

“In the beginning...”

Gender, Ethnicity and the Methodist Missionary Enterprise

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Introduction

Beginning in 1759, issues of gender and ethnicity are enmeshed in the expansion of Methodist Missions. The genesis of Wesleyan Methodist enterprises in the Western hemisphere could not be told without the pioneer figures of Nathaniel and Francis Gilbert, third generation white Creoles in Antigua of Barbados pedigree, whose story is told elsewhere. Some Caucasian wives of planters or other colonial representatives were Methodist pioneers.

The key to church history in the western hemisphere is: migration + witness = mission. Wherever they found themselves, Methodist lay men and women, including African slaves and free people of colour, were constrained by the love of Christ to share their belief and experience. For example, Coke said that 'Baxter being constrained by the love of God' went to Antigua.¹ Thomas Coke wrote his 'History of the West Indies and Methodist Missions' from a personal point of view but mentions more lay pioneers than later historians whose story is attached to the names of missionaries. Indispensable contributions to the planting of Methodism in Antigua and St Kitts were made, for example, by the mixed-race Clearkley family.

Lay missionary work in Antigua pre-dates Methodist organisation in North America (1763-1766)² by four to seven years, the arrival of Dr Thomas Coke and the appointment of missionaries in the West Indies (1786) by some twenty-seven years and the establishment of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (1818) by fifty-seven years.

The Old Testament prophet Joel [2:28-29] had a vision: 'Even on my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit (NRSV, American edition, 1989) 'and they shall preach my message.'³ On the day of Christian Pentecost, Peter saw this prophecy being fulfilled in Jerusalem [Acts 2:17-18]. African and mixed-race slaves and servants and freed people of colour of both genders exemplify a biblical method of mission.

This paper illustrates that in many cases gender and ethnic categories are inseparable and that early Methodist Missionary work transcended social, economic, political, racial and gender barriers. There was no difference between males and females, slaves and free [Galatians 3:28] as the Methodist Church was transplanted, extended and maintained.

North American mission is not included apart from mentioning Black Harry Hosier. Neither does it look at Ministers and Missionaries ordained and appointed by John Wesley and Thomas Coke nor other male Caucasians in the West Indies. The exception is the Local Preacher John Baxter, ordained Elder by the Methodist Episcopal Church, and his wife who shared in pioneer work to Carib Indians.

¹ Thomas Coke, *A History of the West Indies... With an account of the Missions... more especially of the Missions which have been established by the Societies late in connexion with the Rev John Wesley*, 3 vols. (vol. 1, Liverpool: Nuttall, Fisher and Dixon, 1808; vol. 2, London: A. Paris, 1810; vol. 3, London: A Paris, 1811) 2:428. The motto of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas is: 'The love of Christ constrains us.' [2 Corinthians 5:14]

² The work of Robert Strawbridge in Philadelphia pre-dates that of Heck, Embury and Webb in New York, but the 1763 date lacks documentation.

³ NRSV *New Revised Standard Version*, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1989. The Anglicized NRSV *New Oxford Annotated Edition* reads: 'servants and handmaids.' The GNB gives 'servants, both men and women.'

Note: The syntax and spelling in historical documents is retained without the indication of [sic].

Gender

In biblical writing, 'man', 'mankind' and 'humans' are gender inclusive. Following the Jewish and Islamic practices of segregating men and women in places of worship, many Protestant churches allocated separate seating areas in the Chapels. This is illustrated in Jamaica where 'Mr Bradnack gave the Coloured Women the Gallery in the East end of the Chapel, which the White People had occupied since the building of the Chapel, and the White People he removed to the gallery in the back part of the Chapel, where they were placed between the Coloured Women and the Coloured men.'⁴ Presumably, these were free people, as black slaves generally sat or stood in the body of the chapel.⁵

Ethnicity

In the New Testament, 'Race' represents different ethnic groups. For example, we note that Jewish hostility to Samaritans was proverbial as they were considered to be a hybrid people. Paul wrote that barriers between Jews and Gentiles had been broken, 'in order to create out of the two races one new people in union with himself' (Christ.) [Ephesians 4:15].

Historical records use *White* for those of Caucasian pedigree. *Creoles* are descendants of both European and other races who have been born in the West Indies. *Negro* or *Black* represents those of pure African parentage. *Coloured* includes any who are mixed-race. Strictly speaking, a *Mulatto* was the first generation child of a white father and black mother (Spanish *mulato* meaning 'of mixed breed', literally 'young mule.'). Further distinctions appear in literature such as *Mestee* or *Mustee*, born of a white man and mixed-race woman. Also, *Sambo* was used as a nickname for a child of mixed pedigree. The St Eustatius Gazette had a front page advert offering a reward of 2 Joes for runaway slaves: 'Sambo boys named Julius and Phoenix.'⁶

Coolie (*Quli* in Hindi) was a common description of the East Indian hired labourer (in some cases, Chinese also were described in this way). *Amerindian* is a term for native Americans, for whom *Buck* is found in British Government papers as early as 1831. Chinese and other light-skinned people have been labelled *Yellow*. *West Indians* was a generalised term that has been superseded by national identities in the latter half of the 20th century, except for cricket. The contemporary British use of 'black' to classify all non-Caucasian people provides a confusing misnomer.

Ethnicity and the Wesleyans

John Wesley used the generic term *Negro* and the generalised term *African*. On 24 April 1737, Wesley gave Christian advice to a Negro girl at Pon Pon Chapel of Ease, St Bartholomew's Parish, SC. On his return voyage to England, he began instructing a Negro lad in the principles of Christianity. On November 28 1758 Wesley wrote that Bessie was 'The first African Christian I have known.'⁷ Thomas Coke used various descriptions: 'freed Negroes', 'coloured', 'blacks', 'poor black Harry'.

Nathaniel Gilbert noted the ethnic composition of his followers in correspondence to his brother Francis, to John Wesley and to Anthony Benezet. 'We have a small religious Society here, consisting of

⁴ Jamaica General Assembly, 'Charges against the Methodist Missionaries in Jamaica by the Common Council and Assembly and their reasons for the same', Morant Bay, 10 February 1811, No. 2. Isaac Bradnack to Missionary Committee, Morant Bay, 10 February 1811, Methodist Missionary Society Archives [MMSA], West Indian Correspondence (WIC) Folder 1803-4.

⁵ Thomas Hyde, relating Sunday school public examination at Charlestown, Nevis, 13 June 1820. David Farquhar, *Caribbean Adventures: Extracts from Missionary Journals* (Boston, Ms: Mt. Prospect Press, 1999) 30-32.

⁶ St Eustatius Gazette, vol. III No. 173, Aug. 31 1792, illustrated in J. Hartog, *History of St Eustatius* (Aruba: de Wit Stores N.V., 1976) p. 99.

⁷ Nehemiah Curnock, ed., abridged edn., *John Wesley's Journal* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1903) Journal entries for April 23 and December 26 1737, January 7 and November 29 1738.

about twenty whites, exclusive of my family, and of sixty four Negroes and mulattoes.⁸ Nathaniel wrote of 'a free Negro woman who found peace lately' and 'a Mulatto woman who received the blessing before my brother went away, a person of great grace.'⁹ Speculatively, one might see these women of 1764 as Mary Alley a Mulatto and Sophia Campbell who was black. Anne Hart Gilbert gives their names and places them in 1775, just after Francis Gilbert had returned to England for the final time.¹⁰

On his first visit to Antigua in 1763, Francis Gilbert tended to call slaves Negroes or blacks, whereas by the time of his second visit in 1773 Francis is writing about Whites, Blacks and Mulattoes.

William Warrener addressed the inaugural meeting of the Leeds District Missionary Society on October 6 1813: 'The first Sunday after his arrival at Antigua, (Baxter) went to St John's, a distance of twelve miles from English Harbour; and, in the open air, under the shade of a large tree, he preached to... a mixed multitude of white, black and yellow.'¹¹ The term 'Yellow' was used to describe the Caribs, native inhabitants of the islands. In 1787, Dr George Davidson used the term 'Yellow Caribs' to distinguish them from 'Black Caribs' in St Vincent. The latter were a racially mixed group descended from native Americans and African slaves.¹² Other light-skinned people have also been called 'yellow.'

Public interest in civil and social status

Intense interest was aroused in Britain about civil and social status. 'Missionary Intelligence' was shared with the readership of the *Arminian Magazine* and its successor the *Methodist Magazine*. For example, obituaries were recorded for John Hall a Negro, Margaret Berry who was free born, Margery White a free black and Elizabeth Poynter a black woman.¹³

Social and civil status in membership returns

When African slaves and free black or coloured people joined Methodist Societies for the first time, the British Church was concerned with the social and civil status of church members. Statistical returns revealed the multi-racial composition of church membership. From 1787 and the stationing of Wesleyan Ministers by Dr Coke and the British Conference, the number of black and coloured members demonstrated the missionary nature of the church and made it easier for Coke to raise funds for sending more missionaries.

The first membership returns by Dr Coke used three classifications: White, Black and Coloured. In the years preceding the first Methodist Districts with appointed Chairmen (1802-6) members had two classifications: White or Coloured and Black.

Further analysis is provided by Rev. Henry Fish in his Jamaican returns in 1824:

white	14	free	248	men	180
brown	104	black	272	women	340
blacks	<u>402</u>				
totals	520		<u>520</u>		<u>520</u> ¹⁴

⁸ Information in this letter to John Wesley matches the undated communication of Nathaniel Gilbert to Anthony Benezet, copied to John Wesley just after Nathaniel's death on April 20 1774; Benezet, Philadelphia, 23 May 1774, *Arminian Magazine* [AM] 10 (1787) 45-6, and George S. Brookes *Friend Anthony Benezet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1937) 319.

⁹ Nathaniel Gilbert to John Wesley, Antigua, July 22 1765. AM 6 (1783) 329-30.

¹⁰ Anne Hart Gilbert to William Pattison, 1 June 1804, MMSA, WIC, Fiche 1:37.

¹¹ *Methodist Magazine*, [MM] vol. xxxvii [11th in New Series] (London: Conference Office, 1814) 513.

¹² George Davidson, *The Case of the Caribbs in St. Vincent*, Byera, St. Vincent, July 24, 1787. This was published in England by Coke (London, 1787) and appears in vol. 2 of his *History of the West Indies*, 101-7.

¹³ AM 2 (1779).

¹⁴ Mr Fish to Mr Benson, April 26 1804, MMSA, WIC, Fiche 1.

The second column infers that 'Black' equalled slave, but correlation with column one reveals a considerable number of free black and coloured.

Returns for the Antigua/Leeward Islands Districts use the categories:

1815-1818	white	coloured and black	
1824-1828	white	free coloured and black	slaves

After emancipation in 1834, membership returns made no ethnic distinction and at Circuit and District level members were reported as male or female. Despite the presence of white Jamaicans, Barbadians and Anguillans, the presumption grew in Britain that West Indian meant 'Black'.

Part I Pioneers

A. Spontaneous evangelism before Coke

Black Harry of Sint Eustatius: an African-American Missionary

Thomas Coke was greeted by several free Negroes when he landed on the Dutch island of Sint Eustatius on January 24, 1787.¹⁵ Foremost amongst those who spontaneously witnessed to their evangelical faith was a slave: Coke introduces us to Harry, writing:

The Lord raised up lately a negro slave whose name is *Harry* (who was brought here from the continent and who was formerly a member of our Society) to prepare our way... *Harry* did so grieve in spirit at the wickedness of the people around him, that at last the fire broke forth, and he bore a public testimony for Jesus. The Governor at first approved.¹⁶

On his second visit, Coke referred to the 'poor black Harry.' This description became the sobriquet *Black Harry*. Consequently, Harry of Statia has been confused with Black Harry Hosier, the servant and travelling companion of Francis Asbury and Freeborn Garrettson in North America. In addition to various potted histories, a 12 cent postage stamp was issued for the 200th Anniversary of Methodism in the British Virgin Islands. Nathaniel Gilbert was pictured preaching in Antigua, but the portrait of 'Black Harry' was a water colour on paper of Harry Hosier.

The first reference to Hosier is in 1780 when Asbury states that he was suitable to preach to the coloured people. It was suggested that crowds went to hear him rather than Asbury himself. Hosier travelled a thousand miles with Coke in preparation for the Inaugural Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. His sermon, 'The Barren Fig Tree', preached at Adam's Chapel in Fairfax County, Virginia in May of 1781, was the first recorded Methodist sermon by an African-American. Booker T. Washington acknowledged him as the 'first American negro preacher of the United States' and Dr Benjamin Rush went as far as describing him as 'the greatest orator in America.'¹⁷

The provenance of the Black Harrys

The place of origin for Harry of Statia is not known. There are suggestions that he originated in the Eastern Caribbean islands, that he was born in Anguilla and went to Sint Maarten or became

¹⁵ The small (11.8 sq.m/32km²) Dutch island of Sint Eustatius is located at the northern end of the Lesser Antilles chain, South East of Puerto Rico and some 75 nautical miles west of Antigua. It was designated De Bovenwindse Eilenden, a Dutch Windward island viewed from Curaçao. In 1627, British State Papers made first use of the name *Statia*, by which St Eustatius is now known.

¹⁶ John Vickers, ed., *The Journals of Dr. Thomas Coke* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005) 37.

¹⁷ The African American Registry, "Black Harry Hosier, orator of spirit." http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/black-harry-hosier-orator-spirit, retrieved 24/02/2014. Cited from Mole K. Asanta & Mark T. Mallson (New York: McMillan USA, 1991).

acquainted with Methodism in Antigua. Later writers may have confused him with 'Daddy Harry' a black Sunday school teacher of a later generation who used the Lancastrian system of education. Although Statia was basically an English-speaking island, there would have been differences in Harry's North American English and the English dialect of the slaves in a Dutch Colony, but not enough to prevent communication. Harry's spoken English was understood by Governor Runnels and Thomas Coke, indicating a long presence in British colonies. As yet, there was no organised Methodist work in South or Central America, so 'the continent' means North America. We could surmise that like his namesake Black Harry Hosier, Harry of Statia had been born in North America.¹⁸ Coke wrote of Hosier in November 1784:

Monday 29. I sometimes give notice immediately after preaching, that, in a little time *Harry* will preach to the blacks; but the whites always stay to hear him. Sometimes I publish him to preach at candle-light, as the negroes can attend better at that time. I really believe he is one of the best preachers in the world, there is such an amazing power attends his preaching, though he cannot read; and he is one of the humblest creatures I ever saw.¹⁹

It is within the bounds of probability that Harry of Statia had been influenced by Hosier's preaching and had been amongst the 890 coloured members reported in the 1786 Conference *Minutes* of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

An Afro-American missionary

Harry, who arrived in Statia before Coke, can be considered as an Afro-American pioneer missionary, sent by Christ [John 17:18]. His preaching illustrates the Gospel mandate in Matt. 10:7, 'As you go, proclaim the good news' (NRSV) [πορευομενοι δε κηρυσσετε]. Some missiologists argue that the use of the Aorist Participle in Matt. 28:19 can give the reading, 'As you are going, make disciples' [πορευθεντες συν μαθητευσατε].²⁰ Whether or not this is so, despite being a slave Black Harry disciplined when he was transported and can therefore be described as a missionary. Also, 'discipling' can be interpreted as a process included in the pastoral care of a Class Leader and Harry was appointed by Coke the Leader of three Classes. Matthew 28 has been read as a mandate for an aggressive, militant evangelism typified by 19th century missionary societies. However, 'Matthew's Christology is the identification of God with the powerless and the weak. Black Harry is a prototype for Methodist pioneers who illustrate that 'Mission in the way of Christ is a mission "from below"²¹.

Black Harry a domestic slave?

The historical image of slaves is that of the male field labourer, although women and children were used extensively in this work. Maps of 1742 and 1775 show 76 estates on Statia.²² Both male and female slaves formed a second major group working as domestic servants who regarded themselves as superior. Many others became skilled artisans. Bearing in mind the amount of cargo and slaves that were transhipped through Statia; a great number of slaves were engaged as stevedores and sailors.

In 1779, 3,551 ships visited Statia and exports were valued at \$3,700,000.²³ In this year, two years before Admiral Rodney's destruction, there were almost equal numbers of slaves and white people in a

¹⁸ In his novel, Gumbs suggests Georgia. Wycherley Gumbs, *Black Harry. "A Slave Redeemed"—A Man of Destiny* (US Virgin Islands: Supreme Printing, 1996) 3. Harry Hosier was born in Fayetteville, NC, c. 1750.

¹⁹ Vickers, *Coke's Journals*, p. 37. [See also J.A. Vickers, *THOMAS COKE. Apostle of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1969) 82-83.]

²⁰ David J. Bosch, 'Matthew: Mission as Disciple-making', *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991) 73-4, and 'The Structure of Mission: An exposition of Matthew 28:16-20' in Wilbert R. Shenk, ed., *Exploring Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 218-248.

²¹ Johannes Nissen, 'Matthew, Mission and Method', *IRM*, vol. XCI No. 360, (January 2002) 84.

²² Hartog, *History St. Eustatius*, 162-3.

²³ This must have been the Spanish dollar or *pesos* known as *pieces of eight*. See J.C. Neal, *Note on Circuit Accounts and Currencies used in the Leeward Islands District(s) of the Caribbean and Americas up to 1806*.

total population of 3,056. To this could be added those permanently on board the cargo vessels or up to 450 slaves held in transit pending sale. In a book translated in 1776, Abbe Raynal noted that 'whenever this place has the happiness of being neuter in war' the population increased.²⁴ By 1790, of the 8,124 persons there were 2,341 white, 643 free coloured and 5,140 slaves.²⁵

Throughout the history of slavery, slaves were not free to pass beyond the boundaries of their own estate without a permit. Invariably, such permits were denied, not least when attendance at religious worship was requested. From the beginning of Methodism in Statia, it was black leaders including a woman who gave leadership to the members. Coke said that 'there was also a black woman who came here from America, who loves God.' She was given two regular classes by Coke, and the black man named Samuel given one. Harry was appointed to care for three classes.²⁶ In order to give pastoral care to these members, it is clear that these leaders had a certain amount of freedom to move around Oranjestad. This raises the question, 'Was the slave Harry one of the prophet Joel's domestic servants when he preached, rather than a field labourer or stevedore?'

Whatever the nature of his work, the fact remains that Black Harry of St Eustatius was, it is suggested, **the first Afro-American Methodist to be a missionary.**

Lydia at St Kitts: female slave and servant, 1786

Mixed race men and women who were former slaves and servants were Methodist pioneers in St Kitts. Mention will be made later that on his first visit on 16 January 1787, Dr Coke found in Basseterre Mr Cable, a mulatto printer and Mrs (Lydia) Seaton, 'a gentlewoman of the same complexion.'²⁷ The provenance of Mr Bertrie, a jeweller, and Mr Somersall, a gentleman of property and influence at Sandy Point, was not noted. They hoped and prayed that a Methodist Missionary would come to St Kitts.

Mrs Webley in Dominica: Mulatto converted under John Baxter before 1786

Arriving in Dominica on 5 January 1787, Thomas Coke and John Baxter were given hospitality by Mrs Webley, a mulatto converted in Antigua under Baxter. With Mr Burn who was a planter, two Irish soldiers and some slaves who had heard the Gospel in the Moravian Chapel in Antigua, Mrs Webley kept together a little Society of about twenty souls, former members of Society in Antigua and St Kitts. Two years later the Rev William McCornock was appointed, but died within six months. Eight out of the first ten missionaries died within a short time and Mrs Webley kept the Society going in minister-less years.

B. Dr Coke's era in the West Indies: 1786-1810

Claxton and Powell in Demerara: former slaves and economic migrants, 1802

Dr Coke reported to the Missionary Committee that he believed 'there are not fewer than 100,000 Negroes. Many hundreds of those have been members of our Society in other Islands who were removed to Demarara by their Masters.'²⁸ William Moister gives us the names of 'Two intelligent men

²⁴ Raynal A, *The Philosophical and Political History of the Settlement and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies* Translated by Fr. J. Justamons (London: T. Cadell, 1777). Quoted in Lawrence, *The Netherlands and Methodism with particular reference to the Dutch West Indian Methodism* (unpub. ms. in MMSA, 1943-52) 220; WIC, fiche 7/149.

²⁵ Hartog, *History St Eustatius*, 52.

²⁶ Vickers, *Coke's Journals*, pp. 83,84.

²⁷ Thomas Coke, *History West Indies*, 3:57.

²⁸ Thomas Coke, Report of the Missionary Committee, 1805, (London: Wesleyan Church Office).

of colour, Mr William Claxton and Mr William Powell who came from Nevis in 1801.²⁹

Claxton tells us that he was a native of Nevis and received 'light under the Ministry of Revrand Mr Ownes and in the course of little time I was appointed a leader of a Man's Clafs, but at that time being in a State of Bondage & a Butler I was much interrupted.'³⁰ As a Butler, he was another domestic servant. In the late 1790s, he went to St Bartholomew's where the same minister restored his lapsed faith. After he was set at liberty he married, but when St Bart's economy collapsed he was forced to migrate to Demerara.

The two Williams began their Christian witness in 1802 by keeping prayer meetings in the house of a coloured lady known as 'Sally Kitts'. At this time the colonies of Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice were returned to Holland, only to revert to Britain the following year, eventually becoming British Guiana. However, Dutch law continued and the Court of Policy was controlled by Dutch planters. At this time, there was no minister of Christ in the Colony of Demerara. Claxton and Powell, with others, maintained Christian fellowship in the ensuing years.

Thomas Coke had made several attempts to station a missionary in Demerara (1794 and 1800). During a visit to England, Mrs J. Clifton, a coloured housekeeper, petitioned Dr Coke for a missionary. As a result, he reported that 'a missionary has gone to Demerara.' John Hawkshaw arrived in 1805 but was put back on the mail boat that brought him. The London Missionary Society sent John Wray, a minister (February 1808) and John Davies, a teacher (January 1909). Claxton associated with them and became an assistant or secretary to Mr Davies in Stabroek. However, there was some difference of opinion with those of a Calvinistic persuasion.

Frustration finally compelled Claxton to form a Society on Methodist Principles on the evening of 25th July 1811.³¹ About this time, 'Old Claxton was a tailor and had a chapel or Meeting house near Collier's Corner, Camp Street in Georgetown. Irreligious groups organised opposition and harassed the Methodist work. As a result, petitions were lodged against 'CLAXTON and PARTY' in 1812 and a further Petition deemed it 'unpardonable for a black man to hold public meetings for worship and to be a setter forth of strange doctrines.'³² Claxton was summoned before Governor Carmichael and was relieved when he was given an exemption to preach without a licence on condition that he did not infringe on Church hours.³³ Moister said that by the time he arrived in 1834 there were 'two native catechists, William Claxton and William Powell, who had been regularly licensed.'³⁴ It is suggested that **William Claxton, as a former African slave, was the first Methodist Layman to be legally authorised to preach, at least in South America.** At the same time, the early use of the word 'Catechist' for native preachers is noted.

C. Pioneers after Coke (died 1814)

Kitty Dorset in Montserrat: a black domestic slave, 1810

Oliver Cromwell had transported the first Irish to Montserrat in 1649. They in turn imported African slaves in 1651. Predominantly, family names in Montserrat have Irish origin and Irish brogue has influenced Montserrat's patois. The emblem of Montserrat is a shamrock and the maid of Erin, symbol

²⁹ William Moister, *Memorials of Missionary Labours in Western Africa, The West Indies and at the Cape of Good Hope*, 3rd edn., (London: William Nichols, 1866) 263.

³⁰ William Claxton to Rev Mr Whitworth, 16 Feb 1813, Demerary. MMSA, WIC, Fiche 1. The minister was the Rev Thomas Owens who served in St Kitts-Nevis 1796-1800.

³¹ Claxton's letter.

³² James Rodway, *The Story of Georgetown* (Demerara: The "Argossy" Co. Ltd., 1920) 91ff.

³³ Rodway, *Georgetown*, 159.

³⁴ Moister, *Memorials of Missionary Labours*, p.265.

of freedom, appears on the National Flag.

Early attempts to organise Methodism in what was called 'The Emerald Isle' were frustrated as the principal planters were bigoted Irish Catholics. Farquhar said that 'Montserrat became the baptismal font for the denominational rivalries which Wesleyans would encounter.'³⁵ Dr Coke noted that in 1793 there were twelve members in a Society Class led by a pious coloured leader. However, the name recorded in history is that of Kitty Dorset, a domestic slave who was taken to Montserrat from St Bartholomew's. It is no surprise that she suffered for gathering Methodists together.

In July and August 1997, Montserrat's principal town of Plymouth was buried under the pyroclastic flow erupting from the Soufrière Hills. Entombed in the Methodist Church is a memorial tablet to Kitty Dorset:

IN MEMORY OF
KITTY DORSET
A BLACK CHRISTIAN SLAVE
WHOSE ARRIVAL IN 1810 HISTORICALLY
INTRODUCED METHODISM UNTO MONTSERRAT
FOR NOTWITH STANDING ACRIMONIUS PERSECUTION
HER ABIDING AND UNWAVERING FAITH IN GOD
AND IN METHODISM SUSTAINED AND ENABLED HER
TO WORSHIP REGULARLY WITH ANOTHER MEMBER WHO HAD
COME FROM ST. KITTS UNTIL THE ARRIVAL IN 1820
OF THE REV JOHN MADDOCK
AFTER WHICH SHE SERVED AS A DEDICATED
FAITHFUL AND UNREMITTING CLASS LEADER
TO GOD BE THE GLORY

An illustration of the interest in missionary enterprise shown by Methodists in England, the following obituary appeared in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for the year 1827.³⁶

Obituary Died, at Montserrat, Feb. 20th, **Kitty Dorset**, about sixty years of age. She was brought to God in St. Bartholomew's, and joined the Methodist Society in the year 1806. Her circumspect conduct, and unaffected piety, secured for her a large share of esteem from the Missionary labouring there. In the prospect of her removal to Montserrat, where great hostility had been manifested to the Missionaries, who had visited it, she said to him, 'Whata must I do? My owner is going, and my children also; I cannot help it.' He kneeled down, and commended her to God.³⁷ This occurred about four years after her conversion. She was accustomed to relate the separation from the Society in St. Bartholomew's, as very affecting to her. Upon taking leave, she received a solemn charge to 'hold fast the profession of her faith;' and the danger of living in a place so hostile to the Ministers of the Gospel was plainly made known to her.

The introduction of Methodism into the Island of Montserrat, may be fixed from the commencement of her residence in it; who, by her perseverance in the path of piety, showed that she had not received the grace of God in vain. The loss of Christian communion must always be a severe trial, especially to persons who have had no

³⁵ Farquhar, *Caribbean Adventures*, p. x.

³⁶ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* [WMM] (London: Methodist Church, 1827) Volume 6 of 3rd series, 428-9.

³⁷ Officially, there was no resident Methodist minister in the Swedish island of St Bartholomew's 1808-1811. Thomas Dobson had stayed on after refusing to remove to Dominica because the Governor insisted that the Wesleyan Preacher in St Bart's kept a school and nominated successors were unwilling to do this. Dobson had made personal investment in the chapel.

advantages of education, and are thereby cut off from those resources which might have partially compensated for so great a privation. Some time after her arrival, another member of the Methodist Society came from St. Christopher's; and they regularly met together for mutual edification. In such a place, it was not likely that these two unassuming disciples should escape persecution. Of this they had a large share; but they strengthened each other's hands, and held on their way. When this Mission was commenced by the late Rev. J. Maddock, they, with several others who had evinced a concern for their eternal welfare, were joined in Society. When the Rev. T.K. Hyde was appointed to this island, she became a resident in the Mission family, and continued in it to the time of her death. In the year 1824, she was made a Class Leader, for which office she was well qualified, both from a correct knowledge of the different vices which the negroes of the West Indies are subject to, and her own religious experience. The prosperity of the Mission was always a subject in which her best affections were engaged. To the members of her Class she was unremitting in her attentions, and by her prayers, her affectionate and faithful advice, she displayed the ardour of a soul deeply engaged in their welfare. Anticipating the appointment of a second Missionary, it was not unusual to hear her devout acknowledgements at the prospect of additional assistance. She was spared to see him, but a few days after his arrival she was called to her everlasting rests. Upon the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Hyde for the District Meeting in Antigua, she was left in charge of the house, and two of the children. On the 11th of February she was taken ill, when she became very uneasy about the affairs of the house, but particularly about the children, which caused her to earnestly pray for the return of their parents. They landed on the Friday following, and found her very ill, but happy in God. When asked if anything particular exercised her mind, she replied, 'Nothing' and spoke of her unshaken confidence in the goodness of God. Through the whole of her affliction, she breathed the spirit of prayer, and manifested the graces of a matured Christian. A Short time before her death, she grasped the hand of Mr. and Mrs Hyde, and seemed very anxious to speak, but could not: she, however, *looked* a blessing upon them and their children; the youngest of whom affectingly hung around her neck, and embraced her repeatedly. A few minutes after this, her happy spirit

"Dissolv'd its bonds, and clear'd its flight,
Emerging into perfect light."

Such was the end of Kitty Dorset, a black slave, but a sincere Christian. Her funeral was, perhaps, one of the most respectable, for a person in her condition, that was ever witnessed in Montserrat.

ENOCH WARD.

John Hodge of Anguilla: free man of colour, 1813

John Hodge was converted to Methodism in a nearby island, probably St Bartholomew's. In reply to a request from the British Parliament, the Deputy Governor of Anguilla wrote:

The unexpected introduction of religion took place in 1813 in which I received a letter from John Hodge, a free coloured man and native of this island, importuning my sanction for the establishment of it. Deeming it essential to the reformation of the slaves, who, before that period, were conducting themselves in habitual violation of the whole system of morality, and with a view to discipline them in their duty to God and man, I readily offered every encouragement to the petitioner, who proceeded to discharge his religious duties as a Local Preacher without the most trifling procrastination, until Class Meetings were established and leaders appointed to investigate them: which duties he still continues to discharge.³⁸

³⁸ Accessed from Franklin A. Roberts, 'Methodism Sails to the Caribbean.' *Born in Slavery*, Wilbert Forker, ed., (Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2003) 4-5. From 1806-1825 the Deputy Governor was William Richardson.

By the time of the Rev. C. Riley's visit in 1815 there were 250 Methodists on the Society roll. On Riley's recommendation, John Hodge was appointed Lay Agent and the Anguilla Circuit appeared on the British Stations in 1818 with 169 members. The same year, Hodge was recommended as a Candidate for the itinerant ministry. After four years probation, he was ordained in 1822, **the first black West Indian to be so honoured.** The Missionary Committee in London even thought that Hodge was suitable and qualified to go to Africa.

St Martin/Sint Maarten, 1817

Hodge's passion to 'kindle the flame' in nearby French St Martin (separated by about six miles of Caribbean sea) bore fruit as early as 1817, but Hodge and his followers were expelled by the French Commander to the Dutch side of the island. Back in Anguilla, the Lieutenant Governor (British Virgins Islands with Anguilla) complained to the Missionary committee that he thought that Hodge was being discriminated against by his white colleagues. 'Those (Missionary) Gentlemen, not only viewed themselves in superiority to him, but made it manifest that his colour sufficed for the evidence of their inattention to him (Except the Chairman – the Rev Gilgrass and Rev W White) but concluded on sending him to Saint Domingo for life.'³⁹ At first Hodge consented, but with this proviso, that one of the missionaries would accompany him. However, Hodge remained in Anguilla under the supervision of the minister in St Martin. His experience was a foretaste of racial prejudice that would continue into the mid-twentieth century.

D. 20th century economic migrants of African descent

Panama

Methodism went to Central America with migrant workers who built the Panama Canal, but missionary enterprise is not detailed here, other than to mention 'Mother Able' at Bocas del Toro.

Aruba and Curaçao

Work opportunities in the oil refineries on Aruba and Curaçao caused mass migration in the 1930s. Thousands of workers and their families, including hundreds of Methodists, went from the Leeward and Windward Islands and British Guiana. In Aruba, Thomas Markham from Montserrat and Richard Hazel and 'Daddy' Griffiths from Trinidad organised Methodist work. Obed Anthony left Dominica for Curaçao and gathered a congregation. These West Indians of African descent again fulfilled the missionary mandate to disciple as they went in search of work.⁴⁰

Part II Leadership: Class Leaders or informal leaders

Elizabeth Gilbert

White women were prominent in lay leadership of the Methodist Societies, as well as Africans and those of mixed race. In the pioneering days of missionary enterprise in Antigua we note first Elizabeth Gilbert, the pious wife of Nathaniel and an Antiguan Creole.⁴¹ Returning to Antigua after their spiritual awakening, Elizabeth engaged in pastoral visitation, for example, counselling her cousin, the dying Miss Molly Windthorpe.⁴² After Nathaniel's death in 1774, Elizabeth may have maintained their chapel over the plantation stores at the Gilbert estate until she died in 1777.

³⁹ Lieutenant Governor to the Missionary Committee, Forker, *Born in Slavery*, 7.

⁴⁰ John C, Neal, *History of Methodism in Curaçao: The first thirty years* (unpub., 2006)

⁴¹ Nathaniel Gilbert, the Methodist, is designated III to distinguish him in five generations with the same name. His story is not included in this paper, although we note that he was a Creole West Indian.

⁴² Nathaniel Gilbert to Francis Gilbert, May 10 1760. AM 3 (1780) 388. William Moister, *Memorials of Missionary Labours*, 237.

Bessie

The slave Bessie was one of the two Negro women converted and baptised by Wesley at Wandsworth in 1758. Seven years later, Gilbert reported in a letter to John Wesley that his woman Bessie 'had been kept ever since' and was 'still able to rejoice in God.'⁴³ She would have been a quiet worker among her fellow-slaves in the Gilbert household and on the estate.

Mary Leadbetter (Mrs Francis Gilbert)

Having been widowed in 1758, Mary Leadbetter joined the Gilbert family as Governess. She educated Nathaniel's children, first in England and then for four or five years in Antigua. She preceded Francis Gilbert in returning to England c.1763, he departing on 28 May 1764 with Nathaniel's daughters. Mary continued to have primary care of and taught the five girls. Of these, two died at a young age, Mary in 1768 and Alice in 1772. Mary also served as Francis' housekeeper. After a further three years in this role, she married Francis. The younger Gilbert brothers William and Nathaniel (IV) who boarded elsewhere spent time with the family. Mary was the guardian for the two step-daughters of Jane Bod(d)ily (her sister-in-law) meaning that Elizabeth and Jane also may have been part of the household for a short period of time.⁴⁴ Mary made an invaluable contribution as educator, wife and church leader.

Three years later the couple went back to Antigua in 1773 where Mary continued to be actively engaged in the life of the church. In a letter to John Wesley, Francis said 'I find great help from my dear wife. She is willing to spend and be spent in so good a cause.'⁴⁵ However, with Francis' health failing from 1774, the following year the doctor ordered them to return to England.

More importantly, Mary Gilbert returned to Antigua in 1781 as the widow of Francis who had died in 1779. She wrote to John Wesley saying that for two years she had been struggling financially.

Had the estate regularly paid my annuity, I should have rested in my native clime, and quietly enjoyed those means of grace which I greatly privilege. But God hath His way in the whirlwind. I did not know that he had anything for me to do in His vineyard, nor could suppose that He could use so mean an instrument. But my work was provided...
Immediately upon my arrival I was called on to supply those deficiencies which the secular affairs of Mr Baxter rendered unavoidable.⁴⁶

Two fires in 1769 had destroyed two-thirds of the town of St John's, with an estimated loss of £200,000 st. The hurricane of 1772 devastated plantations and there had been long periods of recurrent drought leaving two-thirds of Antigua's inhabitants destitute.⁴⁷ It is noted that Nathaniel had left his brother Francis £60 yearly, but in 1775 the estate was in debt. Francis' sister, Jane Bodily, had also left her brother £35 per annum 'and then to his wife Mary after his death.' Jane's will was made a few days after the couple married but there was no issue, so the £600 to the couple's children could not be paid.

Mary financed a ten-year stay in Antigua through trading from her house in Nevis Street, St John's. Her main commodities were 'A Fashionable assortment of Millinery, gauzes, flowers, feather, ribbons,

⁴³ Nathaniel Gilbert to John Wesley, Antigua, July 22 1765. AM 6 (1783) 329-30.

⁴⁴ The Will of Jane Bodily was proved by Francis Gilbert her brother 29 July 1775. Vere Langford Oliver, *History of the island of Antigua, one of the Leeward Caribbees in the West Indies, from the first settlement in 1635 to the present time* [1894] 3 vols. (London: Mitchell & Hughes, 1896) 2:13-14.

⁴⁵ Francis Gilbert to John Wesley, June 18 1763, AM 5 (1782) 384-6.

⁴⁶ Mary Gilbert to John Wesley, May 20 1783, AM 14 (1791) 499.

⁴⁷ Oliver, *History...*, 1:cxxvii. Governor Woodley gives details of the 1769 fire in a letter dated Aug. 17 1769, Oliver, 1:cxx.

gloves, fans, &c. &c.⁴⁸ Her letter went on to say that John Baxter was fully employed in English Harbour and only went to town 'on the Sabbath.' In St John's, 'My house is open to all that will attend at family prayers every day: I have one evening in every week for the public reading of the Scriptures.' This was in addition to the Class meetings. Despite the segregation of men and women in Classes, Mary's niece wrote: 'My zealous aunt, finding the fields white to harvest, and almost without a labourer, overcame her natural diffidence, and not only met a class of white, and another of coloured women, but opened her house on Friday evenings, for females of all colours, [and] coloured and black men.'⁴⁹

Mary attended to practical matters of the Society. When a building fund for a new chapel was opened Mary raised money and deposited from collections £297. 2s. 11d over a two-year period. She was also one of the trustees for the Conveyance. Mary Gilbert served for ten years as Class Leader and led prayer meetings. After the arrival of William Warrener in 1786, Mary did not preach but supported the Methodist work as she continued counselling and exhorting until her final return to England in 1791.

Mary Alley and Sophia Campbell.

Not distinguishing between black and mixed race people, John Baxter wrote that following the death of Nathaniel Gilbert the Methodists were kept together 'by two black women who have continued praying and meeting with those who attended every night.'⁵⁰ After Francis Gilbert returned to England for the final time in 1775, William Warrener recounted how 'they that feared the Lord in St John's met regularly every day for prayer in a house which belonged to two of our coloured friends.'⁵¹ The two women are given names by Anne Hart Gilbert: **Mary Alley**, a mulatto, and **Sophia Campbell** who was black.⁵²

For the three years when there was no 'official' leadership of the Antigua Methodists, the three hundred members of Society soon dispersed, including all the white members. Mary and Sophia kept a small school, presumably for the children of the free coloured and black. Their freedom of association and having a house in St John's indicates that they were either freeborn or no longer slaves.

When John Baxter arrived as an accredited lay preacher and class leader, lapsed members were restored by Baxter. There was no meeting place in St John's other than the house/chapel of the two women and then later the house of his wife. With Baxter assuming leadership the women took a back seat in governing the affairs of the church.

There is an uncorroborated story that Campbell and Alley raised funds to purchase land and that women paid a major role by clearing the land and carrying stone and marl to build a first Methodist Chapel in St John's.⁵³ Conflation of this story with that of Baxter's chapel causes some scholars to dismiss a first chapel as erroneous anecdotes.⁵⁴

Although Mary Gilbert was the Chapel Steward, Campbell appears to have acted as treasurer of the St John's building fund, making regular deposits. A note on the back of the deed dated April 26 (1786) states that she paid to Mr Hart monies due: £30. 3s 5d in 1785 and £16. 10s 0d in 1786. 'The balance

⁴⁸ *Antigua Gazette*, June 8 1785, Pr. Robert Mearns, 4c.

⁴⁹ Henrietta Gilbert, *Memoirs of the late Mrs Mary Gilbert, with some account of Mr. Francis Gilbert, (her second husband) Second son of the honourable Nathaniel Gilbert of Antigua...* (London: Cordeux, 1817) 19.

⁵⁰ John Baxter to John Wesley, April 22 1778, AM 2 (1786) 383.

⁵¹ William Warrener, Leeds Missionary Meeting Oct. 6 1813, MM 37 (1814) 513.

⁵² Anne Hart Gilbert to William Pattison, 1 June 1804, MMSA, WIC, Fiche 1:37.

⁵³ Anne Hart Gilbert to Pattison, 1804. Eleanor Montague to British Conference, 26 April 1814, MMSA, Box 112 (1814 file) No. 28.

⁵⁴ Robert Glen *Journal of Caribbean History* [JCH] 36:1 (2002) 175. (Departments of History: The University of the West Indies).

of £18. 9. 5d. pd. me in full by Sophia Campbell. B. C. Hart.⁵⁵

Although of African pedigree herself, when Sophia Campbell died in 1799 she left her 'four slaves in a Trust to be administered by John Baxter and another man so that the slaves could be rented out for the financial benefit of Mary Alley and Campbell's (apparently illegitimate) son.'⁵⁶

After John Baxter died in 1805, Alley fell on hard times. Eleanor Montague prepared testimonies to obtain relief for Mary from London.⁵⁷ She wrote that Alley 'waded through many tribulations and temptations but is still alive and steady in the good cause.' In 1807, 45 shillings was given to an unnamed poor person⁵⁸ and the Antigua accounts in 1812 show that money was allocated to Alley during 32 weeks of the previous year.⁵⁹

Mrs John Baxter: co-missionary

'A few years after arriving in Antigua, John Baxter married a lady "of some property" in the island – a woman of kindred spirit who proved to be a helpmate in his religious work – and thus acquired a settled home.'⁶⁰ Unfortunately, the name of this lady is not documented, neither is the place and date of her marriage to John, somewhere between 1780 and 1881.⁶¹ Baxter tells us that 'the house we now have is a life estate of my wife's, so during her lifetime I am not distressed.'⁶² This legal terminology was used to enable a widow to live in the family home, the property then passing to designated beneficiaries rather than to a second husband.

An educated guess is that Mrs Baxter was a widow, sister or daughter of a shop-keeper or artisan.⁶³ However, Coke said she was 'born of a considerable family in Antigua and brought up with all that ease and luxury which is peculiar to affluence in the West Indies.' This indicates the landed gentry and circumstantial evidence provided by Eleanor Montague suggests that she was a Mrs Ceely. She wrote that Baxter was 'introduced to her aunt Mrs Ceely (who had been one of the adherents of Messrs Gilberts), and on that day he preached in her house to a tolerably numerous congregation.'⁶⁴ Mrs Ceely became a Methodist somewhere between 1763 and 1774. She could have been Margaret, widow of Christopher Ceeley who resided in St John's.⁶⁵

Baxter's heavy work load in the dockyard at English Harbour during daylight hours precluded any move to St Johns until after his resignation in 1785. Mrs Baxter's house was used for worship, however, John continued his letter, 'but I want to see a house of our own that the work may stand. As soon as this is accomplished, and if we can maintain a preacher, I hope that some of our brethren will come to our assistance.'

Dr Coke paid tribute to the support of Mrs Baxter in the Methodist work in Antigua and her travels to

⁵⁵ Property Deed held by Superintendent Minister, St. John's, Antigua.

⁵⁶ Will of Sophia Campbell 15 June 1797. National Archives Antigua & Barbuda, Will Book 1809-25, [sic], 78-79 cited by Glen, JCH, 36:1 (2002) 178, f/n 6.

⁵⁷ Eleanor Montague to the Methodist Conference, Antigua, April 26 1814, MMSA, Box 112 (file 1814) WIC 1:28.A discussion on Mary Alley between Glen and Frey & Wood is found in JCH 35:2 (2001) 263 & 36:1, (2002) 178.

⁵⁸ J. A. Horsford, *A Voice from the West Indies...* (London: Alexander Heylin, 1856) 128. This item does not appear in the Antigua accounts 1 April 1806 to 1 April 1807 that were part of the Minutes of the first District Meeting, April 1807.

⁵⁹ Reference given as WMMS Box 111 No. 27. Antigua accounts 1811-12, cited by Glen, JCH, 35:2 (2001) 280, f/n 32.

⁶⁰ Coke, *History West Indies*, 2:33.

⁶¹ A John Baxter of a previous generation married Anne Drew; the couple had descendants in Antigua: there were also Baxters in following generations none of whom were related.

⁶² John Baxter to John Wesley, Antigua, June 10 1782, MM 13 (1790) 339.

⁶³ Robert Glen, personal communication, 29/04/2010.

⁶⁴ Eleanor Montague.

⁶⁵ Oliver, 1:cxii & 1:104. Registrars often recorded surnames with different spelling.

other islands.

Though born of a considerable family in Antigua and brought up with all that ease and luxury which is peculiar to affluence in the West Indies. She had already consented that her husband should abandon a lucrative office under the Government, worth £400 per annum, currency; and she now cheerfully consented to make a still greater sacrifice. She had acquiesced with the former, that her husband might devote all his time to the service and work of God; and upon the same principle, that he might be more extensively useful, she cheerfully submitted to be banished from her acquaintances and friends, to be exiled on the margins of civilization, to spend two years among hordes of savages, and to repose her safety in the protecting hands of God.

... Constrained by the love of Christ, both she and her husband had abandoned present possession, and expected no requital on this side of the grave. After the surrender of wealth and ease, they were now about to quit from intercourse with the world, in order to undertake the arduous task of cultivating the savage mind!⁶⁶

Coke is referring to the experimental mission to Caribs in St Vincent. Mrs Baxter was a true missionary by definition when she left her native island for St Vincent in the cause of the Gospel.

*Pioneers to native Amerindians*⁶⁷

The first Protestant mission to indigenous peoples in South America was by the United Brethren (Moravians) in the Dutch Colony of Berbice (later incorporated into British Guiana.) Beginning in 1738, they were unable to teach slave children to read and write because of the opposition of plantation owners. After two years, they left Van Eys' plantation and moved among Arawak Amerindians on the banks of the Weironie Creek. Schuman was able to produce an Arawak dictionary and grammar and translate John's Gospel and Epistles and a Passion History. However, during the Berbice Slave Rebellion (1763-4) their community was scattered. Two of the brethren died, most of the Moravians went to neighbouring Demerara and the remainder returned to Europe.⁶⁸

In North America, David Brainerd was born in East Haddam, Hartford, Connecticut. A Mission Board in Scotland commissioned him as a pioneer missionary to Native Americans in 1742 and he began work amongst tribal people in New Jersey in April of the following year. By 1747 he had 130 new converts. He died in the house of Jonathan Edwards, whose daughter he loved, on October 9 1747 at the age of 29. His younger brother John took over the work.⁶⁹

Other than Roman Catholics, Wesleyans initiated Christian work with Amerindian tribes in the Caribbean. Pre-dating other ventures launched by Coke, Mr & Mrs Joyce were recruited as teachers for the Carib Mission in St Vincent and built a school early in 1788. The theory was that the Black Caribs had to be civilised and educated before they were ready for the Gospel. **The Joyces had the distinction of being the first Wesleyan lay agents to use an indigenous language.**

A couple of years previously (1785-6), Methodist work in the Highlands and adjacent Islands of Scotland was conducted by someone who already spoke the Erse language (Duncan M'Allum) and in

⁶⁶ Coke, *History West Indies*, 2:263-5.

⁶⁷ The word 'Amerindian' is derived from 'America' after the explorer Amerigo Vespucci and 'India' coined by Christopher Columbus when he thought he had found the Indian subcontinent.

⁶⁸ J.E. Hutton, *Short History of the Moravian Church*, (London: Moravian Publishing Office, 1909) Book 2, Ch. 6.

⁶⁹ *Journal of David Brainerd*, pub. Scottish Society for Promulgating Christian Knowledge, 1746. Jonathan Edwards, *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd* (Boston, MS: 1749). John Wesley produced a compendious extract of this Journal, (London: Methodist Book Room) Wesleyan Methodist Magazine 4 (1825) 697.

the Channel Islands of Jersey and Guernsey by a French-speaking inhabitant (Jean de Quetteville).⁷⁰ **The first Wesleyan Minister (and his wife) to mission to native inhabitants in a foreign language was the Rev John Baxter.** By the time of Coke's third visit to St Vincent in 1790, 'Mrs Baxter made no small proficiency in their (Charaib Indian) tongue.'⁷¹ Considering that John Baxter did not have the privilege of a theological education and Mrs Baxter as a female white Creole would not have had the opportunity to study outside Antigua, it was a creditable achievement for them to learn the language of the Black Caribs or Garifuna. This was a dialect of the Kalipona language that included Arawak words.

This two-year experimental mission to the Black Caribs failed and the Baxters were forced to withdraw. Based on a letter from John, Coke further notes that

Mrs Baxter, on taking her leave, wept at their rejection of the Gospel and earnestly prayed that they might have another call, before the things which made for their everlasting peace were for ever hidden from their eyes. At the same time she earnestly besought God, that when another call should reach them, they might not reject it as they had hitherto slighted the overtures of salvation which had been made.⁷²

Mrs Baxter continued her life in Antigua until she died in 1802, leaving her husband John to carry on the Methodist work until his own death in 1805.

Clearkley family

Timothy Clearkley, an English man domiciled in Antigua, married a black woman named Frances. She became a 'true Christian' through the ministry of Francis Gilbert from whom she received her first membership ticket pinned to the Rules of the Methodist Society.⁷³ Their family was described as a miniature of the Primitive Church, diligent in visiting the sick, distributing Bibles and Testaments and in other works of charity. The whole family spent their evenings with music and reading. The Clearkley home was frequently visited by Nathaniel and Francis Gilbert, was a home for John Baxter and also Dr Coke on his visits. Their granddaughters wrote that the Clearkleys 'were united to the Methodists and trained up the youngest members of the family... in the fear of God and the observance of religious duties' and added that Frances had 'died in the faith.'

With the family having 'pecuniary means', two of the four girls received a very superior education in England where they listened to the ministry of John Wesley.⁷⁴ The second Clearkley daughter was **Elizabeth** who remained a spinster after her intended husband, Charles Matthews, was drowned on his passage from England to Antigua. The third daughter, **Lydia**, was also pious and intelligent. She acted as an instructress to her nieces Ann and Elizabeth Hart, but developed dementia in her later years.

Amongst those who welcomed Dr Coke to St Kitts in January 1787 was a Mrs Seaton, a Mulatto gentlewoman, and her daughter Molly.⁷⁵ She had started life in Antigua as a servant girl and spent time in the house of a Mrs Francis Turner, a convert of Nathaniel Gilbert. Lydia (Seaton) 'was converted to God in the house of Mr Clearkley, in Antigua.'⁷⁶ It was Mr Richard Cable, a Mulatto gentleman, who offered the invitation to Coke and gave him hospitality, although in fact, he was lodging in Seaton's

⁷⁰ Thomas Coke, *Address to the Pious and Benevolent...* (London: Mar. 13, 1786), found in Davies, George and Rupp, *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, 4 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1988) 4:209-10.

⁷¹ Coke, *History West Indies*, 2:259, 268.

⁷² Coke, *History West Indies*, 2:268.

⁷³ Letters of Ann Gilbert, June 1 1804 and Elizabeth Hart Thwaites to Preachers now in Europe, May 5 1804. MMS Archives, WIC, 1:31, 37.

⁷⁴ Horsford, *Voice from West Indies*, p.193.

⁷⁵ Thomas Coke, *History West Indies*, 3:56, Vickers, *Coke's Journals*, p.81.

⁷⁶ Horsford, *Voice from West Indies*, p.193.

house.⁷⁷ He was a printer and the original proprietor of the 'St Christopher Advertiser.' **Grace**, the fourth Clearkley daughter went to St Kitts and married Richard Cable in 1789.

After her husband died, Grace returned to Antigua where she resided in the family home for many years and was active in promoting education. However, when she died on October 21 1854 at the age of 91, her funeral service was conducted in St Kitts. The Rev James Cox summed up her character: Grace Clearkley Cable 'was a woman of masculine understanding, of great uprightness, energy, and decision of character, with much suavity of manners and cheerfulness of spirit.' In her long and eventful life she was subject to many afflictions but was sustained by Divine grace.⁷⁸

Hart-Clearkley marriage

The first-born daughter of Timothy and Frances Clearkley was **Ann**, described as of sterling piety, natural ability and excellent character. Ann Clearkley married Barry Conyers Hart on August 30 1766, after a Licence was granted for a mixed-race couple to be married in the parish church of St John's.

Barry Conyers Hart: freed mulatto and yeoman.

John Hart, the former Governor of Maryland, arrived in Antigua as Captain-General of the Leeward Islands on December 19 1721. He was born in Ireland where the name Conyers is found in County Limerick. There is no family link to John Hart of Antigua who had one son Gratianus from his first marriage and no issue from his second. Barry Conyers Hart appears to be the child of a slave woman and therefore a mulatto. A minor in 1759, Barry's legacy on attaining twenty one years was £200 (st) and £50 (cy) per annum. Due to his father's social standing, Barry received a good education and as an able writer took part in newspaper controversies and contributed his own compositions to the 'Poet's Corner.'

Barry inherited a number of properties and slaves from friends and employers and was designated a yeoman, a small landowner engaged in agriculture.⁷⁹ Luffman's map of Antigua showed that Barry Conyers Hart owned Harts Plantation in 1788 (together with Royals this was 208 acres.)⁸⁰ He moved comfortably in the social circle of planters and merchants as well as with slaves and the free coloured and black. His name frequently appears as a Witness, Executor or Swearer of Wills in the period 1779-1790 and he also signed manumission papers. He was said to have 'spoiled all the negroes' and was a 'restlessly dissatisfied slave holder.'⁸¹

John Baxter wrote that the day after he arrived on Friday April 3rd, 'I went to St John's and waited on Mr H_ who received me kindly. The next day Mrs H_ went with me to see our friends.'⁸² Barry Conyers Hart was most likely this Mr H_ and his wife Ann Mrs H_.

On December 9 1782 and for the sum of £360, Barry Hart purchased a corner lot on Tanner and Temple Streets in St John's from John Nanton, a mariner and free Negro. This property was 70 feet in front and depth each way and contained 'several tenements and houses thereon built and erected with out houses offices buildings and appurtenances.' The Wesleyans paid to Hart a deposit of £200 on April 5 1783; the loan with 5 percent interest being paid off in April 1785.

Baxter had previously complained that he was 'at a loss to find trustees for our house... how to proceed'

⁷⁷ Findlay, G.G. & Holdsworth, W.W., *History of the Wesleyan Missionary Society*, 5 vols. (London: Methodist Church Office, 1921-4) 2:39 citing *Missionary Notices*, June 1843.

⁷⁸ Horsford, *Voice from West Indies*, pp. 191-3.

⁷⁹ Oliver, 3:225 and, 2:67, etc.

⁸⁰ Oliver, 3:208.

⁸¹ Horsford, *Voice from West Indies*, p. 191-2.

⁸² John Baxter to John Wesley, April 22 1778, AM 11 (1786) 383. Quoted by Coke, *History of West Indies* 2:428 where he writes that it was 'Mr H_' that went with him to see the friends.

and 'I have not one white man beside myself in Connexion.'⁸³ However, Barry Conyers Hart, Dealer,⁸⁴ and Elizabeth his wife, owners of the property, *Conveyed in Trust under Deed Poll* to John Baxter, Gentleman, Mary Gilbert, widow, William Gilbert, Esquire, William Usher, Taylor, and Nicholas Lynch, Merchant.⁸⁵ This was 'for settling and establishing the preaching House agreeably to the plan of Terms of the Preaching House in England.' John Baxter preached in this first purpose-built Methodist chapel in the West Indies on 8 November 1785 and Dr Coke preached in what became known as 'Baxter's Chapel' on Christmas Day in 1786.⁸⁶

William Gilbert was the youngest son of Nathaniel III born in 1763. He was in Antigua 1783-86 when he served as clerk to the Assembly. William Gilbert was author of 'The Hurricane.' Two years after the Deed was signed, a Mary Usher who was a widow held two parcels of land in Church Street, St John's.⁸⁷ In 1782, Nicholas Lynch married Lucy Allen (a Mestee) in St John's Church where the couple had seven children baptised between 1783 and 1798. Lucy was left lands and tenements in Nevis St., St John's, with Nicholas Lynch and Barry C. Hart as Executors, Will sworn Nov. 23 1785.⁸⁸ The Lynches were 'attendants on the ministry of the first Wesleyan Missionaries – Messrs Gilbert, Baxter, Dr Coke and others. Their house was the constant resort of these servants of God.'⁸⁹ See further re their first child Elizabeth, born a year after the marriage.

According to Luffman, as 1787 dawned Antigua's economy was in a poor state:

Most of the landowners are in poverty, from a series of bad crops, previous to the last three years. In fact, the greater part of the estates, in this island, are in trust, or under mortgage to the merchants of London, Liverpool and Bristol. The resident merchants suffer considerable losses from bad debts, and are not in a small degree hurt by that bane of honourable commerce, smuggling.⁹⁰

In 1783, Trinidad's population was 2,763, composed of 2,032 Amerindians, 310 black slaves, 295 free non-whites and 126 of European ancestry. A Spanish Cedula of Population offered 32 acres (129,000m²) of land to each Roman Catholic and half as much to each slave. In 1797 Britain annexed Trinidad (ceded 1802 by Treaty of Amiens.)

Barry Conyers Hart is not mentioned in Oliver's History after 1790 and around 1800 he took advantage of the better prospects in Trinidad. His 'circumstances having suffered a reverse he went to Trinidad in the hope of retrieving his affairs.'⁹¹ If Barry Conyers was of a similar age to his half-brother Gratianus (baptised September 2 1747) he would have been about fifty when he went to Trinidad. After a few years he returned to Antigua where he died and was buried on December 2 1808, aged about 58.

The Hart sisters: mixed-race pioneers in education and social welfare⁹²

⁸³ John Baxter to John Wesley, June 10 1782, AM 13 (1790).

⁸⁴ William Sunter, Chairman of the Leeward Islands District found a note in Antigua archives that Hart was an 'Antique Dealer', *Methodist Archivist*, Methodist Historical Society of the West Indies, 9th issue (12 January 1962) 4-5.

⁸⁵ This merchant could have been the Nicholas Lynch who was a storekeeper in St John's in 1782 and 1788: Oliver, 1:62, 2:208.

⁸⁶ Oliver, 1:cxxvii.

⁸⁷ Oliver, 2:121.

⁸⁸ Oliver, 2:210, 3:348

⁸⁹ Horsford, *Voice from West Indies*, p.106.

⁹⁰ Luffman, Letter XII, Feb. 15 1787: Oliver, 1:cxxxi.

⁹¹ Horsford, *Voice from West Indies* p.196.

⁹² A detailed study is given by Moira Ferguson, ed., *The Hart Sisters: Early African Caribbean Writers, Evangelicals and Radicals* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993). In this work, there are a number of historical errors concerning Methodist beginnings in the West Indies.

Barry and Ann Hart had six children, including Ann (born July 31 1767) and Elizabeth (baptised May 1771). Barry was described as 'an affectionate Father who ever watched with the tenderest solicitude over the morals of his Children.'⁹³ The family house was used for worship. After Ann died in November 1780, Barry married Elizabeth and a further eight children were born between 1785 and 1798. Both Ann and Elizabeth shared in the education of these much younger children.

At the Gilbert's Estate the sisters were presented to Dr Coke in 1786 as persons farther advanced in religion than they really were. Although Coke gave them membership tickets, it was not until later that they experienced 'life and liberty' through the life, ministry and death of the Rev Bartholomew McDonald, who lived in their house at Popeshead 24 December 1797 to 4 December 1798.⁹⁴

Ann and Elizabeth first gave instructions to their father's slaves at Popeshead. As the daughter of a slave-holder, at the age of twenty two Elizabeth was writing about her concern with the welfare of slaves, including a letter to a brother in Christ.⁹⁵ She examined philosophically and theologically the practice of taking Africans from their native land, referring to owners who were blinded by self-interest: 'It is sometimes in morals as in optics: the eye and the object come too near to answer the end of vision.' She particularly abhorred the practice of separating slave families, citing mothers of ten who never had the satisfaction of calling one their own, or only children that were sold to another island. She looked forward to the noble attempt about to be made for the abolition of African slavery. Ferguson followed Horsford in seeing the Hart sisters as 'strong abolitionists', but although they wrote about faith, slavery and freedom, they were meliorationists rather than abolitionists.⁹⁶

Ann Hart

Having been denied a Licence, Banns were called on October 7 1798 for Ann Hart and John Gilbert, a nephew of Nathaniel III and naval storekeeper or Quartermaster of His Majesty's Dockyard at English Harbour (1781-93). The President of the Council tried to deter this union of a mixed-race couple and Baxter advised that John might be considered a lunatic. As an officer of the Militia he was threatened with a Court Martial and was forced to resign and the Governor General in St Kitts removed him as a Notary Public. John Horsford commented that had John seduced a coloured woman he would have been admired by the white community.⁹⁷ In contrast, this mixed-race marriage gained notoriety amongst the white population.⁹⁸ The day after their marriage, they found that the door of their house was painted half white and half black.

John had been refused membership by the Moravians at Popeshead on the grounds that they were exclusively a mission to the Negroes. Consequently, John joined the Methodist Society in St John's in 1794 and beginning in 1797 served as a Local Preacher for many years.⁹⁹ John was re-employed at the Naval Dockyard in 1803 and the couple became the chief supporters of the English Harbour Society, giving Christian witness and preaching to a mixed-race congregation. The Hart, Lynch and Gilbert families founded the English Harbour Circle that was committed to general reform, particularly amongst the mulatto or coloured population.

With her cousin Elizabeth Lynch (see below), Ann started one of the first West Indian (Sunday) schools in English Harbour in 1809. Ann built a school near Willoughby Bay in 1813, later naming it

⁹³ Elizabeth (Hart) Thwaites, to Preachers in Europe, May 5 1804.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Thwaites, 1804.

⁹⁵ Elizabeth Hart, *Letter to a Friend*, Popeshead, Antigua, 24 Oct 1794. Her letter was printed in John Horsford, *Voice from West Indies...* 223-234.

⁹⁶ Horsford, *Voice from West Indies*, p. 195. John Saillant, 'Antiguan Methodism and Antislavery Activity: Anne and Elizabeth Hart in the Eighteenth-Century Black Atlantic.' *American Society of Church History* (2000) 86.

⁹⁷ Horsford, *Voice from West Indies*, pp. 66-7.

⁹⁸ Journal Matthew Banks, 8 February 1827, David U. Farquhar, *Caribbean Adventures...* 228, fn 37.

⁹⁹ Journal Matthew Banks, Farquhar, *Caribbean Adventures...* 12.

'Bethesda.' Their charities included the English Harbour Poor Fund (1815) the Female Refuge Society in English Harbour (Feb. 1815) and the Distressed Female Friends Society in St John's (1817) and later the Ladies' Negro Education Society. The first church-related 'Youth Club' called Juvenile Society was founded by the Lynch sisters at the St John's Wesleyan Society (1816.) These pioneers worked tirelessly for the rescue of 'fallen' women and orphaned children.

Generally speaking, these practical and moralistic objectives were intended to 'shelter and educate those helpless female children who have been bereaved of their parents, or who are dependent upon such as from poverty or profligacy are unwilling or unlikely to train them up to useful occupations and virtuous courses'.¹⁰⁰ They gave notice to the Antiguan community that the mulattoes associated with the Wesleyans intended to halt abandonment, indifference and neglect and to inculcate the principles of virtue and godliness showing that self-respect could be achieved by a combination of pure religion and hard work.

Ann died on July 16 1833 and the respect of the whole Antiguan community was expressed in Ann Gilbert's obituary notice published in July of the following year: 'She first raised the tone of morals among the slave population of the island, and it is not too much to say that the foundation was laid by her for the advancement which her native island has made beyond the other islands of the West.'¹⁰¹

Elizabeth Hart

After her mother's death in November 1780, Elizabeth spent the next twenty years caring for and educating her eight half brothers and sisters. After their father went to Trinidad, in 1801 she went to live with her sister Ann in St John's, where she attended the Methodist Chapel, the United Brethren and the Established Church. She married Charles Thwaites, the son of an English clergyman in 1805 and moved to English Harbour where he was employed under her brother-in-law John Gilbert at the Naval Dockyard. Here, their house replaced the low-roofed hut hired John Gilbert for Methodist worship and was used until 1807 when the more superior accommodation of Gilbert was used. Together with her sister Mrs Ann Gilbert, Elizabeth Thwaites 'opened the first Sunday-school established in the West Indies, on a Sunday in September in the year 1809.'¹⁰² Ethnic diversity was seen with children were of all colours, statures and circumstances.

When the naval yard was reduced in 1817, Thwaites became a Catechist and Superintendent of Schools for the Church Missionary Society. He was dismissed in 1825 for refusing to give up his Methodist association. In 1817 a commodious school house was used until destroyed by a hurricane in 1848. From 1821, when the couple were residing at Hope estate that was in proximity to Lynch's estate, Elizabeth went back to English Harbour Sunday to teach Sunday school every weekend. Later, the couple located to Willoughby Bay in St Philip's parish and built the first school room in the West Indies for teaching slaves on the Lyon's estate. This was 44 feet x 16 feet plus a shed. A hut was used for worship until the congregation moved to the emancipation village of Freetown.

Extensive extracts of Charles Thwaites Journal are given by Horsford (207-8) with further information about Elizabeth (208-9). Horsford also gives letters written to Elizabeth Lynch (198-200) and a selection of hymns written by Elizabeth Hart Thwaites (217-22) and her obituary notice (214-5.)

Elizabeth Lynch

The daughter of Nicholas Lynch and Lucy (a Mestee), Elizabeth was born on February 1 1783 and baptised in St John's on 27th. She was part of a large and extensive family of Lynches. Her maternal

¹⁰⁰ *Seventh Annual Report of the Female Refuge Society*, Antigua (1822) and *Antigua Free Press*, 22 September 1831, cited in David U. Farquhar, *Missions and Society in the Leeward Islands, 1810-1850*. (Boston, MS: Mount Prospect Press, 1999) 84.

¹⁰¹ Ladies Negro Education Society, *Supplement to the Ninth Report, 1843*, Farquhar, *Missions and Society*, 101.

¹⁰² Horsford, *Voice from West Indies*, p. 197.

grandmother 'embraced the Gospel and felt its saving power' under the ministry of Nathaniel Gilbert and she rode horseback to the Gilbert's estate every Sunday. Elizabeth's mother Lucy had become a member of the Wesleyan body at an early age and her father at a later period of his life.

Barry Conyers Hart was Elizabeth Lynch's uncle through his mother Ann Clearkley, so Ann and Elizabeth Hart were cousins. Brought up in the domestic circle of virtue and religion, at the age of seventeen (1806) Elizabeth recognised the need for personal change under the ministry of the Rev. Mr. Murdoch and experienced 'the love of God shed abroad in her heart.'¹⁰³

Horsford gives great detail about Elizabeth's graces and virtues under seven headings.¹⁰⁴ In summary these were

- Piety: the fruits of grace. 'She deplored – as did her beloved cousins Mrs Gilbert and Mrs Thwaites – a growing tendency to indulge in gaudy and extravagant dress, unbecoming the spirituality of true religion so manifestly inconsistent with the word of God and the rules of Methodism.'
- Regular attendance at the ordinances of religion including daily prayer and reading the word of God, family devotions and public worship, week-night services and Thanksgiving and Quarterly Days.
- Extensive and unwearied benevolence. 'The love of Christ constrained her' to ceaselessly visit the sick, aged and afflicted. She was the first female Superintendent of the Sunday school in the old chapel from 1815 to 1848 and frequented the most dark and degraded streets of the town seeking children for the Sabbath school at the Point chapel or Ebenezer. The Juvenile Society met under her roof. Elizabeth also collected for the missionary cause and read the missionary periodicals.
- Patient endurance of sufferings: her motto was 'no surrender!' to 'vituperate persecution.' During long and harassing sicknesses she breathed the spirit of prayer.
- Love for the doctrines and discipline and institutions of Methodism. As a Class Leader for many years she exhorted, admonished and comforted her members and visited the sick and aged.
- She was a keen advocate of the Temperance Movement.
- Hundreds were trained in Elizabeth's Seminary for educating females not only in Antigua but also from other islands. It was estimated that 132 girls had boarded and lodged under her maternal care. She was a pioneer of literary improvement through hymns, scripture, poems and other publications.

Elizabeth Lynch died at the age of 66 on August 26 1849.

A number of mixed race Methodist families were related: the Gilberts, Harts, Clearkleys and Cables. Ethnic factors are therefore seen in the missionary enterprise and gender issues are illustrated in the initiative of women.

Class Leaders in the Missionary Enterprise

Baxter reported the deaths of two mulatto Leaders in **Antigua**. Christopher Nibbs was an estate slave who was for five years a good Leader until he died at the age of thirty six. John Cory was a slave and a tailor by trade who worked independently and paid his owner one dollar a week. He was converted to Methodism shortly after Baxter's arrival and was Class Leader and Exhorter for twelve years.¹⁰⁵ Both of these mixed-race slaves were instrumental in bringing many from the error of their ways to the good ways of God. Horsford mentions many lay leaders in *Voice from the West Indies*.

¹⁰³ Information here is taken from Horsford, *Voice from West Indies*, pp. 106-111.

¹⁰⁴ Horsford, *Voice from West Indies*, pp. 107-116.

¹⁰⁵ John Baxter to Dr Coke, May 24 1794, AM 23 (1803) 265. Quoted by Coke, *History West Indies*, 2:445-6.

Dr Thomas Coke appointed Black Harry, an American Negress and a black called Samuel as Class Leaders in **Statia** in January 1787.¹⁰⁶ These and other Leaders maintained a persecuted church for thirteen years before a minister was permitted to reside.

The first Class Leaders in **Demerara** appointed by William Claxton in 1811 were 'Mr Adams, a Married (sea) [Capt]an for the men, and Frances Ouckama an old Statia Methodist, for the women'.¹⁰⁷ A Mr Adams had arrived from England with John Davies in 1809, but the context shows that the first Methodists were African or mixed-race. As a slave, Frances may have taken her name from Dutch Ouckamas who were found in Demerara and Essequibo, for example, the Ouckama who was Clerk to the Court of Policy. The Methodists waited until 1815 for a resident minister.

With the arrival of William Hammett in **Jamaica** in August 1789, the first Society Class in Hannah Town was formed of eight persons. Mrs Mary Akle Smith was appointed as Leader for the white, black, coloured, bond and free members. Mary Wilkinson was a free coloured woman who called together the slaves in her locality of Manchioneal for religious instruction. Because she solemnised marriages in the most Christian way she could she was compelled to flee to Kingston where she joined the Parade Chapel and became a most useful and resourceful leader.¹⁰⁸

In 1807 the Kingston Corporation passed an ordinance prohibiting the holding of religious meetings after sunset and before sunrise (the time when slaves could attend.) The Parade Methodist chapel in Kingston was closed for seven years by order of the Court. 'Father Harris', one of the original eight members, was now a Leader. With the Chapel closed, Wilkinson met her class in the chapel yard after dark and at five o'clock in the morning in different parts of the city. She also worshipped at the Parish Church, where, after the morning service she would go around from pew to pew and counsel members of the congregation.¹⁰⁹

The first Methodists in **Barbados** were Mr Button, a merchant converted by Dr Coke in Baltimore and Irish Militia at the Garrison. The Rev William James Shrewsbury supplied in Demerara after the deaths of two Ministers in Mahaica in November 1822. In 1824, repercussions from the martyrdom of John Smith in Demerara caused riots in Barbados where the Bridgetown Chapel was pulled down on October 19th and the Shrewsburys were forced to flee to St Vincent. Ann Gill opened her home for Methodist worship and was hauled before the Magistrates for holding illegal services. Whilst waiting for the next Minister, she maintained the Class Meetings for four years and gave a parcel of land for the building of a new Chapel.¹¹⁰

Conclusion

Enough has been said to demonstrate that facets of gender and ethnicity were integrated '**in the beginning**' of the Methodist Missionary Enterprise. At the same time as illustrating that migration provided a model of mission, pioneers fulfilled the prophet Joel's anticipation that the Holy Spirit would empower slaves and servants in their witness and discipling. Whatever their ethnic origin or civil and social status, early Methodists were constrained to share the Gospel of redeeming grace – the love of Christ shed abroad in their hearts.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Vickers, *Coke's Journals*, 37.

¹⁰⁷ W.A. Claxton to Mr Whitworth, 16 Feb 1813. MMSA WIC fiche 1.

¹⁰⁸ Findlay & Holdsworth, 2:97.

¹⁰⁹ Donald S. Ching, ed., *Forever Beginning* (Kingston, Jamaica: Literature Department of the Jamaica District Methodist Church, 1960) 30, 35.

¹¹⁰ Methodist Church, *Kindling of the Flame* (La Penitence, BG: British Guiana District, 1960) 30-1.

¹¹¹ John Wesley's explanation of his 'Aldersgate experience' was 'I felt my heart strangely warmed.'

Harry, possibly a domestic slave, was transported from the United States to St Kitts; Lydia, formerly a servant girl, moved from Antigua to St Kitts; Mrs Webley from Antigua went to Dominica; former slaves Claxton, a butler, and Powell, migrated from Nevis to Demerara; Kitty, a domestic slave from St Bartholomew's was carried to Montserrat. Caucasian women of European ancestry and Creole birth pioneered Methodist work in Antigua and St Vincent.

Consequently, Methodists of European, African and mixed ethnic descent transcended the prevailing barriers of race and social status in Plantation Society and the centres of commerce. The pioneering work of these men and women preceded the appointment of missionaries and supplied leadership in the absence of ministers. Eventually, the British Missionary Committee and Society adopted the Bands and Classes and gave them formal structure with Societies, Circuits and Districts, Ministers, Local Preachers and Exhorters. This institutionalisation of spontaneous and informal Methodist work sidelined the laity to subservient roles.

In the passage of time, the cultural superiority of Western imperialism and male chauvinism marginalised the leadership of women, except as Leaders of the Women's Classes. Separate Men's and Women's Classes continued down to the latter part of the 20th century in West Indian Methodism. It was not until the mid-twentieth century that women reappeared as Local Preachers or Society and Circuit Stewards and indigenous ministers assumed the leadership role of Chairmen of Districts. Much later, women became ordained Ministers of the M.C.C.A and in the 21st century they are found as District Presidents.