

Auckland  
11 November, 1852

The Bishop of New Zealand sorrowing as a spiritual father over his lost son, sends the enclosed sentence; and would gladly have accompanied it with words expressive of hope, that when the LORD has brought forth the fruits of repentance in the Sinner's heart, the Church will reverse its sentence and restore the penitent; but this will depend in great measure upon the Society in England, who, in a former case of a far more venial kind, have

hardly been persuaded to allow their first sentence of absolute separation to be reversed.

May the Saviour of Sinners, in the exercise of His own absolute prerogative of mercy, be more lenient in His Sentence, than His Church dares to be.

To William Colenso,  
with the sorrowful prayers of his Father  
in the ministry of Christ Jesus,

(signed)  
G.A. N. Zealand.

George Augustus by Divine Permission Bishop of New Zealand.  
To the Reverend William Colenso, Missionary Deacon of the  
District of Ahuriri.

Whereas in a letter dated September 7th, 1852, you have confessed yourself to be guilty of the sin of adultery and have submitted yourself to my Episcopal judgment,

And whereas your letter was formally examined by a  
Commission of five Clergymen:—

viz:— The Rev. G.A. Kissling  
Rev. J. F. Lloyd,  
Rev. C.J. Abraham,  
Rev. R. Burrows,  
Rev. F Thatcher,

held at Auckland on the 8th November 1852.

And whereas Mr. John Fairburn being called upon to give evidence before the said Commission confirmed the statement contained in your letter.

And whereas the said Commission in a Report of their proceedings given under their hands and seals have certified that there is prima facie grounds for instituting further proceedings in the matter aforesaid.

We therefore in remembrance of the charge which we received at our Consecration, to be so merciful as not to be remiss; so to minister discipline as not to forget mercy, have carefully weighed and considered both your letter and the Report of the Commissioners, and thereupon do pronounce this our definitive sentence.—

“That the Reverend William Colenso Missionary Deacon of Ahuriri in our Diocese of New Zealand, having been found guilty of the sin of adultery upon his own confession confirmed by evidence taken by a Commission appointed under our hand & seal, and having willingly submitted himself to our Episcopal judgment, we do hereby inhibit the said William Colenso from ministering henceforth in the Holy Office of a Deacon, and do hereby straitly enjoin him on no account to continue to conduct Public Worship or to administer the Sacrament of Baptism, but to walk humbly with GOD, and in the sight of all men.

“And we do hereby revoke the licence granted to Rev. William Colenso as Missionary Deacon of the District of Ahuriri.

“Witness our hand & seal this ninth day of November in the year of our LORD, one thousand eight hundred and fifty two.

(Signed)  
G.A. N.Zealand

Selwyn wrote to the Central Committee (for New Zealand) of the Church Missionary Society on 27 November 1852,

1 Revd. W. Colenso. The Ahuriri Station must be considered vacant in consequence of the suspension (*sine die*) of Revd. William Colenso who has confessed himself guilty of the sin of adultery. The Committee will concur with me in deploring this most unhappy event, and in making prompt arrangements to supply Mr. Colenso's place.

2 Revd. S. Williams. I have written to Mr Williams to go to Ahuriri to stay the evils which may be expected to ensue in that District.

Selwyn asked Rev. James Hamlin of Wairoa to deliver the letter to Colenso and Hamlin did so on 29 November. He returned home and reported his visit to the Central Committee on 20 December 1852,

To Robert Vidal Esq  
Sec. of C. Committee  
Dear Sir

I am requested by the Eastern D. Committee to provide the Central Comee. with a full account of the unhappy event which has occurred at Heretaunga namely Mr. Colenso's fall.

A full account is perhaps unnecessary.

It may be sufficient to observe that Mr. Colenso related to me with tears that about June 1848 commenced his criminal connexion with the Native woman living in his house whose name was Ripeka; she was at that time unmarried; this I understand continued—about three months, perhaps fearful of consequences, she wished to be married to a young man, also a domestic of Mr. Colenso, whose name was Samuel. After some delay, the parties were united, subsequently to their marriage the criminal connexion went on with the knowledge and consent of the husband during 1849 & 1850.

She gave birth to two Children, the last I believe died shortly after the birth; the first Mr. Colenso has taken and considers it his own.

At length the married couple for obvious reasons wished to leave Mr. Colenso's service to reside at the Native residence and to take the Child with them. Mr. Colenso refusing to give up the child some altercation took place & threats of a full

disclosure were held out. The Party left without the Child and the Country was soon filled with disgusting reports, many of which could not be gainsaid.

Mr. Colenso in a letter addressed to the Bishop confessed he had been guilty of immoral conduct and His Lordship in consequence deposed him, I placed the Bishop's letter in Mr. Colenso's hands on the 29 of November & I mentioned to the Natives that His Lordship had written to Archdeacon Hadfield that the Revd. S. Williams might be sent to Heretaunga in Colenso's place. The Natives of Heretaunga those of them with whom I had an interview expressed themselves very favourably under the trying circumstances in which they are placed, that Mr. Colenso having attended to all the duties of the Station up to the date of my arrival there, the reports had been disregarded & disbelieved by the better disposed of the Natives. The evil effects therefore of this sad affair are yet to be experienced. In compliance with the Bishop's request I suggested to Mr. Colenso the propriety of his leaving the district but he has determined otherwise, nor did the observations which I made to him on the subject weaken his determination.

Shortly after I left Heretaunga I wrote a letter to Mr. Colenso in which I stated that I could not see how Mr. S. Williams & he could under existing circumstances carry on on the same premises. To this I have received no answer. In justice to Mr. Colenso I should observe that he appeared willing to do all that he could to counteract the effects of his grievous fall & this object he thinks he can better accomplish by remaining on the spot than by removing elsewhere. Hence he thought that if the new site was fixed upon for a permanent Station he might remain in the old one & the present house be allowed him in consideration of the expenses he has laid out on the premises.

Or in the event of the present site being continued, if

I mistake not Mr. Colenso wishes that the Study which is detached from the house may be allowed him as a residence. These questions and the position Mr. Colenso is to occupy in regard to the Society, as well as the education of Mr. Colenso's children, who are at the North, are referred to the Central Committee. I need scarcely remark that these decisions should be communicated as early as possible. Praying that you may be endued with the wisdom that cometh from above, I am my dear Sir

Your obt. Servant

J Hamlin

To the Secretary of  
Central Committee.

### Colenso responds

Colenso had written at the first opportunity to the CMS secretaries in London—a hasty indignant letter on 4 December followed a little over a week later by a long epistle:

The Secretaries,  
Church Mission House,  
Salisbury Square,  
London

Church Mission Station,  
Waitangi, Hawke's Bay,  
Dec 13. 1852.

My dear Sirs,

1. I wrote to you a hurried letter on the 4th instant, which if it reaches you before this, will in a measure prepare you for my present melancholy communication.
2. This Letter will be almost wholly written with especial refer-



ence to a Letter of mine to the Bishop of New Zealand, dated September 7, 1852, and the Bishop's Sentence, dated Novr. 9, 1852, and his accompanying Letter to me, dated Novr. 11, 1852.

3. Before however this can possibly reach you, I shall have entered on the 20th. year of my Service and Correspondence with the C.M. Society and never until now have I experienced difficulty in communicating with you. Much of the recent past appears to me to be more of an ugly dream than a reality; and even now, there are times when I can scarcely bring myself to believe in its truth. I have necessarily a great deal to say; which, had the Bishop thought proper to take another (and, as I still believe, a more suitable and Scriptural and truly Christian) course, had better never been made known, at least to the world. I did believe, at the time of writing to the Bishop, that he would (at all events) hear what I still had to say, (as alluded to in par. 19 of my letter to him,) when I should willingly have told him, in the privacy of Confession, all that I must now write, and more besides. Notwithstanding, my dear Sirs, I firmly hope, that you will give every Christian consideration to what I am now about to record; and, that you will also find, that the contents of my present Letter is not intended as an extenuation of evil; but on the contrary, to shew, how that evil came to be committed:—it may also serve as a warning to others, who, like myself, may be zealously-active & full of the best of intentions, and yet to whom Satan may also come in the guise of an Angel of Light.—I have indeed sinned: I have trespassed greatly: I want—I wanted—no one to tell me this. GOD, the Holy Ghost, in mercy, soon shewed my great error; and often indeed, have I bitterly confessed it before my gracious and loving Father, through whose unchangeable love & mercy I am still alive, still upheld, and still hoping, that, through His “exceeding abundant grace”, great good shall yet come out of this, to me, sore evil.

4. I had thought when in the year 1832–3, I was first brought to the saving knowledge of GOD in Christ, that I had then sounded the gloomy and comfortless depths of repentance; but I have since found that there were still depths unfathomed. But, that GOD who was with his erring servants, David and Jonah, when in the very “belly of hell”, and even then loved them, has also been with me under similar circumstances:—and, although the Candle of the LORD shines not upon me now as it once did, still His promise is equally sure, and I am stayed upon His faithful word which cannot fail. I looked (foolishly, perhaps) to my “loving” ecclesiastical “father and friend,” for counsel and Christian rebuke seasoned with love, but on my going to him with “Father, I have sinned, &c.” I met with worse than a stern repulse from his door—Was it from my father himself, the spontaneous and genuine feelings of his own heart towards his lost but returned son? or was it through the statements of his elder children, that he so severely acted towards me?—I now turn to you, to whom I should have turned before; only I considered, that my Journal (though rudely written) and Reports, and much collateral evidence, all testifying to my being still actively and profitably engaged as far as the Natives were concerned, were ever my best testimonies with you, especially if (when you should hear of the failings and sins of your servant,) such could also have been stopped by a word in my favor from my “loving father & friend”, who had so lately been here among us. In this however I have been sadly disappointed.—“Brethren,” says the Apostle, “if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

5. I recollect well the year 1833, when I was in London, in the office of the Society's Printer, Mr Watts. He had been previously speaking to me about going to N. Zealand, when one day he sud-

denly and publicly exclaimed (after his manner,)— “But, Colenso, the men and women go about naked in New Zealand; however will you, a youth, manage when you get among them?” “GOD can keep me, Sir,” was my reply. “Very true, very true,” he immediately rejoined, “I will tell Mr. Pratt and Mr. Coates that.”— Yes and GOD did keep me throughout ten years of active service as a bachelor in your employ.—

6. In the following year (1834) I landed in N. Zealand; both young and a stranger. I was stationed at Paihia, where the two resident Missionaries had very large families (upwards of 20 Children between them!) and (as you well know) the majority of the Missionaries, at the other stations had large families also. I soon saw, that a family in a heathen land was unavoidably a heavy charge both to the parents and to the Society, and a most serious obstacle to active Missionary work. I concluded, therefore, both to live alone and to remain unmarried, although in so doing I should greatly increase both my labor and the difficulties of my situation. In those days, when the Gospel had scarcely made any advance in this Country, I once happened to advocate a young Missionary’s marrying the converted daughter of a powerful & influential Chief (an opinion which I have subsequently heard as having been espoused by Mr. Coates and by some writers on New Zealand,) for which unorthodox innovation I had to endure the laugh (not to say the hostility) of several of the Mission. I thus lived a single life for several years, without a stain upon my moral character—although in the full vigour of youth & health, and surrounded by temptation, and where powerful solicitations to evil from without were not wanting. In the year 1840, I wrote a Letter to the Society requesting to be allowed permission to visit England in about 2 years from that time (before which period I should also have finished printing the whole Prayer Book, the New Testament having been printed some time

before); a principal object I had then in view was that of looking for a suitable partner. To that application, I received (in the following year,) the following answer, — “That as his return to this Country would in the present circumstances of the Mission, and especially with reference to his sphere of labour, be attended with serious inconvenience and disadvantage, they (the Comee. of Corresp.) recommended a reconsideration of his application to return home.” This of course (acting from that one principle with which I left England and from which I have never departed—of living only for the Cause,) decided me. I should, however, also tell you, that about the time of my receiving the above-mentioned answer from the Society, three of the Missionaries daughters were considered marriageable; to one of whom (or, rather, to her father,) I applied on the subject of marriage, and was by him refused. Still continuing to make my situation a matter of prayer, and believing from the strong wishes of the C.M.S., that I should finally be settled with the Press as its Superintendent, and consequently remain in the Bay of Islands, and, also, be admitted to (perhaps) Deacon’s Orders, I greatly wished to remove the loneliness of my home, and have done with daily domestic cares, which, up to that period (nearly 8 years) had not been even once attended to by any female hand. Consequently I, in April 1842, wrote a letter to the Rev. Maunsell, respecting a second of the three marriageable females above referred to— (a young woman whom I had not seen for several years,) and his answer again determined me. I soon after addressed both Mr. Fairburn and (through him) his daughter, in a similar manner and almost immediately received the consent of both.—At the close of the year I visited Mr. Fairburn’s house, and as I then expected to be soon called by the Bishop to enter upon a course of study at the Waimate preparatory to Orders, my marriage with his daughter was spoken as likely to take place after my Ordination. In a letter

however which I received from the Bishop in March 1843, he wished me to go to Waimate married, to which I assented; stating however, it was my wish to have gone thither unmarried. Accordingly, I again visited Mr. Fairburn's, in the following month, when we were married (unfortunately, shall I say?) at his house, on the 27th of April.—

7. Up to this time I had never been by any one of our Mission told the cause why Mr. Fairburn had been disconnected from our Society. I had always been opposed to the large purchasing of Land by the Missionaries, and had often spoken against it; hence it was that I ever stood in any thing but a favourable light with them, and consequently, gained but little information concerning passing events in the Mission, which were common enough in themselves. I had hitherto believed that the cause of Mr. Fairburn's disconnection was his large purchases of Land: but it was only after I had procured the Marriage License and upon the very eve of our marriage, that I knew for certain what I have often wished I had either known earlier, or never, never known.—I could not help remarking it as a curious circumstance, that the Minister only used an abbreviated portion of the Marriage Service;—in particular, merely asked, “Wilt thou have this woman to be thy wife?” (stopping there). I do not mention this as either impugning the legality of our marriage, or of our mutual Contract, far from it;—such however was the case.—

8. On the 1st day of February 1844 (while I was absent in these parts) our first child was born. In September, in that year I was admitted to Deacon's Orders. In December, I (having completed all arrangements and at last got a vessel to take us to Hawke's Bay) left the Bay of Islands in her, and on the 16th joined Mrs. Colenso at her father's house, whither she had gone before with our child. In May & June 1845, I was brought very low indeed with a violent fever, and no medical (nor, in fact, any human) aid

at hand; and long before I was strong enough to walk I was obliged to escort Mrs. Colenso (both of us on foot) to Poverty Bay, Archdn. W. Williams', that she might have some needful assistance at the time of her Confinement, which took place on the 23rd of September, when our second child was born. Leaving Mrs. Colenso at Turanga I returned after only a day or two of resting there, to the Station at Waitangi, and there on throughout the whole District (then travelled over by me twice a year); from which I had only returned to the Station on the 4th of December, having hastened back to prepare for the Bishop's expected visit.—On my arrival I found two letters awaiting me: one, from Mrs. W. Williams upbraiding me severely for not remaining with Mrs. Colenso, at either her former or present confinement, (when, on both occasions, I was unavoidably absent on prescribed duty,)—and one from Mrs. Colenso informing me, that Mrs. Williams had made her promise not to return until she was fetched by myself in person; and, that she, Mrs. Colenso, hoped that there would never such another occasion happen, as, if so, she, for her part, had made up her mind that the fault should not be hers. (This was with reference to having more children, a subject upon which we had conversed, and both of us plainly saw, that situated as we were, here in this wild district, a young and increasing family would be a very serious drawback to our usefulness.) At this time the Bishop was on his way hither from Wellington, so I wrote to Mrs Colenso, stating that fetch her in person I could not, at least, not till after my Summer travelling was over, and that as to the other particular, I fully agreed with her, and only hoped we could both keep to our declared convictions.—In January, 1846, I accompanied the Bishop on his way to Te Wairoa, and met Mrs. Colenso at Waikare, who had been brought thus far by Mr. Hamlin. On our return to our Station we occupied separate rooms, and continued to do so to the present. At first, things went on pretty

well, (but never very well, for our domestic troubles had commenced early when we were at Te Waimate) but before a year had elapsed there was a great increase of dissension, jarring and discontent at Te Waitangi Station. I will not, my dear Sirs, attempt to give you even an outline of our domestic miseries; let it suffice to say, that I, who had long been a constant sufferer from Chronic Rheumatism,—a disorder, which, as every medical man knows, as well as the poor patient, tries a person's temper greatly,—and who, notwithstanding, had very much and heavy travelling,—and the continual and harassing conduct of these (then) wild natives to endure, receiving plenty of disagreeable language and behaviour from Mrs. Colenso, and of prompt kindness unembittered by a single word from our Native Girl Rebecca, (whom we had brought away with us from the Waimate,) got insensibly not only to esteem but to love the latter, which affection was mutual, until in an evil moment, and without any prearrangement, we had (as I stated in my Letter to the Bishop,) carnal knowledge of each other.—We had all left the Waimate together in 1844, and not until long after the birth of the child in 1851, had I ever received a single unkind word or look from our girl Rebecca. Although but very young when she first came with us, it mattered not, whatever I might require, by day or by night, in rain or in shine, Rebecca was always ready to do her best for me; and from the circumstances of our being for several years with only much smaller girls in our house, she was necessarily often called upon. Is it then to be wondered at, that, under all circumstances, I became attached to her? or, that in an unguarded moment I fell? Others more highly favored than I have been have sinned even as I—even when they had the great advantage of loving wives, and friends, and company, to act as bars against such evils. The Scripture saith, “Woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up”:—this I have

proved by experience. However, I have sinned; I have transgressed. Yet, as with Augustine, I will say, —“He who, called by Thee, hath avoided the evils which he hears me confessing, should not deride me a poor patient healed by the physician, since he himself is indebted to the same Benefactor for his health, or, to speak more properly, for his being afflicted with a less degree of sickness. —Who is there, LORD, that is perfectly temperate? Whoever he be let him magnify Thy Name. But I am not he, I am a sinful man. However, I magnify Thy Name, and He who overcame the world, and numbers me among the weak members of His body, intercedes for my sins.”——

9. And here I should in all fairness state, that, while I have thus plainly written concerning Mrs. Colenso, she has several good qualifications, which rightly used would be of great value in a Country like this.—But, unfortunately for us, we married without knowing much of each other; without that species of love which is as essential as piety to true happiness between man and wife; and I, in requesting to have my lot among the wildest and least known Tribes, little thought but that such would be quite agreeable to Mrs. Colenso,—even more so than if she had been born in England.—Let my sad fall and unhappy state and prospects be a loud and useful warning to all the young men in your Institution at Islington, and to all others who may offer themselves for the Holy Office of a Missionary—to be very sure that they have real partners altogether helpmeets in those whom they may seek to make their wives; let them have mutual love for each other, and love for the Mission work too, as well as piety.—Let them, when seeking a wife, read and study Cecil's admirable chapter “on the Marriage of Christian Ministers.” —But, after all, they are not likely to sin as I have; for it makes a wonderful difference—the choosing of a wife in England and leaving home and coming out together, and the taking one (out of two) here in the

Colony, whose family and friends and whole circle of acquaintance are in this Land but not among the Natives.—

10. Very shortly after the birth of the child (which happened in May, 1851,) Mrs. Colenso's suspicions were aroused; and, on her repeated enquiry, she soon got the whole of the unwelcome truth from the mother. This she quickly communicated to the whole household, consisting, at that time, of six girls besides Rebecca. It was not however publicly known until February last, as mentioned by me in my letter to the Bishop. One of the greatest of mercies has been the continual deliverance of both the helpless infant and the mother (who, for a very long time, subsequent to the birth of her child, was subject to epileptic fits,) from all physical evil. Which should, I think, be attributed either to the ministry of Angels, or to GOD'S graciously hearing Intercessory Prayer, or both.

11. And here I should perhaps inform you, that during the whole of this long period I never omitted my private devotional duties; I regularly read the Holy Scriptures on my knees night and morning, and prayed (privately) thrice a day as before. Many indeed have been the bitter seasons and sleepless nights which I have had! Many a strong temptation to give up both reading the word of GOD and prayer! The 51st and other penitential Psalms have been frequently used by me as prayers with an intenseness of feeling which few can know.—While the vii of Romans (a chapter which I had often studied) I have been made experimentally to understand. From books I have found little solace (always excepting the blessed Word of GOD),—save from Luther on the Galatians, Adam's private thoughts, Bunyan's Grace abounding, Augustine's Confessions, Bp. Hall's Contemplations, Goode on the better Covenant, Hodge on the Romans, with some portions from Mr Henry's Commentary, and Mr Jowett's little works. My Public duties you will know something of from my Journal, and I

have, and do bless GOD, that HE ever kept me hard and steady at work. In the worst of my sinning and repenting I was regular in them, attending to the preparation of my Sermons for the LORD'S day, &c., &c., as before,—and I am sure (paradoxical though it may seem,) that my unworthy instrumentality in His work was being blessed by Him, down to the very (evil) day of my suspension.—

12. It was during the last winter that I came to the conclusion to inform the Bishop of my situation. I should have made it known at an earlier period, had Archdn. Williams been here among us. Could I, however, have foreseen that the Bishop would have acted in such a precipitate manner, I should have hesitated in acquainting him of the matter. I did suppose, that it was quite possible that the Bishop might ultimately suspend me; but even then I believed, that he would first hear all I had to say, and be quite provided with a substitute to fill my place. In confiding in him as I did, I acted (as I believed) in accordance with the concluding paragraph in the first exhortation or Warning before the Holy Communion, as well as with the latter part of the cxiii Canon, which states,—“Provided always, that if any man confess his secret and hidden sins to the Minister, for the unburdening of his conscience, and to receive spiritual consolation and ease of mind from him, we do not any way bind the said Minister by this our Constitution, but do straitly charge and admonish him, that he do not at any time reveal and make known to any person whatsoever any crime or offence so committed to his trust or secrecy (except they be such crimes as by the laws of this realm his own life may be called into question for concealing the same) under pain of irregularity.—It never once occurred to me, that the Bishop would (or, could) make my private and confidential Letter, (I was about to write, Confession,) immediately upon the receipt of the same, the ground of public proceedings against me. I thought,

(foolishly perhaps,) that something was due to my former long tried character in perilous times—to my having ever decidedly opposed all immoralities and sins of that very nature as that one through which I had fallen—to my long and active Service—and to, the voice of the Church here, my flock.—I was prepared for his coming hither, and, perhaps, investigating the matter on the spot, hearing what the Christian Natives of the district might have to say, and I was also prepared to do all that I could towards reparation. I would willingly have confessed my error publicly before the Church, and submitted to a public rebuke from my Superior, which, I believe, would equally have answered the ends of justice, and have been far more suitable to the welfare of this flock, and the exigencies of the Mission, than the present course (however strictly legal) which the Bishop has adopted.—Bp. Hall truly remarks,—“As GOD makes a difference betwixt chastisements of His own & punishments of strange children, so must wise governors learn to distinguish of sins and judgements according to circumstances.”

13. But, (and I must be allowed in my exigency to state this,) I never have been at any time a favorite of the Bishop. In 1844, on leaving Te Waimate, (directly after our Ordination,) I told the Bishop, “that my conscience told me, I had no favour to thank him for.” This I again reminded him of, when here, in 1846; and again, on this last visit, a year ago. My conflicts with him, when at Te Waimate, concerning a Sentence of mine (an unfortunate one, it should seem,) which occurs in a Letter I wrote, in May 1841, to the Bishop of Sydney, (and which, although he never even acknowledged the receipt of it, he had shewn to the Bishop of New Zealand when on his way hither,) which sentence was as follows:—To your Lordship, under GOD, do I now look for that which may enable me to serve the LORD lawfully & faithfully, in that situation to which I believe HE has called me,—in which

HE has permitted me, unworthy as I am, to labour nearly 7 years, and in which HE has blessed me and made me, I trust, in some measure a blessing to others. I seek not, my Lord, a new employ. No: but only a lawful continuance of that which has ever been not only my occupation but my delight.”—And, also upon Baptismal Regeneration, and my utter and decided opposition to both Popery and Tractarianism and the new Scheme of dis severing the Church here from the mother Church of England,—have, long ago, made me a marked man. The Bishop, on his last visit, (when he came here late on the Saturday evening and left early on the Tuesday morning, not dining on any day of his stay, and having only an hour or two—i.e. from xi. p.m. on the Monday to iii. a.m. on the Tuesday in which we could privately converse together, & he accused me, first of having written to the C.M.S. against him! And, second, of unduly aspiring after the Priesthood! I felt very indignant upon both charges; and we had a long and furious conversation concerning them. The former I indignantly denied; and, on my pressing him for the proof, he assigned a letter which he had received from Mr. Venn, (some 5 or 6 years back,) in which reference was made to something I had communicated to Mr. Venn relative to the Ordination in 1844, and at that time!! I acknowledged to my having written to Mr. Venn a concise statement of facts relative to myself, but again denied my having done so against him.—To the latter charge I replied, by falling on my knees before him, and telling him, with tears, that this was now the second time he had charged me with unduly seeking the Priesthood, (the former occasion was at Wellington some years ago,) but so far from it, that I had all but quite made a vow never to take Priests’ Orders: which unexpected declaration of mine seemed to move him.—We, subsequently, travelled from this place to Waikari together; on the way, and at that place, he told me; first that he was much gratified with the



state of my Natives; and second, that if I wished to leave the Diocese he would give me suitable letters dimissory (I forget the proper Latin term he gave them,) to the Bishop of any other Diocese I should wish to go to. I afterwards thought much upon this latter statement, as to what was meant by it, but I did not, and do not, even now, understand it.—But why should I now mention these things? I have sinned; I have justly given the Bishop cause to act against me according to the strictness of Ecclesiastical Law; he has so acted and I must bear it.

14. In writing to you, my dear Sirs, this long and melancholy letter, I have but little hope that, even supposing you to be so inclined, you would succeed in getting the Bishop to reverse his sentence. Still I have a hope, however slender, resting mainly upon your long and much more perfect knowledge of me, and, also, upon a sentence which occurs in the accompanying Letter of the Bishop, where he speaks of a possibility of the Church's reversal of its sentence and restoration, as "depending in great measure upon the Society in England, who in a former case of a far more venial kind, have hardly been persuaded to allow their first sentence of absolute separation to be reversed." I do not know the case here referred to by the Bishop, unless it be that of Mr. Spencer, but, while I willingly allow that his case was a "far more venial" one (if there really is any such distinction in sin before GOD); still, it occurred immediately upon his entering on his work, and, without his having a long and laborious service in the mission field, and a known & recorded decided abhorrence to those very sins, to plead somewhat in his favour.

15. Should you, however, be inclined to deem it both prudent and necessary wholly to agree with the Sentence of the Bishop, I pray you, my dear Sirs, do not cut me off entirely from among the number of your Servants. If I cannot be allowed any longer to serve you in that situation in which I have hitherto delighted to

serve you, and in which I believe many a poor soul has been blessed, allow me to do so in some lower, in some more quiet more private one, where I may yet have opportunities of serving the Cause to which I long ago devoted myself.—For I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my GOD, then dwell in the tents of wickedness. I have (allow me to say,) served you zealously to the utmost of my capacity throughout a long period—and this, I think, you will again readily grant.—Do not, then, turn me quite away, for I have few or no earthly friends, especially in N. Zealand. Neither have I any means of subsistence, even supposing I had the inclination to go into the world, with the unjust steward I may truly say—"dig, I cannot; to beg, I am ashamed." If you cannot conscientiously allow me to remain in full connexion with you, as heretofore, allow me at least to remain in this "temporary house," (seeing that I have obtained for you a new and better site, and that I have expended upon this as you have long ago known, so much money and labor,) with a small allowance from you just to keep me from want. Let the place of my sin be the place of my exile. Of course I could not make this request, if it were ever intended to continue this spot as a Mission Station.—And even in case of my removing, it would be some time before I could get up a house into which I could go with all my goods—including Printing and Binding materiel, Carpenter's, and Turner's tools, &c., &c. And there is not a single hut large enough any where in this neighbourhood. Our two dear Children are (happily) gone to Auckland, (whither their mother is about to follow them in a few weeks,) and I dare believe that you would not refuse to pay for their Education, (which you would, I believe, allow if I were naturally dead,) and, also, to continue the small sum of £10. pr. ann. to my dear and aged and sorrowing parents; which with a small allowance (say £20 pr. ann.) to, myself, I would endeavor to be content with, and serve you and

the Cause in which (notwithstanding my grievous sin) my heart alone is, until my hour of release. I can still serve you in many ways, inferior only to the one grand work of preaching the Gospel. My little Press, rightly used, may yet be a great engine for good amongst this people.—In the Bible Classes & Native Teachers' Schools, where I have always been at home, I may still be of Service. My little practical knowledge of medicine, and of the suitable treatment required by Native race when ailing, and my great influence with the Native Chiefs, who are still without the pale of the Church, may all be advantageously used in your behalf, and I know, that by my remaining among them, even in a lower capacity, I shall effectively keep them from joining the Papists:—For many of my poor flock love me greatly, and loudly lament the severity of the Bishop. It must, however, be plainly understood, that while willing to help (if required) the resident Missionary, I should not like to be under his control or supervision.—

16. In the beginning of this letter I have ventured to express my hope, that GOD, who is wonderful in working, will yet bring good out of this evil. And this, I think, I may truly say HE has already done—at least as far as I am concerned—blessed be His holy Name for it! The LORD, who seeth not as man seeth, often works by contraries. It is His alone prerogative to bring good out of evil—to make even the wrath of man to praise Him—to circumvent even Satan himself the great master of all artifice—and to divide his spoils.—And all this in order to hide pride from man, to teach man to know himself to be, even when at his very best estate but vanity:—a poor proud Sinner! Saved indeed, in and by the LORD, but still impotent to good. Needing every moment the strong, and not left losing hold of his Creator's Redeeming to preserve him from falling in to hell.—Upon this subject I feel as if I could write a volume of my own experience. If I

have been taught in some defile to know and abhor myself—to know and value my Saviour—to cease from man and to glory alone in the LORD—shall I not be thankful for such teaching; however dear to flesh and blood the purchase may have been? Naturally of a warm sanguine temperament—too close a follower of St Peter in his forward and erring zeal—too readily lifted up with the gracious successes which the LORD had given me in everything I put my hands to—what needed I more than to be made humble and kept so; that I might know myself. And what way was there better calculated to that end than the way the LORD has chosen? Not that I make Him the author of Sin; no: I abhor the thought. The evil is my own; the good is alone of GOD. St Paul tells us, that it was by GOD considered needful that he should have “a thorn in his flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him.”—Doubtless some severe humiliating trial, or failing, tending to humble spiritual pride even in an Apostle—and such an Apostle too, whose home was heaven, whose all was Christ, who longed to depart & be with Him! How much more then was such a grievous visitation needful for myself, who am still but a poor half-awakened earthly-minded sinner!! Oh yes! there was much to which Satan could lead me, there to dwell and contemplate, (as Nebuchadnezzar viewed his Babylon,) until Christ and my need of Him, and my own nothingness and sinfulness, should be obscured in the vainglorious shew. Satan well knew my weak side. He knew how to order his devices. Was it a small matter for me, alone, to have printed the N. Testament and the P. Book (perhaps, the first and only complete edition of the New Covenant and the Prayer Book of the Church of England yet printed in the Southern Hemisphere,)—and so to have supplied every corner of this Land with the Word of GOD and the form of sound words?—for me to have been the first (perhaps the only one) to travel throughout the whole length of this Island



(from Cape Palliser to Cape Maria Van Diemen,) and to preach Christ in every village?—to have been continually opposed by whole armies of aliens—Papist, Infidel, Heathen, Herodians, Legalists,—not a few, too, of whom, have been backed with power, native & foreign—and yet to overcome them all?—to see all my little works undertaken for my Saviour’s Cause both owned and prospering?—my tracts against the Papists, and all Will-worship, my little Catechisms and Hymns, &c., &c., all of Service and blessed?—to have even the great and fierce Heathen Chiefs of the Southern parts of this Island afraid of my influence & power?—and quietly obeying me, in so much that this District is said, by the Government Officers, to be in the best order of any? and, further still, to have letter on letter, and long ones too, from some of the first Scientific men in England and on the Continent, including some of the Peers of Great Britain, full of praise on matters of natural Science, & asking for my help? But, I’ll say no more as all these things have a wonderful tendency to exalt the fleshly mind, and to give low and even contemptible views of Christ and of His work, especially among ignorant Heathens. But, blessed be GOD! in the midst of all, I have never become weary in well-doing—I have not relaxed my onerous labours—I have not taken that ease which the flesh too often agreed with Satan in saying, I was entitled to. It is true that I have sinned; I have drunk that bitter cup, but GOD, who is wondrous in working, has made my own sin to be my corrector—my poison to be my medicament. The viper has been made a plaster: it has been the great means of weaning me entirely from the love of praise and worldly honors;—of keeping me at my work; of making me lowly in my own eyes, and especially before my GOD; and of causing me the better to bear and sympathize with the infirmities of my own people (2 Cor. I. 3,4,6.). And, further: who can tell the great use which may yet be made of my fall amongst this

people; who, though hitherto simple in their faith, (notwithstanding their former superstitious heathen notions which still cling to them respecting the sanctity of their priests,) are, especially just now, in danger of being led away from the truth of the Gospel, through the bold assertions of the Popish Priests on the one hand, and the sly schemes of the Tractarians on the other, concerning the peculiar Sanctity and distinctness of the Clergy; who, in so doing, usurp the powers of our one and only Priest and Mediator, Jesus Christ.—

17. If there is any one thing more than another which gives me uneasiness just now it is, the anxiety I have lest my unfortunate error should be a means of injuring you in any way—whether at home, in your funds—or, abroad in your infant Churches.—Here, in this district, I humbly hope the injury will be neither great nor lasting. Up to the present hour the Popish Priest have not been able to gain over a single Native; in which, I know, he is wonderfully disappointed. Another cause of sorrow to me is Major Straith’s kind Christian Letter of January 31. For, abounding as it does in love & Consolation and encouragement and esteem from you all, I feel that I little deserve it; and, I fear, that when this sad information shall reach you, the unwelcome blow will be so much more severe as it was unexpected. I am sure that I shall feel both anxious and unhappy until I hear how you are able to bear up under this most sad sad affair.

18. It would be a very easy matter for me to get all the Native Teachers of the District and the Christian Natives generally to petition you in my behalf, but such a proceeding I dislike and utterly disown. Although cut clean off from all Ministerial duty, I shall still afford them all the help that lies in my power as a private Christian—until, at least, I hear from you, which I hope will be at no very distant period. In the meanwhile I intend (D.V.) to be occupied in writing up my Journal, and with my little Printing-

press and Book-binding, and so finish my little Books long ago begun,—one of which (the Happy deaths of Converts of various nations,) has reached the 96 page.

19. I did not intend (neither would it perhaps be proper for me just now,) to remark upon either the Bishop's Sentence or his accompanying Letter. Still I ought not to close this without stating that there are certain things therein which I cannot agree in, and others that are widely at variance with my own belief & teaching.—For instance:—in the preamble to his sentence, and again in the body of that document, he has stated that I “have confessed myself to be guilty of the sin of adultery”:—which, however, I assuredly have not. Such may be a proper term for it according to Canonists, notwithstanding I myself cannot conscientiously consent to allow as much. But, after all, it matters little, whether it is called a criminal connexion, or concubinage, or adultery. Sin is ever sin under whatever guise it may be concealed. All are alike crimes; although the moral consequences attendant upon the confession of each vary greatly in different lands and at different times.—Again the whole tenor of his accompanying Letter (as it seems to me) is more in accordance with the doctrine of Novatian and that of the modern Puseyites, than with that of our Church. Repentance and Forgiveness are a long way off in the misty region of Doubt, scarcely perceptible to mortal ken; while the Church—whose duty it is to preach the Gospel to all poor Sinners—in which we have Forgiveness of Sins secured to us upon our repentance,—is spoken of as not daring to pardon! S. John, however speaks differently— “If we confess our sins, He is faithful & just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”. Yes: the act of forgiveness is completed before we approach the throne of grace. Our blessed Saviour would not have taught us whenever we pray to ask for forgiveness if such was not as readily obtained. Neither would our Church have taught us concerning GOD, as being “always more ready to hear than we to pray, and wont to give

more than either we desired or deserved,” if such a case could have been supposed as that of a poor sinner asking in vain for mercy. For, as Bp. Pearson (writing on this article of our Creed,) says— “So long as guilt remaineth on the soul of man, so long is he in the condition of the devils.—We are always subject to offend, and so long as we can offend, so long we may apply ourselves unto GOD by repentance and be renewed by his Grace & pardoned by His mercy.—There is no voice like that— ‘Thy sins are forgiven thee’. This is GOD’S goodness, this is man’s happiness.” GOD’S gracious Covenant with us is mercy to unrighteousness.—And that not only once, but continually:—not only before we are brought to acknowledge by ourselves and of GOD in Christ, but after, when we daily need His mercy as much as ever. Yea, then it is, that HE much more remembers the word of His grace; much more bears with the sinful infirmities of his Children, now that Sin is the grief and plague of the renewed mind.—“There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus”— “Their sins & iniquities will I remember no more.”— “Now where remission of these is there is no more offering for Sin”. There needs no more for GOD is already satisfied. The justification of the believer is not an imperfect work—justified to day and condemned again by GOD tomorrow. An immediate pardon awaits every Believer who has fallen into sin, even the grossest kind, upon his penitential acknowledgment thereof. Suffer he may, as much as it shall please his Heavenly Father, but condemned he is not, die eternally he shall not, for Christ hath died for him. Oh! how differently another Bishop (Leighton, writing upon the xxxii Ps.,) speaks.— “The gracious readiness of the Father of Mercies to grant pardon is so much the more evident, as on the first word of confession that he uttered, or rather the first purpose that he formed in his mind, immediately the pardon, the full and free pardon, came down signed as in the Court of Heavens. I said, I will confess, & thou foregavest. O admirable clemency! It requires nothing but that the offender

should plead guilty, and this not that it may more freely punish, but more liberally forgive.— He freely offers peace and favours to those who have deserted him, when they return to his obedience; he runs forth to meet them, and to receive them with a most affectionate embrace; and having to importunately entreated our return, will not despise those who are treading back with prayers and leave the fatal path which their folly had chosen.”—

20. Before I close I should, perhaps, tell you, to prevent misconception, that the young woman Rebecca, (who, I informed the Bishop, in my letter to him, had returned again to us to dwell,) has again, of her own free will, gone back, with the young man to whom she has been some time married, to the Native villages inland, there to reside.—

21. I enclose a copy of my Annual Report, and other yearly Papers, which I have (as usual) just made out and transmitted to the local district Commee.—These papers I have always, every year, made out after this manner, and have forwarded to the E.D. Commee.

And now, my dear Sirs, I must conclude. Do not, I pray, judge severely my present Letter, written, as it has been, under much affliction. Remember me—your Servant in bonds—in your prayers; and, may the Great Head of the Church and Bishop of souls guide you in considering my unfortunate case.

And believe me,

my dear Sirs,

faithfully, though unworthily Yours  
William Colenso.

### The aftermath

The minutes of a meeting of the Central Committee in Auckland on 2 March 1853 record that Hamlin’s letter was read. The Committee

“Resolved: that the connexion of Mr Colenso with the Church Missionary Society ceased on 29 November last when the Revd James Hamlin placed The Bishop’s letter of suspension in his hands.

“That if Mr Colenso should still be in The Ahuriri Station he be requested to leave the same without delay.”

In a letter dated 18 June 1853 to Robert Vidal, Secretary of its NZ Central Committee, the Secretaries of the CMS in London, Henry Venn and Hector Straith, wrote,

“The Committee have allowed £200 to remain opposite the name of Mr. Colenso, as an expenditure to this amount may be required to carry out the decision of the Committee that Mr Colenso’s Passage may be paid to England or any other region by his quitting New Zealand immediately.”

On the copy of the 2 March Central Committee minutes received by the CMS in London is an annotation, “no power in Central Commee to dissolve connexion” and on 7 October 1853 the secretaries wrote again,

“Case of the Rev. W. Colenso—.... no local Committee is competent to dissolve the connexion of the Society with a Missionary engaged & sent out by the Parent Commee. The original engagement having been made at home, the Parent Commee. alone can dissolve it. All that a local Commee. can do is to take the Mission out of his hands & to suspend his local connexion with the Society.”

On 22 March 1854 the London secretaries wrote again to Vidal,

“We grieve to hear of the sad continuance of Mr. Colenso’s domestic circumstances: and of the final separation of his wife from him—we trust that he has left Ahuriri long since—and that the scandal has thus been removed on the eyes of the na-

tives: this case and that of Mr. Barker—is an occasion of much humbling before the Lord; although the amount of delinquency differed in the two cases, yet they both have given the Enemy a handle against the Gospel, and show us how much need there is of prayer continually on the part of all that share in this great cause, that the Lord may keep us all from falling and put forth His sanctifying power that each member of our body throughout the world may be a steady holy witness for Christ in whatever position He may see fit to place us—We agree with you in feeling that it would be injudicious (*sic*) and improper to receive either of these persons into connection with the Society again: indeed, as true penitents before God they will feel this themselves—and seek to remove a stumbling block from before the native Christians: May He give them grace to mourn in some distant sphere—and revive to serve Him with retiring gratitude and holy zeal.”

### The return Home?

Colenso pondered his future. In January 1853 his house burned.

On 28 March 1853 when they were arguing about who had the rights to Waitangi, Selwyn angrily urged him to go to England to see the CMS but Colenso told Baker that “I have no intention whatever of leaving this place and neighbourhood”. He wrote to Vidal on 28 November 1853, “The C.M. Society having been pleased (most unexpectedly to me) to dissolve their connexion with me, I, consequently cannot consent to return to England. Neither do I propose (for the present, at least,) to remove from this district.” He told William Williams on the same day, “I wholly decline their (ie, the Parent Committee’s) proposal of returning to England; as I cannot see such to be my path of duty.” Checkmate.

In 1854 he was acting as an interpreter in Maori land cases. In April

1855 he bought land in Napier and in 1857 in the Meeanee river region; he leased out his 200 acre farm at Tutaekuri and lost the election for coroner to Dr Hitchings.

Colenso may, however, have revisited the notion of returning to England in late 1856, and perhaps wrote to the Central Committee asking for the fare, and to his uncle William in Cornwall asking him to lobby the CMS—for on 19 February 1857 the London secretaries wrote to the new NZ secretary, Rev R Burrows,

“The committee have considered the question relative to Mr. Colenso’s passage referred to in your letter of Sept 30/56. They adhere to the terms of their Resolution of May 31/53 which offered him a passage home on condition of his leaving the country immediately. Not having acceded to the proposal then made to him, the Committee do not think it advisable to renew it; & you acted rightly in not making any grant for this purpose without a fresh reference home.”

—and on 28 April 1857 Colenso’s uncle William lobbied the Church Missionary Society...

*Penzance 28th. April 1857*

*Reverend Sirs*

*I crave permission to address you, at the request of my Nephew in New Zealand. He gave to all his relatives here, the most painful feelings by his former conduct,—but as he has shewn more compunction recently for the sad affair than he had previously done, I readily accede to the request, which he has transmitted me.—He begs me to ask, if you would be so kind as to overlook his former conduct and either give him foreign employ or use your influence in procuring him a curacy in some retired spot—at home where he might be useful—Foreign Missionary employment he would prefer, say any where on one of the many Islands of the Seas which surround New Zealand, from their kindred dialects, or even Patagonia—or Terra del fuego. He says,*

*his old Missionary Heart still burns, & is longing to resume his sacred employment—deeply lamenting his fall, and the sad disgrace he brought upon himself—he trusts by his resolute determination now to guard his conduct in future from all temptation. In answer to a question he tells me he never obtained of the natives any of their Lands—If you will do me the honor of favoring me with a few lines in answer hereto, I should be greatly obliged, & you would confer an additional obligation if you would state your opinion as to whether, if my nephew returns to England, with the Bishop’s suspension unremoved, would be considered sufficient to render him ineligible for duty in any English Diocese. I beg to subscribe myself*

*Reverend Gentlemen  
most respectfully  
Yr obedt. Servant  
W. Colenso.*

In 1859 Colenso was elected Provincial Councillor; appointed Provincial Auditor and re-elected Councillor; in 1860 appointed acting Provincial Treasurer; in January 1861 he accepted nomination for Parliament and was eventually elected; he met Coupland Harding at a book auction; in July he joined the opposition benches in Auckland; he moved from Waitangi to Napier. Willie returned from relatives in Northland; and in 1861 he was appointed Inspector of Schools.

Life was improving and neighbours were approving: New Zealand, even without the church, was becoming home. But it was not all defiant cheer: there remains an intense feeling of guilt, rejection, isolation.

None so lowly as the tall, felled.



Selwyn ▲



Hamlin ►



Venn ▲

I know not whether the Letters I have sent to you from this place, have ever reached your hands; I have not heard of such having been acknowledged by you in any of your Public Letters to us. I do not go to Committee at Turanga, as my doing so would occupy (at *least*) 5 weeks; and I have so very much travelling, and not a scrap of time to spare. There is one thing which I have often considered to be almost without precedent or fellow, namely, *my not having a single clerical* (I may almost add, Christian) *Correspondent in the whole world!* Excepting a *few* of my brethren in N. Zealand. I sometimes feel alone on these lonely shores. I think this ought not to be.

*William Colenso in a letter to the CMS secretaries dated 14 September 1848, three months after the affair began.*





*YES... YES  
MY LORD,  
BUT I... I...*

**THE BISHOP  
HAS BAD NEWS!**