

Letter from Arthur to Mary Prior, undated¹

CANTERBURY UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

CHRISTCHURCH N.Z.

Thursday night

Darling da,

I am writing this in the Public Library, in an odd few minutes before going along to the Conference's public meeting in some nearby building, perhaps the Town Hall. – Prof. Knight will be among the speakers. – Our time is, as we foresaw, very full; but I may be able to get along to V.U.C. Library tomorrow afternoon, and I'll have a shot at seeing Ron O'Reilly² in the weekend. – I'm inclined to think I made a mistake in bringing all those books up with me – I can't see when either I or anyone else is going to get the time to look at them! – Fellow-Conferencers include Ian Dixon, Mac Wilson³, Jack Bates⁴, Duncan Hercus⁵, Lex Miller⁶, Dean Warren, Canon Parr, Jim Stewart,

¹ Editors' note: This letter has been edited by Martin Prior and David Jakobsen. It is part of the Martin Prior Collection, presently kept at Aalborg University folder B, item 2, undated-thursday. The letter is written on Canterbury University College writing paper. The letters B2, item 1 and 2 were enclosed, together with a drawing, in an envelope postmarked 29th August 1947. The envelope is from Canterbury University College and addressed to Mrs. I McLaren, Ahi Paku Longbush. Longbush is 25 miles southeast of Masterton. Mrs. McLaren is Arthur's sister Elaine married to Iain McLaren, a farmer from a farming family in the Wairarapa. It is sent from Wellington where Prior apparently attended an Ecumenical conference. This letter is most likely written on Thursday 28th August 1947.

² Editors' note: Ron O'Reilly (1914-1982), was Librarian from 1951 to 1968 at Christchurch Public Library. He was a part-time lecturer in logic and psychology before he finished a diploma in librarianship in 1946.

³ Editors' note: Rev Malcolm William (Mac) Wilson (1904 – 1969) was a Presbyterian minister in Christchurch who in the 40s was active in ecumenical affairs. Chalmers, Timaru, South Canterbury Presbytery, from 27 October 1938. Knox, Christchurch, Christchurch Presbytery, from 13 September 1951 until 20 December 1966.

According to Martin Prior, Mac's son Jim was a student of Arthur's and later became a lecturer in theology at University of Canterbury. According to Jim, his father Mac played a part in persuading Mary's father, the Rev. Frank Wilkinson, that Arthur was "O.K".

⁴ Editors' note: Rev. J.M. Bates was an active neo-orthodox theologian in New Zealand Student Christian Movement, who studied theology in 1934-35 under Emil Brunner in Switzerland.

⁵ Editors' note: Rev. Duncan Hercus was a chaplain at Scots College in Wellington.

⁶ Editors' note: Alexander Miller (1908-1960) was a New Zealand minister and General Secretary of the Student Christian Movement from 1935-7, and had in that period a huge influence on Arthur (see *When I Was a Fresher* at <http://nachlass.prior.aau.dk>). In 1937 Miller was ordained in the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand in 1937, upon which he moved to Britain. He joined George MacLeod in the Iona Community from 1942 to 1945, where he moved back to New Zealand. From 1945-1948 he served as minister in Napier, New Zealand. From 1951 until his death in 1960 he headed Religious Studies at Stanford University California.

Miller's nephew, Ross Miller, also became a Presbyterian minister. He married Mary Cameron, granddaughter of Andrew Cameron, and cousin to Arthur's wife Mary.

Harold Miller⁷, Bob Thornley⁸, Robin Lapsley⁹, Nancy Wilson, G.M. Smallfield¹⁰, &c. &c. Selwyn¹¹ couldn't get down – his wife's not too well. – We had a very laboured Plenary Session this afternoon about the doctrine of the Church. My own contributions were 2, of much the same kind – I drew attention to points that needed amending, but my own amendments were defeated, in favour of others which I myself thought better. In one place the suggested statement spoke of the Churches of Corinth, {2} Ephesus, &c. (“particular Churches”, in short) as being “members” of the One Church – a metaphor which seemed to me quite wrong and unscriptural in that context. I suggested “parts”, but didn't like it myself, and was not sorry when it was turned down. Many other suggestions were put forward, and they adopted the best one of them – one from an able Anglo-Catholic named Allerton (I think he's the one Ken Horne talks about), who made it read simply “the Churches of Ephesus, Corinth, &c. were One Church”. – Lex is with me here, writing a note to his wife (it was he who suggested the Library as the place to do it). He has shown me a photograph of his David; who looks very fat. – I hope Martin's happier now. – Oh, about our trip back. At the Union Steamship Offices they didn't think there'd a hope of changing our berths; but it might be worth while calling there about possible cancelations on Friday (the 5th) at 4 p.m. or on Saturday (the 6th) at 8.45 a.m. We won't be here by either time, but maybe I can get someone here to do it.

Must scoot

Love & Love & Love

- Skig¹² X X X O X

X X to Mutt¹³

⁷ Editors' note: Harold Gladstone Miller (1898-1989). Like Arthur, he was born in Masterton. He was a librarian at Victoria University College for 38 years from 1928. For more on Miller, see <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4m52/miller-harold-gladstone>

⁸ Editors' note: Robert Thornley was a Methodist minister and a chaplain at the Victoria University College in the 1940s.

⁹ Editors' note: Rev. William Robin Lapsley (1911-1992). Chaplain to Military Forces within New Zealand 1942 to 1944. Papakura, South Auckland Presbytery, 1947 to 1952.

¹⁰ Editors' note: The Rev. G.M. Smallfield B.A. Served as minister in Pohangina (1951-1956).

¹¹ Editors' note: According to Martin Prior this is most certainly a reference to Selwyn A. Grave (1916-2002). He was a philosopher in Western Australia, holding the Chair from 1961 until his retirement in 1981. His doctorate from the University of St. Andrews was published under the title *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense*, Oxford University Press (1960). He had initially been an Anglican Priest but converted to Roman Catholicism.

¹² Editors' note: One of Arthur's many self-named nicknames.

¹³ Editors' note: One of Martin's nicknames, also Marty and Mutty.