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A table of contents for the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* can be found here:

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Proceedings OF THE Wesley Historical Society

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METHODIST FOREIGN MISSIONS, THE FIRST HALF-CENTURY¹

(*The Wesley Historical Society Lecture, 1986*)²

THE phrase “foreign missions”, though unacceptable today as a way of referring to the Church’s witness overseas, was commonly used to describe early Methodist initiatives outside the British Isles. Such was the case in the period under review, from the 1760s until the formal creation of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) in 1818.

1: The Significance of 1786

Allen Birtwhistle has written of three phases in Methodism’s missionary response.³ The *earliest phase* lasted until 1786, and was characterised by the efforts of individuals who took initiatives without official backing or support from the home church. The *second phase* continued until 1813 with the Methodist Conference assuming responsibility for foreign missions and with Thomas Coke as its Agent or Superintendent. The *third phase* was hastened by Coke’s departure for Ceylon and the need to develop formal structures through which Methodism could continue to be involved in foreign missions.

¹ For reasons that will become apparent the half-century referred to differs from that covered by N. A. Birtwhistle in the first chapter of R. Davies, A. R. George, E. G. Rupp (edd.), *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Epworth Press, London 1983, iii, pp. 1-43.

² It is an honour to have been invited to deliver the Wesley Historical Society Lecture. The Methodist Church Overseas Division (Methodist Missionary Society) facilitated research, and the staff at the School of Oriental and African Studies (where the Methodist overseas archives are housed) were, as ever, helpful and efficient. Thanks are due to certain individuals who gave special support and encouragement—Cyril Davey, Esther Fyffe, Dr. David Hempton, Shelagh Livingstone, Rosemary Seton, Margaret Taggart, Professor Andrew Walls and John Vickers. In these notes MMSA stands for overseas archives of the Methodist Church held at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Where appropriate, box numbers in the archival collection are given in brackets.

³ *Proceedings*, xxx, p. 28.

Accordingly, an Auxiliary Missionary Society was established in the Leeds District in October 1813. This District initiative was quickly followed by others and prepared the way for the creation of the WMMS.

Birtwhistle regards the events of 1786 as of vital importance. Prior to the Conference, Coke had written *An Address to the Pious and Benevolent, proposing an Annual Subscription for the Support of Missionaries* etc. to which Wesley contributed a preface. This received the approval of Conference and Coke set sail for North America accompanied by three missionaries appointed to Antigua and Newfoundland. The Constitution of what is now known as the Methodist Church Overseas Division (Methodist Missionary Society) also recognises the significance of 1786, seeing it as "the beginning of Methodist overseas missions", with the Methodist Conference itself becoming responsible from that date for "the initiation, direction and support of overseas missions".

It is against this background that Edgar Thompson expressed the hope that 1986 would be observed as the bicentenary of Methodist overseas missions.⁴

Without in any way detracting from the significance of 1786, it should be recognised that the issues are not as clear-cut as the Constitution of the Overseas Division and its subsequent interpretations would suggest. For example, in tracing the beginnings of Methodist foreign missions to 1786, Birtwhistle and Thompson looked for two main distinguishing marks, namely official and collective efforts in the name of Methodism, and initiatives from Britain towards those who would then have been regarded as 'the heathen overseas'. Although both were certainly evident by 1786, such criteria are not flexible enough to do full justice to Methodist missionary endeavour in the late eighteenth century. The questions who are "the heathen", where is "overseas" and when can Methodism be said to have first acted collectively and officially are all in need of fresh answers. For example, in October 1735 John Wesley, about to sail for Georgia, wrote to his brother Samuel at Westminster School:

Assure yourself, dear brother, you are even now called to the converting of *heathens* as well as I. So many souls are committed to your charge by God . . . You are to instruct them, not only in the beggarly elements of Greek and Latin, but much more in the gospel.⁵

Even when it is acknowledged that "the heathen" have *normally* been understood in line with Thompson in terms of "non-Christians overseas", it would not be true to say that Methodist foreign missions have had such non-Christians exclusively in mind. Coke's appeal for financial support in 1786, for example, was for mission on a wide front, with specific mention being made of the Highlands and Islands

⁴ E. W. Thompson, *The Methodist Missionary Society; Its Origin and Name*, London 1955, p.27.

⁵ *Letters*, i, p.192f. The emphasis is mine.

of Scotland, the Channel Islands and Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Quebec, as well as the West Indies. In the *Minutes of Conference* for 1798 Nova Scotia, Gibraltar and the West Indies are all bracketed together in answer to a question concerned with "foreign missions". This underlines the point that the Conference and the WMMS have not traditionally limited their concern to "heathen", in the sense of non-Christian, countries.

William Arthur, in addressing the Anniversary Meeting of the WMMS in 1848, spoke of the threefold nature of the Missionary Society and of the inclusive view of Methodist foreign missions :

It is not merely a Missionary Society to the Heathen ; but it is, first, a Colonial Missionary Society ; it is, again, a Continental and European Society ; and it is, finally, and most largely of all, a Missionary Society to the Heathen.⁶

It is for this reason, Arthur contended, that the WMMS was heir to the official initiatives in sending preachers to North America. There is a case therefore for concluding that Methodist missions began officially in 1769 with the appointment by Conference of Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor as the first preachers in America. In the same way, Arthur argued, the WMMS was involved in the colonies – in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand – and in nominally Christian countries such as France, although its major involvement was acknowledged as being among the heathen in non-Christian countries.

Similarly, Robert Alder, one of the WMMS Secretaries, claimed in 1842 that Methodist foreign missions commenced with the sending of the first preachers to America in 1769. He described the events of 1786 as "the second important Missionary movement" among the Wesleyans.⁷ Even earlier, one of the speakers at the formation of the District MMS in Leeds in 1813 said that the first missionaries had been appointed by the Conference in 1769.⁸

Thompson's point, that the American preachers were sent only to minister to their fellow Methodists and kinsfolk overseas, is difficult to sustain. Their "pressing call" to which Conference responded certainly came from fellow Methodists, but the same could equally be said of beginnings in many other parts of the world including so-called "heathen" countries. It is difficult to see how else a start could have been made overseas apart from a cry for help from like-minded people. Once begun, however, the work was not to be restricted to fellow Methodists. This was often emphasised in correspondence between the WMMS and its missionaries. John Beecham, one of the

⁶ MMSA, *Missionary Notices*, xiv (1848), p.103.

⁷ R. Alder, *Wesleyan Missions : Their Progress Stated* etc., London 1842, p.1-2.

⁸ J. Nichols (ed.), *A Report of the Principal Speeches delivered at the Formation of the MMS for the Leeds District* etc., London 1840, p.36. Other speakers, however, ascribed this development to the year 1786.

WMMS Secretaries, wrote to John McKenny as he was about to take up work in New South Wales in 1835 :

The funds of the Socty. are especially designed for the support of Missions among the Heathen, & missionaries cannot be multiplied in an English Colony where the labours among the Settlers are unconnected with any efforts on behalf of the Aboriginal Inhabitants, excepting on the principle of their support being chiefly raised by those among whom they exercise their ministry. If a hopeful mission cd. only be commenced among those people, whose deep degradation excites a peculiar sympathy in their behalf, our Mission in New South Wales wd. have a much stronger hold on the public mind in this country.⁹

Experiences in New South Wales taught McKenny that the relationship between “colonial” and “heathen” missions was even more complex than he had been led to believe. As he wrote in 1840 :

I fully admit the claims of the poor Heathen, and of places which may justly be regarded as in one sense more Missionary in their character than New South Wales ; but . . . here we are in a new world, rising rapidly into immense importance . . . Our Colony will form the centre of this new world, and will be the fountain of legislative and executive authority ; and from this land will go forth the law of the Lord, or else the despot’s mandate, which will bind men to superstition and idolatry. It will then, I trust, appear to you that the occupation of as many places as we can in this country, is closely connected with the success of the Gospel in the islands of the South Seas.¹⁰

McKenny’s dread was of Roman Catholic influence. His endeavours to outstrip it were typical of the period.

Thus the year 1786 is undoubtedly an important milestone in the evolution of Methodist missions, but too much should not be claimed for it notwithstanding the substantial benefits received from bicentennial celebrations this year.

2: Wesley’s World Parish

Perhaps no words of Wesley are more frequently quoted than his claim, “I look upon all the world as my parish”. The background to his words was the controversy over Wesley’s conduct of services without the permission of the incumbent of a parish and without episcopal authority. Wesley defended his position by appealing to scriptural imperatives, God’s call and the supreme importance of the proclamation of the gospel.

I look upon all the world as my parish ; thus far I mean, that in whatever part of it I am I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare, unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation.¹¹

Popular use has transformed these words into a slogan to encap-

⁹ MMSA MSS, Beecham to McKenny, 9 October 1835 (24).

¹⁰ MMSA, *Missionary Notices*, ix (1840), p.241.

¹¹ *Letters*, i, p.286.

sulate Wesley's commitment to the world-wide mission of the Church. However, given that his own efforts were restricted to the British Isles following his evangelical conversion, some have questioned the seriousness of Wesley's commitment to foreign missions.

It has been suggested that Wesley's bitter sense of failure in Georgia, coupled with natural conservatism, led him to respond negatively or at least cautiously to some of Coke's endeavours for foreign missions. For example, when two young princes from Calabar on the Guinea Coast who had been taken to America as slaves, escaped and returned to Africa via Britain, they asked for Methodist missionaries to be sent to them. Coke responded positively to their appeal, circulating the call for help among some of the preachers. Wesley, however, wrote disapprovingly to one preacher: "You have nothing at present to do in Afric (*sic*). Convert the heathen in Scotland."¹² The Conference of 1778 duly reflected Wesley's views by deciding not to back the call. Not did Wesley support Coke's *Plan of the Society for the Establishment of Missions among the Heathens* in 1783. He also resisted the idea of a mission to India at that time.

Such responses should be seen primarily, however, in terms of Wesley's judgement on procedure and strategy rather than a definitive attitude to foreign missions. He would have disapproved of the degree of autonomy to be accorded to the Missionary Society envisaged in Coke's *Plan*, and events were soon to make clear that Wesley's thoughts, which included a significant role for Coke, were taken up with the West rather than the East at that time. The need of the hour was to consolidate the position of Methodism in America. This is the background to an entry in Wesley's *Journal* in 1784:

I desired all our preachers to meet and consider thoroughly the proposal of sending missionaries to the East Indies. After the matter had been fully considered, we were unanimous in our judgement that we have no call thither yet, no invitation, no providential opening of any kind.¹³

The geographical focus of Wesley's work was extraordinarily wide by eighteenth-century standards, and his indirect influence on foreign missions was enormous. This was expressed chiefly through the theological truths he affirmed, the contacts he made, his commissioning of Thomas Coke as the Superintendent of Methodist missions, and his acceptance of the need for American Methodism to plot its own course. His own experiences in Georgia, the special interest he took in Blacks, and his concern for the termination of slavery, were all important elements in helping to shape the pattern of Methodism's missionary response.

In a study of the relations between British, Canadian, and American Methodism during Wesley's lifetime, Frank Baker has drawn attention to Wesley's remarkable co-ordinating ministry. Apart from the

¹² *Ibid.*, vi, p.316.

¹³ *Journal*, vi, p.476.

supply of manpower, his main support was given in letters. Through correspondence he strove, with considerable success, to hold all the preachers together as a family of evangelist-pastors, advising them in their complex and lonely tasks and enabling them to feel part of a co-ordinated worldwide venture. From the last two decades of his life, evidence survives of his correspondence with dozens of Methodist leaders in the New World, with many extant examples. He had, Baker notes, four correspondents in Newfoundland, five in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, one in Prince Edward Island, four in the West Indies and at least twenty-eight in the United States.¹⁴

Wesley was convinced of his providential role in these matters. One of the pioneer group of missionaries to go to Asia wrote of Wesley that he was a "lover of mankind on the most extensive scale" and that "his heart was open to every member of the human family".¹⁵ Methodists, to Wesley, were "one people" throughout the world. He was therefore able to exult in 1785, the year before some would acknowledge Methodist foreign missions had begun :

How strangely the grain of mustard seed, planted about fifty years ago, has grown up. It has spread through all Great Britain and Ireland ; the Isle of Wight and the Isle of Man ; then to America from the Leeward Islands, through the whole continent, into Canada and Newfoundland. And the societies, in all these parts, walk by one rule.¹⁶

There is therefore much to substantiate the claims that within Protestantism, Methodists were among the first to display a worldwide concern for mission, and that the Wesleyan revival was essentially a reaction against narrowing concepts of the gospel and of the Church, "whether Calvinistic, sacerdotal, nationalist, or particularist of whatever kind".¹⁷ The movement Wesley initiated was bound to spread, given its emphasis on fellowship, mobility, evangelical conviction without dogmatism, personal renewal and social commitment, lay involvement and an awareness of being called and sent out by God.

3: Thomas Coke, Methodism's Foreign Minister

There is no denying the central position occupied by Coke in early Methodist missions. It is reported that Wesley once exhorted him to "go out, and preach the Gospel to all the world!"¹⁸ The words were taken to heart, with Coke thoroughly justifying such titles as the Father of Methodist missions and "the Foreign Minister of

¹⁴ *The Bulletin of the Committee on Archives and History of the United Church of Canada*, no.28, 1979, pp.5-21.

¹⁵ W. M. Harvard, *A Narrative of the Establishment and Progress of the Mission to Ceylon and India*, London 1823, p.1.

¹⁶ *Journal*, vii, p.59.

¹⁷ G. G. Findlay and W. W. Holdsworth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, London 1921, i, p.31.

¹⁸ J. A. Vickers, *Thomas Coke, Apostle of Methodism*, London 1969, i, p.33.

Methodism".¹⁹ The Conference variously referred to him as its Delegate, its Agent and its General Superintendent of missions.

Coke is not above criticism. Wesley had reason to question his maturity and judgement while still entrusting him with responsible and delicate tasks. He has been accused of personal ambition and of being too deferential to people in authority. Most serious from a mission point of view are allegations about Coke's "autocratic rule",²⁰ his "administrative ineptitude"²¹ and his defective assessment of character.

Certainly he resisted, even resented, what he saw as interference in his control of missions by Conference-appointed committees. An authoritative source comments that he was, in effect, "the dictator of the foreign work of Methodism."²² Some have argued that this is why the establishment of a more effective missionary instrument was long delayed within Methodism.²³

There is much too, to substantiate the claim that Coke was administratively weak. His imprecise financial accounts were frequently a matter of concern, but it needs to be recognised that the problems confronting him were many and complex. Communication was slow and unreliable and missionaries on the ground, however zealous, often lacked all-round ability and experience. Inflation, caused by the Napoleonic Wars, was already an adverse factor in 1804, compounding other financial difficulties. As the momentum of the work increased and fresh openings arose, new responsibilities inevitably placed unbearable strains on resources. Nothing can excuse the fact, however, that Coke's premature death left the small pioneer group of missionaries entirely without practical guidelines on how to conduct the Asia mission.²⁴

Coke's weakness in assessing character was undoubtedly a damaging factor in the work. Those whom he selected sometimes failed to live up to expectations as in the first mission to Sierra Leone in 1796, which had to be speedily abandoned. Only a month after the missionaries arrived Coke was informed that :

most of the persons you chose for the propagation of the Gospel in the Foulah country, in Africa, have manifested to the world that they are strangers to the power of it themselves.²⁵

¹⁹ Quoted in G. G. Findlay and M. G. Findlay, *Wesley's World Parish*, London 1913, i, p.14.

²⁰ R. H. Martin in *Proceedings*, xlii, p.81.

²¹ R. H. Martin, 'The Pan-Evangelical Impulse in Britain, 1795-1830' (Ph.D. thesis, Oxford 1974), p.84.

²² Findlay and Holdsworth, *op. cit.*, ii, p.61.

²³ B. Semmel, *The Methodist Revolution*, London 1974, p.157f.

²⁴ N. W. Taggart, *The Irish in World Methodism 1760-1900*, London 1986, p.104f.

²⁵ W. T. Smith, 'An Appraisal of Thomas Coke's Africa Mission, 1796-1811' in *Church History*, September 1971, vol. xxxix, no.3, p.8.

Not for the first (or last) time mission was marked as much by human weakness as by divine grace. On other occasions also, Coke's ebullient spirit glossed over the shortcomings of others.

Much, however, has rightly been pointed out on the positive side. Coke's vision, energy, and enthusiasm were boundless. Once seized of an idea, he would not let go, despite opposition and indifference. The Asia mission, which in the end claimed his life, was a dream cherished for thirty years. Coke was no armchair missionary theorist or executive. His personal income was placed at the disposal of the mission when others did not respond. At times he wore himself out begging for support. He crossed the Atlantic eighteen times and visited the West Indies on four occasions. His life was at risk more than once on his travels and he died while crossing the Indian Ocean on the way to India and Ceylon. Cyril Davey's conclusion is appropriate. "No man in Methodism had a greater significance . . . for the Missionary movement than Thomas Coke."²⁶

4: Aspects of Methodist Missions

(i) Missionary Motives

The *glory of God* is the supreme motive of missions. Individuals are not only required to honour God themselves. They are also obliged to do all in their power to make it possible for others to learn of Him and to glorify Him. Susanna Wesley recognised this element at work in Ziegenbalg and Plütschau, the early Protestant missionaries in India, whose story influenced her so decisively in 1712.²⁷ Wesley acknowledged God's glory as the ultimate test affecting all important decisions in life, associating with it "the good of men" when writing to his father in 1734 on whether he should succeed him at Epworth or remain at Oxford.²⁸ As Francis Asbury sailed from England in 1771 he wrote that he was prepared to suffer "for the glory of God, and the good of souls".²⁹ On finding his colleagues in America too city-bound for his liking, he made it clear that he was prepared to press the claims of itinerancy even if it led to disagreement. Too much was at stake to do otherwise. "I am in trouble, and more trouble is at hand . . . I have nothing to seek but the glory of God", he wrote.³⁰

Those committed to mission believed that they had discerned *God's activity* and had heard his *call*. His was the initiative, theirs the response. When Wesley justified his world-parish stance, he affirmed God's call. "The cause of Missions" is "the cause of God", claimed one of the speakers at the formation of the Leeds MMS.³¹ "We act under the influence of God Himself", declared Richard

²⁶ Quoted in Vickers, op. cit., p.2.

²⁷ Findlay and Holdsworth, op. cit., i, p.29.

²⁸ *Letters*, i, p.171.

²⁹ E. T. Clarke (ed.), *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, London 1958, i, p.5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.10.

³¹ Nichols (ed.), op. cit., p.23.

Watson. No stronger motive was required, he believed. It is sufficient that Christians be "the agents of His plans, and the almoners of His bounty."³²

This leads directly to the motive of *benevolence*. Practical piety – doing good to others, and bearing witness to God's love by responding to people's needs – was an essential ingredient in Methodism from the beginning. "Individual responsibility" and "organised philanthropy" belonged together as expressions of eighteenth-century religion when transformed by the Evangelical Revival. According to Watson, it is "the spirit of our religion ; the *influence* of the God of Love, the Father of the human family" which excites the Christian's pity, brings home to him "the miseries of Heathens", and prompts him to take practical initiatives to help.³³ "The injured sons of Africa have an irresistible claim on our benevolence", stated a speaker at the formation of the Leeds MMS.³⁴ Coke had written along similar lines in 1808, pressing also the need for conversion :

As people possessing the means of grace, it is a duty incumbent on us, that we make use of every exertion to promote that important end. As men in a state of nature, they have a claim upon our benevolence which we dare not deny ; and humanity and public interest lend their assistance to urge the demand.³⁵

Benevolence broadened into a concern for the advancement of "civilization". "Civilization always flourishes most", claimed Coke, "where the gospel is preached in its purity".³⁶ Difficulties were to arise, however, when the one did not flow naturally from the other. The establishment by the WMMS of schools, printing presses, hospitals and agricultural projects was a later expression of this concern, with cultural insensitivity regrettably sometimes evident.

Related to the claim of benevolence was the Biblical demand for *justice*. This sometimes took the form of *restitution* or *reparation* for wrongs done through slavery and other forms of exploitation. Coke's appeal in 1786 on behalf of West Indian slaves was on grounds of justice as well as compassion :

These islands seem to have a peculiar claim on the inhabitants of *Britain*. Our country is enriched by the labours of the poor slaves who cultivate the soil, and surely the least compensation we can make them, is to endeavour to enrich them in return with the riches of grace.³⁷

Although Coke saw slavery as "but a small thing"³⁷ compared with

³² *Ibid.*, p.43-44.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.44.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.27. In a thorough discussion of motivation it would have to be admitted that benevolence was not always pure. It sometimes emerged from, and merged with, Western feelings of superiority.

³⁵ T. Coke, *A History of the West Indies*, Liverpool 1808, i, p.182f.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.179.

³⁷ Vickers, *op. cit.*, p.150.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.170.

the bondage of sin, it was nonetheless an evil he deplored. Part of the impulse to engage in mission, lay therefore in the desire to mitigate and remove the effects of the slave trade. God, wrote Coke in 1795, "will never withdraw his Hand until Civil & Religious Liberty be Established all over the Earth".³⁹ A speaker proposing one of the resolutions at the setting up of the Leeds MMS issued this challenge :

Does the religion of the Bible command restitution for wrongs, and reparation of injuries ? Upon that principle let us act ; and for the wounds which we have inflicted, let us offer the balm of the Gospel. Every motive . . . of humanity, benevolence, justice and Christianity impels us to send the word of life."⁴⁰

Sectarian and ecclesiological considerations, though not dominant, were present despite Coke's claim that his purpose was "to spread the Gospel, and not to aggrandize a sect".⁴¹ The official policy was that Methodist missionaries would not be placed in areas where the gospel already flourished, but a dominant Roman Catholic influence demanded a different response. On occasions Calvinism too was seen as a rival, for example in the West Indies.⁴² Part of the argument favouring the creation of the WMMS was an attempt to stem the flow of Methodist funds to the London Missionary Society.⁴³

The French Revolution excited an atmosphere of *millennial prophecy* (as to a lesser extent did the Napoleonic Wars), adding greatly to the urgency with which those committed to mission took up the task.

R. H. Martin has noted that following the Revolution, confidence was high that the "Anti-Christ would fall, civil and religious liberties would spread and bigotry would be suppressed for ever".⁴⁴ It was widely believed that Protestantism would replace Roman Catholicism in France and that Christianity would be brought to heathens and Jews. British evangelicals saw themselves as God's instruments to spread the gospel. Differences of opinion existed among them as to how and when the millennium was to be introduced, but there was a wide-spread conviction shared by evangelicals "that their own generation was either to be the last . . . or the first of the latter days".⁴⁵ John Vickers has pointed out that Coke's correspondence is marked by a millennium theme especially between 1790 and 1810.⁴⁶

(ii) Mission in One World

One of the criticisms levelled at Coke in his lifetime – and since – was that concern for people in distant lands led him to neglect those

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.170f.

⁴⁰ Nichols (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.27.

⁴¹ Coke, *A History of the West Indies*, iii, p.171.

⁴² Vickers, *op. cit.*, p.300ff.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.302f. See too R. H. Martin in *Proceedings*, xlii, p.81-86.

⁴⁴ R. H. Martin, 'The Pan-Evangelical' etc., p.52f.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.56.

⁴⁶ Vickers, *op. cit.*, p.330.

much nearer home. This is unfair and overlooks the fact that Coke was the pioneer of initiatives to those who lived in remote parts of Ireland, Scotland and Wales. In many other ways also he was significantly involved in the church's work "at home". Although fully alert to the claims of foreign missions, home missions were in his view "of infinite importance".⁴⁷ For example, he once described the Irish Mission to Roman Catholics as by far the most important in which Methodism was engaged. So far was he from a one-sided emphasis in mission that he wrote in 1810 that "home missions are of greater importance . . . than all our other Missions put together".⁴⁸ In the management of missions at this time it is significant that no distinction was made between "home" and "overseas".

(iii) The Laity in Mission

The vital influence of lay people, though often unacknowledged, has existed since New Testament times. The laity played a key role in the early days of Methodism in various parts of the world, preparing the ground for missionaries, giving them support and adding greatly to the church's worship and witness. This was especially important when missionaries died or had to be withdrawn.

Military personnel often came to the fore as with George Middlemiss⁴⁹ and John Kendrick⁵⁰ in Cape Colony. Most outstanding in this category was Andrew Armour from Scotland who saw army service in Ireland, Gibraltar (from 1792), India (Madras, from 1798) and Ceylon (from 1800). A gifted linguist, he taught and acted as an interpreter after his release from the army. He was on hand to welcome the first Methodist missionaries to Ceylon in 1814 and accompanied them on their first journeys. He wrote to the Missionary Committee in that year about the lingering influence of caste among converts, commenting that "heart conversion" was required as well as "head conversion".⁵¹

Special reference must be made in this bicentennial year to Antigua Methodism. The main details involving Nathaniel Gilbert are already familiar and need not be repeated. What is less well known, however, is the help received by Gilbert from Mary Leadbetter who lost both husband and family and became governess to Gilbert's children. She played a part in helping to form a Society, and supported the work until returning to England in the 1760s.⁵² After Gilbert's death in 1774, when there were two hundred members, the role of two converted slaves, Sophia Campbell and Mary Alley, was crucial in

⁴⁷ MMSA MSS, Coke, 31 July 1809 (74).

⁴⁸ MMSA MSS, Coke, 21 May 1810 (1).

⁴⁹ MMSA MSS, Middlemiss, 16 September 1807; 1 March 1814 (299).

⁵⁰ MMSA MSS, Kendrick, 20 November 1810; 6 March 1812; June 1813 (299).

⁵¹ MMSA MSS, Armour, 29 July 1814 (443).

⁵² F. Baker, 'The Origins of Methodism in the West Indies', in *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, January 1960, p.13.

holding the Society together until the arrival of John Baxter in 1778.⁵³

Baxter's part in the development of Antigua Methodism is also well documented, as is the historic meeting between him and Coke at St. John's on Christmas morning 1786. Less familiar is the contribution by relatives of Nathaniel Gilbert in those formative years.⁵⁴ His brother Francis was received as an itinerant preacher in England in 1758. Returning to Antigua in the early 1760s, he helped to evangelise the Blacks on the family estate. He later married Mary Leadbetter in England in 1767. After his death in 1779 his widow returned to Antigua where she again helped to establish Methodism. Baxter opened the first Methodist chapel in St. John's in 1782. The membership was then over a thousand, and by 1787, a few months after the appointment of the first missionary, it had risen to two thousand.

John Gilbert, the nephew of Nathaniel and Francis, made a distinctive contribution. In 1798 he married Ann Hart who was coloured. Their marriage was strongly opposed, and amid talk of a possible court-martial he had to resign his commission in the Militia. In the end, however, the couple gained the respect of many people. John continued as a local preacher until his death in 1833.

Coke often draw attention to the courage and devotion of black and coloured Christians.⁵⁵ Of the contribution of nine local preachers or exhorters in Jamaica in 1801 he commented :

These were either blacks or people of colour. Their lives were pious ; they were admirably adapted for the work in which they were engaged ; and, however the voice of prejudice may exclaim against the intellectual powers of those who are of African birth and extraction, certain it is, that the abilities of these men were far from being contemptible.⁵⁶

Lay pioneers often admitted to theological and other shortcomings. They tended to think of themselves as supporters of the preachers, or as occupying new ground until preachers were appointed. They looked for partnership with the preachers, not independence from them. In some cases experience proved that promising lay initiatives could founder for want of adequate ministerial support. A letter from Baxter to Wesley in 1782 well illustrates aspects of this problem.

We are much in want of leaders. It is dangerous to let too many meet with one ; for, being ignorant of the word of God, they run into many superstitions . . . The work cannot be said to be deep in any ; but it is visible in multitudes.⁵⁷

⁵³ Findlay and Holdsworth, op. cit., ii, p.32.

⁵⁴ Baker, op. cit., p.14-16.

⁵⁵ Coke, *A History* etc., ii, pp.85ff., 289 ; iii, pp.121ff., 147 ; Coke, *Extracts of the Journals* etc., Dublin n.d., pp.47f., 91, 118, 190f.

⁵⁶ Coke, *A History* etc., i, p.443.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, ii, p.431.

John Kendrick sought advice in his letters from Cape Colony, confessing that “in general a Methodist soldier is despised & scoffed”.⁵⁸ In 1813 he wrote to Coke suggesting that a minister be sent. His words are an example of the kind of dilemma often confronting those in such situations :

We are nothing, we know nothing, we can do nothing. We are despised as ignorant, but many enjoy God . . . We have no chapel.⁵⁹

(iv) The Management of Missions

(a) *Structures for Management*

The Methodist Conference – directly or through Coke and/or its Committees – was responsible for official Methodist outreach overseas. Every important aspect of the work, including the nature and extent of the initiatives, their support, the recruitment of personnel and the length and terms of service, came to be clearly defined. A Committee for managing West Indian affairs (1790), a Committee of Finance (1798), and a Committee of Finance and Advice (1804) were among the attempts to improve efficiency and effectiveness through greater accountability and wider support.

Coke, however, remained dominant. He strenuously resisted whatever appeared to him as interference and was bitterly opposed to any diminution of his role. Vickers has carefully examined this particular phase of mission history, drawing attention to the suspicions which arose and the strain in relationships which developed.⁶⁰ Coke attended as few meetings as possible, and was sometimes criticised for not passing on important information.

(b) *The Recruitment of Missionaries*

Once a need or opportunity was identified and shared and preachers indicated a willingness to serve, a selection took place and appointments were made. A sense of call, and recognition and confirmation of that call, were crucial. For example, in the *Minutes* of 1771 a cry for help from America was noted. The question was then put as to who was willing to go. Five were reported as making themselves available, of whom two were chosen and appointed.

In 1797 a role was assigned to District Committees of discovering which preachers were prepared to serve in the West Indies. Chairmen of Districts were given the task in the same year of alerting Dr. Coke, when preachers expressed an interest. Four years later the same procedures were extended to include preachers for Nova Scotia and Gibraltar, and it was recognised that likely candidates might be found among local preachers as well as itinerant preachers.

⁵⁸ MMSA MSS Kendrick, n.d. (299).

⁵⁹ W. G. Mears, *Sergeant John Kendrick*, Cape Town, n.d., p.12.

⁶⁰ Vickers, op. cit., p.271ff.

“General offers” were to come later, indicating a willingness to serve either at home or overseas in accordance with the Conference’s judgement as to need and suitability. At least the germ of such an approach is, however, evident in the offer of William Warrener, the first missionary appointed to the West Indies. He indicated to Wesley in 1785 that he was “at his and the Lord’s disposal to go to America, or wherever I might be wanted”. On being appointed to Antigua in 1786, he sought confirmation that this was where Wesley wanted him to go. Having received this, Warrener simply commented that he had nothing more to say. He would “go in the name of the Lord”.⁶¹

Problems arose when the supply of missionaries proved inadequate. In 1814 the question of Conference taking a more active line in encouraging people to serve overseas was raised by a hard-pressed missionary in Antigua:

I can see no reason why a man who is called to preach the Gospel to every creature (if he is young and healthy) should form any serious objection to labour in this country.⁶²

(c) *The Discipline of Missionaries*

Preachers overseas, like those at home, were men under authority. Appointed to their posts by Conference, they were in the course of time given instructions on such general points as the supply of information (“missionary intelligence”, as it was called) to the Committee in London, the keeping of financial accounts and such personal matters as marriage and furlough. Rules on special matters such as slavery were drawn up as need arose.

It is often assumed that early missionaries offered themselves “for life”. This, however, was not the case. Arrangements between Coke and the missionaries were apparently for defined periods, but the details were often not communicated to those who later shared responsibility with Coke for missions. This led inevitably to difficulties, with missionaries expressing hurt and anger when agreements were not kept.⁶³ The Conference laid down regulations in 1799, 1800 and 1802 about initial periods of service. Missionaries already in full connexion were required to serve for four years when sent to the West Indies; those who had been on probation in Europe were to serve five years; and new probationers, six years. If a person became seriously ill, he was authorised to proceed to Bermuda, Nova Scotia, or New Brunswick, to await further instructions from the Conference or Dr. Coke. This last rule proved decidedly impracticable in urgent cases.

⁶¹ Nichols (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.13.

⁶² MMSA MSS, T. Smith, 2 June 1814 (112).

⁶³ See, for example, MMSA MSS, F. Hallett, St. Vincent, 27 January 1807; W. Gilgrass, Barbados, 25 May 1810; Hallett, St. Kitts, 12 October 1812 (111).

Unsatisfactory communication, partly due to slow travel and the unreliability of the postal service, was a complicating factor in matters of discipline. Requests for permission to return to Britain were granted in some instances, but appeared to go unnoticed in others. One missionary claimed that soon after his arrival he had written that "six years for a Missionary to stay in the West Indies, was . . . as long as was good for either his body, his soul, or the Church". This period was now nearing completion in his own case, and he wished to confirm that he was still of this opinion.⁶⁴

Unauthorised action, such as leaving one's station without permission; acting contrary to defined policy, such as holding slaves in violation of Conference; and unacceptable moral behaviour ranging from serious drink problems to sexual immorality, all led to disciplinary proceedings. Poor communication again created misunderstanding and distrust. Inefficiency, postal delays (sometimes due to war and shipwreck) and lack of training and preparation for service overseas, were all factors. Missionaries sometimes smarted under a sense of injustice, complaining that their situation was little understood and that the Committee was misinformed or ill-advised.⁶⁵

The devolution of limited powers to areas overseas was a possible way forward in easing some of the problems related to the exercise of discipline. Coke gave long consideration to the designation of a General Superintendent in the West Indies.⁶⁶ However, Edward Turner, writing from Antigua in 1806, expressed the view that no one had yet been appointed who would command sufficient support to assume such a position. He therefore suggested three alternative proposals — that a committee of three preachers manage affairs between meetings of the Conference; that there be a Conference in the West Indies; or that the area be divided into two or more Districts, with Chairmen possessing the same powers as in Europe. He argued that some such development was urgently necessary for several reasons. If a preacher died, no one in the West Indies had authority to take steps to fill the vacancy; disciplinary action against preachers was slow and unsure; Superintendents sometimes reacted differently to similar problems, due to varying local factors and inadequate consultation; and stricter oversight was required.⁶⁷

The division of the West Indies into Districts took place in 1806, with Chairmen appointed by the Conference in Britain and Secretaries elected within each District. A decision in principle was reached in 1812 to appoint a General Superintendent for the West Indies, and in the same year the District structure for the Leeward and Windward

⁶⁴ MMSA MSS, M. C. Dixon, 10 May 1815 (112).

⁶⁵ MMSA MSS, J. Taylor, St. Kitts, 17 April 1807; E. Turner, Antigua, 27 October 1807; J. Whitworth, Barbados, 21 September 1812; F. Hallett, St. Kitts, 12 October 1812 (111).

⁶⁶ Findlay and Holdsworth, *op. cit.*, ii, p.72f.

⁶⁷ MMSA MSS, E. Turner, Antigua, 15 May 1806 (111).

Islands was modified with limited powers to censure preachers and produce draft lists of stations.

(d) *Missionary Finance*

It has been said that "foreign discipline" and "home finance" were the "chronic problems" of Methodism in its conduct of foreign missions.⁶⁸ Vickers is again a reliable guide to Coke's involvement in the financing of the missions, describing the private initiatives he took through printed appeals and "begging tours".⁶⁹ In London especially he often travelled by hackney-coach, but elsewhere and especially in the north he is known to have walked thousands of miles. Despite his efforts, however, the missions often fell into financial difficulties. In an analysis of the period 1787 to 1793, Vickers has indicated that in every year apart from the first there was an annual deficit. The year 1792/3 was particularly bad, with a shortfall of over two thousand pounds against an expenditure of £2,788.⁷⁰ In such circumstances Coke generously used his own resources on behalf of the missions.

The Conference, on paper at least, gradually assumed greater responsibility for raising money for missions. In 1793 encouragement was given for a general collection in congregations, to help remove the debt. Three years later, preachers were urged to hold collections in those towns not visited privately by Dr. Coke. General collections for missions became an annual feature from 1799, with preachers being asked in 1805 to "preach expressly" on missions on the day of the collection. Early attempts were made, too, to encourage overseas support for mission. The work in mainland America was self-sufficient, apart from initial contributions. In 1800 Conference resolved that there should, as far as possible, be a collection in the West Indies on the same basis as in Britain.

Despite such efforts, however, demands frequently outstripped resources. On occasion special initiatives had to be taken in an attempt to retrieve the situation. In 1805 the accounts were in such a chaotic state that Jabez Bunting was called upon to sort them out. In 1812 there was a "very large debt", and an "extraordinary public collection" had to be held in addition to the normal annual collection. There was talk of retrenchment. The blame cannot be wholly laid at Coke's door for these recurring difficulties. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, despite its resolutions, Conference was still not giving missions a sufficiently high priority.

(v) **Problems in Missions**

Some serious problems have already been identified. These include lack of commitment on the part of Methodism generally,

⁶⁸ Findlay and Holdsworth, op. cit., i, p.67.

⁶⁹ Vickers, op. cit., p.262.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.266.

unsatisfactory communication, administrative weakness, inadequate financial and human resources, errors of judgement in the selection of missionaries, and insufficient consultation.

The sense of isolation experienced by many early missionaries was enormous. Appointed to remote and unfamiliar locations, with the minimum of preparation for living in alien cultures, missionaries felt the urgent need for guidance. They wrote to Coke or the Committee, but awaited replies in vain. One missionary complained accusingly from St. Vincent :

We never could get any answer to our letters. Let us ask what advice we would, however important, none was given. We were just left to do as we could, and it seemed as if we were not worth the least notice. Now we were got to the West Indies and I can assure you some of our missionaries have almost resolved never to write more.⁷¹

A letter from Nova Scotia stressed that the dearth of preachers gave rise to other problems :

We have not preachers sufficient to appoint one for every Circuit, hence what good we have done at one time, gets undone at another, & a thousand difficulties arise which would be prevented had we a proper supply of able pious men.⁷²

In 1810 Coke himself maintained that the work in the West Indies had been losing ground for years due to the lack of missionaries.⁷³

The high level of mortality among missionaries in some areas was another major problem, as was the incidence of natural disasters. Coke's *History of the West Indies*, for example, describes suffering due to drought in Santa Cruz and neighbouring islands between 1788 and 1792.⁷⁴ It also contains a graphic account of destruction by hurricane and flood in St. Kitts in 1792.⁷⁵ Drought, accompanied by "four dreadful gales of wind", was a major problem in the Bahamas in 1806. Fortunately the missionary was able to provide refuge in his home for many who were distressed.⁷⁶ Letters reported hurricane damage on several islands, describing the loss of houses and possessions in Dominica in 1807⁷⁷ and the destruction of a new chapel in the Bahamas in 1813.⁷⁸

International conflict, for example between France and England, also created difficulties. One preacher was intercepted on his way to Antigua in 1797, and spent a week in prison in Guadaloupe before

⁷¹ MMSA MSS, J. Taylor, St. Vincent, 7 April 1804 (111).

⁷² MMSA MSS, W. Bennett, 18 July 1805 (91).

⁷³ Vickers, *op. cit.*, p.300f.

⁷⁴ Coke, *A History etc.*, iii, p.166ff.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.51ff.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.216f.

⁷⁷ MMSA MSS, T. Pattison, Dominica, 12 June 1807 (111).

⁷⁸ MMSA MSS, W. Turton, 29 September 1813 (111).

gaining his release in an exchange of prisoners.⁷⁹ War between England and the United States from 1812 to 1814 produced a crisis within Methodism in what we now know as Canada, with preachers of the Methodist Episcopal tradition suspected of republicanism because of their links with America.⁸⁰

It was, however, human factors which led to most difficulty. Given the prevalence and dehumanising influence of slavery in the West Indies, it is not surprising that those among whom the missionaries laboured most, often appeared unpromising. In describing the work of a newly-arrived missionary in Kingston, Jamaica, Coke observed in 1797 that

the members in society amounted to several hundreds ; but . . . discipline had been much neglected. Many among them . . . were not only questionable characters, but unworthy the name of Methodists. Of these, he was obliged to exclude as many as fifty-one, some for the wilful neglect of the means of grace, some for disorderly conduct, and others for acts of immorality.⁸¹

Another missionary, writing from St. Vincent in 1804, was rather dismissive of Blacks, describing them as “a stupid, ignorant race of beings” who were nevertheless not irredeemable.⁸²

The Whites presented major difficulties too. Comparatively few openly welcomed or supported the missionaries. One commentator, not at all unsympathetic to the Whites, concluded in 1804 that with few exceptions they were uniformly ignorant on matters of religion.⁸³ John Baxter was particularly critical of the role of better-off Whites :

All the money in the West Indies is contributed by the Black and Coloured people except a very few white people that attend the Chapel and many of these are poor.⁸⁴

Many White West Indians were deeply suspicious of missionaries, believing they were encouraging insubordination and revolt among the slaves. When the Irishman John Stephenson landed in Bermuda in 1799 (the year after the Rebellion in Ireland), he encountered immediate opposition on the grounds that he was “an Irishman, a rebel, and a Methodist”.⁸⁵ “Methodists”, it was observed, “were the cause of the rebellion in America, the revolution in France, and the disturbances in Ireland!”⁸⁶

At times, it must be acknowledged, the missionaries were them-

⁷⁹ Coke, *A History* etc., ii, p.447ff.

⁸⁰ MMSA MSS, W. Bennett, Nova Scotia, 16 October 1815 ; W. Black, Nova Scotia, 12 November 1815 (91).

⁸¹ Coke, *A History* etc., i, p.440f.

⁸² MMSA MSS, J. Taylor, St. Vincent, 2 July 1804 (111).

⁸³ MMSA MSS, A. Gilbert, 1 June 1804 (111).

⁸⁴ MMSA MSS, J. Baxter, Antigua, 28 July 1804 (111).

⁸⁵ Coke, *A History* etc., iii, p.238.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.253.

selves part of the problem. This was indeed the dominant factor in the failure of the unofficial mission to Sierra Leone in 1796. Some preachers possessed only limited ability. It was said of one missionary in Antigua in 1811 that he was "a man of weak understanding, small abilities, & less grace".⁸⁷ His language was described as rude and insulting. There were occasional moral lapses among missionaries, with some engaging in extra-marital sexual relations or developing serious drink problems.

Relationships within congregations and between missionaries sometimes sank to a low level. This was illustrated in Jamaica in 1807 when the worst possible construction was put on Isaac Bradnack's contacts with a group of young women who were likely candidates for prostitution. Instead, under his influence, they became involved in the Methodist Society in Kingston. Bradnack saw them frequently, in his home as well as on mission property, and there was talk of his "seraglio". Rival groups formed in the Society, for and against his action, and the Leaders' Meeting was split. An investigation found Bradnack guilty of nothing worse than indiscretion, and his most troublesome opponents were expelled from Society. Bradnack's character remained intact, but the work had been seriously damaged.⁸⁸

(vi) Progress in Missions

Given the catalogue of problems already indicated, it is remarkable that any progress was made. Care must be exercised in assessing such progress. For example, a healthy cynicism about official reports, including statistics, is rarely misplaced. It is therefore encouraging to find evidence of concern for accurate reporting in some accounts. In the *Minutes* of 1791, for example, although the number of members in the West Indies was reported as 1,800, only half of these were actually entered in the general statistics since the work was of such recent origin and the increase had been so rapid. One missionary in St. Kitts felt that exaggerated reports of the work in the West Indies had already appeared in print in Britain, and pressed that only fully authenticated accounts should be published in the future.⁸⁹

The *Minutes* of 1813 give some impression of the geographical and numerical spread of Methodism.⁹⁰ In Gibraltar there were 87 members with one missionary, and in Sierra Leone, where a fresh start had been made in 1811, 96 members with a missionary to be appointed.⁹¹ The total number of members in the West Indies was

⁸⁷ Said of Isham in MMSA MSS, 14 January 1811 (111).

⁸⁸ MMSA MSS, various authors, 4 August 1807; M. A. Smith, 15 August 1807; I. Bradnack, 30 October 1807 (111). Also Findlay and Holdsworth, op. cit., ii, p.78f.

⁸⁹ MMSA MSS, A. Murdoch, 12 July 1804 (111).

⁹⁰ The order of stations is as set out in the *Minutes of Conference*.

⁹¹ Some of the freed Blacks from Nova Scotia who were settled on the present site of Freetown from 1792 were Methodists. The witness of those who remained faithful was crucial for early Methodism in the colony. See Findlay and Holdsworth, op. cit., iv, p.74ff.

15,220, with 27 missionaries working in 13 circuits. In Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland there were a further 1,522 members and 14 missionaries, excluding two retired preachers. In addition seven missionaries, excluding Coke, were appointed in 1813 to new missions starting in Asia and South Africa. Membership figures for the United States of America are recorded as 216,000, with those for world Methodism at 423,798 of whom 162,000 were in Britain.

It is particularly difficult to assess progress in such matters as changing people's attitudes and improving living conditions. Recognising, however, that the West Indies was Methodism's primary overseas field, and that the major emphasis was placed on work among slaves, it is clear that no true assessment can be made until full account is taken of Methodism's response to race and slavery.

(vii) Race and Slavery

A letter written by a former missionary in the West Indies to a newly-appointed missionary provides useful insights into the situation the recipient was soon to face :

To the white people be respectful to them *at a distance* and never on any account meddle with the *political state of things*. *Our business is to preach Christ* . . . As it respects the dear Negroes who will be your particular charge — on your first onset manifest your sincere love and regard to their spiritual interests by familiarizing yourself with them . . . entering into all their concerns as far as prudence & religion dictate and never my Dear Bro, on any account think less of them on account of their *colour*. I hope you will allways live and die in this belief that none ever plead for Slavery but those who are ignorant of its consequences.⁹²

The concern to mitigate the evil effects of the slave trade through Christian mission has already been noted.⁹³ Wesley's opposition to slavery was clear and consistent. Coke, however, altered his tactics though not his opposition after coming into direct encounter with slavery. On his first visit to America he made numerous negative references to slavery in his Journal, though at the concluding conference a strong anti-slavery line was modified because the church was considered to be "in too infantile a state to push things to extremity".⁹⁴ References to slavery in later visits were much fewer and less hostile, and after he spent a week in Grenada in 1793 Coke commented favourably on the humane legislation governing the treatment of slaves on the island.⁹⁵ Coke was largely instrumental in persuading the British Conference in 1807 to forbid missionaries marrying white West Indian women who owned or inherited slaves, but it is clear that the eternal salvation of slaves mattered more to him than their

⁹² MMSA MSS, I. Kingston, Nottingham, 21 November 1803 (1).

⁹³ See p. 165f.

⁹⁴ Coke, *Journal* etc., p.74.

⁹⁵ Coke, *A History* etc., ii, p.75.

temporal emancipation. He was not prepared to jeopardise the former to effect the latter.

Coke's approach was consistent with the "no politics" rule as it had evolved within Methodism. This had originated with Wesley himself, and affirmed that spiritual concerns rather than political ones were of paramount importance for Methodists. It was believed that involvement in politics (or, as some argued, involvement in political programmes with which the leadership disagreed) would deflect the movement from its spiritual objectives. On one occasion, however, Coke took accommodation to slavery too far when he agreed that slaves be employed so that a coffee and cotton plantation, which had been given to the Mission in St. Vincent, could be developed for the benefit of the Carib Indians. This led to a bitter verbal attack by a missionary who had previously quarrelled with him.⁹⁶

It was a task for a later period to remove anomalies in the Methodist stance on slavery. The *Instructions to Missionaries* of 1822 reminded them of their duty :

Your only business is to promote the moral and religious improvement of the slaves to whom you may have access, without in the least degree, in public or private, interfering with their civil condition.⁹⁷

A sermon preached by Richard Watson in 1824 was an able presentation of the Wesleyan position.⁹⁸ Among the points emphasised were the unjust treatment of slaves, the remarkable restraint of slaves, the shameful record of the churches in failing to minister effectively to slaves for so long and a firm insistence upon a gradualist and indirect approach to the termination of slavery so that it could take place peacefully through "the infusion of Christian principles into the minds of the slave population"⁹⁹ and normal legal processes. In the meantime slaves were to be obedient to their owners and to work hard.

From the earliest days in the West Indies, "the poor slaves" were regarded as "the primary objects" of the Methodist mission.¹⁰⁰ This is what earned missionaries the title "Negro Parsons" in some instances.¹⁰¹ It was a significant emphasis at a time when some owners still treated their slaves as "the tools of labour or the instruments of lust"¹⁰² rather than as a fellow humans. Blacks realised the fundamental importance of the Methodist approach. "These men", they said of the missionaries on one occasion, "were

⁹⁶ Taggart, *op. cit.*, p.157f.

⁹⁷ MMSA, *WMMS Annual Report*, 1822, p. xii.

⁹⁸ R. Watson, *The Religious Instruction of the Slaves in the West India Colonies*, London 1824.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹⁰⁰ Coke, *A History etc.*, ii, pp 25, 257.

¹⁰¹ R. Watson, *A Defence of the Wesleyan Methodist Missions in the West Indies*, London 1817, p.64.

¹⁰² Coke, *A History etc.*, iii, p.255.

imported for us".¹⁰³

Not surprisingly, many Whites viewed things rather differently, regarding the missionaries as posing a threat to their way of life. In enhancing the self-esteem of the slaves and providing them with education, it was feared that the missionaries were actively supporting the movement towards emancipation. Ultimately the economy, indeed the structure of society itself, would be undermined.

Some of the debate focussed on what Coke described as "the hackneyed notion" among Whites that preaching to Blacks would introduce "notions of equality" among them.¹⁰⁴ A letter in 1809 by a non-Methodist who wished the Mission well expressed the fear that an emphasis on equality might undermine the constitution and render Jamaica ripe for an uprising of slaves, as had occurred elsewhere :

I am of opinion that if you do not meet the Magistrates and assure them that you will adopt every measure in your power to check slaves from aspiring to equality, which must involve us in the same calamities with the inhabitants of St. Domingo, you will not be permitted to assemble . . . for it is highly requisite that subordination should be observed & if not insured by your conduct & discipline of the members of your Church the Inhabitants will not tamely submit to be massacred under the sanction of religion.¹⁰⁵

The normal response to such criticism was twofold. First, the assurance was given that nothing would be done directly by the Mission to alter the civil condition of slaves or in other ways to give political expression to religious equality. Richard Watson, in a defence of Methodist missions on this point, vigorously denied that preachers proceeded from the declaration that all people are equal before God to "inculcate liberty and equality". "Neither at home, nor abroad", he argued, have they "inculcated such doctrines".¹⁰⁶ Second, it was argued that slaves who had come under Christian influence were demonstrably more industrious and submissive than other slaves.¹⁰⁷

So far as personal morality relates to equality it is relevant to note that a missionary was officially advised in 1811 to give up his association with a coloured woman whom he intended to marry. The Committee assured him that the Conference would not approve such a step.¹⁰⁸ This was not a case of the Committee in London ruling contrary to what was felt locally, for the District Synod in

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, ii, p.257.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.357.

¹⁰⁵ MMSA MSS, S. Cooke, 15 August 1809 (111). Also Findlay and Holdsworth, *op. cit.*, ii, p.80.

¹⁰⁶ Watson, *A Defence etc.*, in Postscript after p.163.

¹⁰⁷ N. W. Taggart, 'The Irish Factor in World Methodism in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' (Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, Belfast 1981), p.110ff.

¹⁰⁸ MMSA MSS, Missionary Committee, 18 April 1811 (545).

St. Kitts had already unanimously declared that

a union of this kind would be dishonourable to the man himself, & highly detrimental to our work ; & that such a step would render a preacher improper to travel in the West Indies.¹⁰⁹

Individual missionaries were also capable of displaying racial prejudice. A coloured local preacher in Barbados complained angrily :

The poor Coloured and Blacks is treted [sic] with much contempt . . . The preacher said in the pulpit before the Congregation that a Black Man had the rudeness to offer his hand to him in the street & that . . . their is a distinction between a White person and a Black that when the Black & Coloured people comes into the chapel they should bury (?) their heads.¹¹⁰

Complications arose in the case of those missionaries who married into White West Indian families. This inevitably influenced their thinking on a range of issues, especially on slavery since in some instances the families owned estates on which slaves were employed. In this connection the decision by Conference in 1807 to forbid preachers marrying West Indian women in possession of slaves, led to unforeseen difficulties. The ruling was applied retrospectively which meant that those already possessing slaves had quickly to devise satisfactory methods of releasing them. This was not easy. In some cases there were legal difficulties, with trustees, for example, having a say as well as owners.¹¹¹ Even after clearance was received it could be a costly business to give slaves their freedom. Some local governments insisted that considerable amounts (up to £500 per slave) had to be paid into the Treasury by the owners to prevent emancipated slaves becoming a drain on public funds.¹¹² Applications by some missionaries to the Committee in London for financial aid to meet the costs of releasing their slaves¹¹³ were not well received! The possibilities of single missionaries finding suitable marriage-partners were also suddenly reduced by the rule. Again, freed slaves ran the risk in some areas of being rounded up, placed in prison and then auctioned to help defray the costs of imprisoning them. Finally, the refusal to allow preachers to hold slaves called into question the same practice among Methodist lay people. Were they too to be disciplined, even expelled from membership, if they did not release their slaves? It was feared that such a development could lead to serious splits within the church.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ MMSA MSS, Minutes of 5th St. Christopher's District Meeting, 5 April 1811 (111).

¹¹⁰ MMSA MSS, R. Beck, 21 July 1814 (112).

¹¹¹ MMSA MSS, W. Jenkins, Antigua, 19 February 1808 ; E. Turner, Antigua, 21 May 1808 (111).

¹¹² MMSA MSS, J. Taylor, St. Kitts, 7 January 1808 ; W. Jenkins, Antigua, 19 February 1808 ; J. Whitworth, Barbados, 21 September 1812 (111).

¹¹³ For example, MMSA MSS, W. Jenkins, Antigua, 19 February 1808 (111).

¹¹⁴ MMSA MSS, G. Johnston, Jamaica, 28 February 1808 ; E. Turner, Antigua, 21 May 1808 (111).

This was the background to a decision by the Antigua District Synod in 1808. In answer to a question about their attitude to the Conference resolution of 1807, they replied that "the *publication* of that Minute was *impolitic*, the execution of it *impracticable*, & the effects of it *injurious*."¹¹⁵ One missionary writing from Antigua in 1808 viewed slavery as "a bad system altogether", but argued the case for compromise :

I do not think that the Methodist Preachers are the persons to effect a revolution ; it is their business to make all people good without interfering with their civil condition, and I am deeply convinced that the opposite of bad is not always good. Allowing Slavery to be bad, yet general and immediate emancipation would be worse. After all, the principle fault I find of the rule is, that it is *retrospective*.¹¹⁶

White opposition to Methodist Missions sometimes took violent forms and led to repressive legislation within the West Indies.¹¹⁷ Feelings hostile to the Mission ran particularly high following the abolition by Britain of the slave trade in 1807, together with the Methodist Conference resolution of the same year forbidding its missionaries from holding slaves. In Jamaica, for example, prominent citizens made representations to the Town Council in Kingston, alleging that late-night meetings were creating a public nuisance. With but one dissenting voice, the Council prohibited the holding of religious services before sunrise and after sunset. These were the only times suitable for slaves to join in worship, since they had to be available for work during the hours of light. The Council also prohibited unauthorised persons "of any sect or denomination" from all "preaching, teaching, the offering of public prayer, the singing of psalms" in unlicensed places.¹¹⁸ At the same time the House of Assembly reactivated an old statute which had plainly lapsed directing slave owners and overseers to instruct their slaves in the principles of Christianity and to prepare them for baptism. A new clause was added :

Provided that the instruction of such slaves shall be confined to the doctrines of the Established Church in this island, and that no Methodist Missionary, or other sectary or Preacher, shall presume to instruct our slaves, or to receive them into their houses, chapels . . .¹¹⁹

Clearly these Acts of Council and Assembly were intended to muzzle Methodism. Similar steps were taken at other times in Jamaica and elsewhere, and those who defied the laws, believing them to be unjust, spent varying periods in prison. Appeals were made within the West Indies and Britain, with Coke and the

¹¹⁵ MMSA MSS, Minutes of 2nd Annual District Meeting, Antigua, May 1808 (111).

¹¹⁶ MMSA MSS, E. Turner, Antigua, 21 May 1808 (111).

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Vickers, *op. cit.*, pp. 158, 165ff, 227f. ; Coke, *A History etc.*, i, pp.444f., 454f. ; ii, pp.12ff., 27ff., 274ff. ; iii, pp.124, 240ff.

¹¹⁸ Findlay and Holdsworth, *op. cit.*, ii, p.74.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.75.

Methodist Committee of Privileges pressing for annulments. Delays were inevitable, however. An Act introduced in Jamaica was annulled seventeen months later in April 1809, but the repeal was not published in Kingston until the following August.¹²⁰ Also, the municipal regulation restricting the hours of worship in Kingston remained in place. A new disabling Act was passed by the Assembly the following year, making the obtaining of licences for both preachers and premises even more difficult and expensive.

As with the Church at other times and in other situations, it was sometimes found that persecution contributed to progress. One missionary, imprisoned for a month in Jamaica in 1812 under "very rigorous" conditions, found on his release that lay people had become more active and that numbers had increased. Although difficulties continued, progress was still made. He was therefore able to claim with enthusiasm, and with perhaps pardonable exaggeration :

When the Society fell under my care, at the close of the year 1811, it consisted, I think, of 560 members, and our Chapels were in a very bad state of repair. I was left, too, without a single shilling, nay £60 in debt, without liberty to preach, and sorely persecuted on all hands ; and now our chapels are in a good state of repair ; we are out of debt ; our Society consists of 2,700 members, & their growth in the knowledge and love of God is at least equal to their prosperity in every other respects.¹²¹

Despite personal lapses and errors of judgment, Methodism continued to affirm the common humanity of all. Hope in Christ was offered to the victims of slavery and there was a desire for an end to persecution and the creation of justice.¹²²

Conclusions

Methodist overseas missions, which commenced earlier than the bicentennial celebrations of 1986 will lead many to suppose, merit more detailed study than they have received. Neglect of such study by Methodist scholars has inevitably led to neglect by others, and has lessened appreciation of the importance of missions.¹²³ Through its message, mobility and early involvement Methodism has contributed significantly to the initial impetus for, and the later development of, "modern missions". Early unofficial initiatives, with the laity to the fore, preceded and prepared the way for formal initiatives. John Wesley's influence, though questioned by some, was in fact considerable. Thomas Coke was a central figure in the period prior to the formation of the WMMS.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.78.

¹²¹ MMSA MSS, J. Wiggins, 21 April 1815 (112).

¹²² Coke, *Journal* etc., p.204.

¹²³ This is presumably a factor in the inadequate treatment of Methodist missions in S. Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 1964. Neill refers only once to John Wesley, makes no mention of Thomas Coke, and gives no Methodist mission information earlier than 1811.

Recognising that Methodist missions began before the formation of the WMMS, the place of the Missionary Society is within Methodism's missionary movement rather than at its head. It is itself a product of mission, and should not be thought of as controlling mission. Mission "at home" and "overseas", though now divided for administrative purposes, is essentially one. Ways must be sought to affirm and express this unity.

Social awareness has been a feature of Methodist missions from the beginning. This sprang initially from the traditional recognition within Methodism of the diverse needs of people, and was sharpened by the prominent position held by West Indian slaves in Methodist missions. Missions played a considerable, though indirect, part in undermining slavery.

Mission is a vital aspect of Christian discipleship. "The glory of God and the good of men" are constant challenges to every Christian and to the whole Church in all its life.

NORMAN W. TAGGART

[An Irishman who was formerly Home Secretary of the Methodist Church Overseas Division (Methodist Missionary Society), the Rev. Dr. Norman W. Taggart has also served in India. He is currently Superintendent of the Belfast Central Mission and Chairman of the Belfast District of the Methodist Church in Ireland.]

Readers will be interested that Dr. Taggart has written a book on other aspects of mission (*The Irish in World Methodism 1760-1900*, published in June 1986 by the Epworth Press). A review by Dr. P. Ellingworth appears on p. 189.

Another useful tool for researchers is the Index to the memoirs and local histories in the *Arminian Magazine*, later the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1778-1839, compiled by F.M. Jackson and issued as an occasional publication by the WHS in 1910. It has long been difficult to obtain, and so there should be a warm welcome for the reprint now available at £2.50 from Gage Postal Books, PO Box 105, Westcliffe-on-Sea, Essex, SS0 8EQ.

To mark the centenary of the Southport Convention, Dr A. Skevington Wood has written a brief history entitled *Let Us Go On* (44pp) which traces the vicissitudes of Methodism's Holiness Convention since the first meeting in Mornington Road in June 1885.

The Heart of Wesley's Journal, (Labarum Publications, £6.95) is an American paperback reprint of P.L. Parker's abridgement of 1902. As such, it is without annotation and is based upon the incomplete and unreliable four volume edition which preceded Curnock's Standard Edition, itself about to be superseded by the Oxford/Bicentennial edition. Those seeking a selection from the *Journal* are now much better served by Christopher Idle's recent abridgement (see *Proceedings*, xlv, p 127f.)

THE ACCOUNT BOOK OF THE HULL P.M. CIRCUIT 1825-1833

OUTSTANDING among the documents deposited in the Kingston upon Hull Record Office by the Hull West Circuit in 1983 is the account book of the Hull Primitive Methodist Circuit from June 1825 to February 1833 (ref. DCT 299). It is clearly a continuation of an account book for 1822-27 already described in these *Proceedings*, vol. xxxvii, pp. 169-172. This latter together with its predecessor for 1819-22 are now in the Methodist Archives and with the volume now under discussion they constitute a basic source for the study of the Hull circuit during its first fourteen years. The accounts for 1825-33 are in a book 7¼" x 12¼" containing eight gatherings of five feintly lined sheets giving a total of 160 pages. The covers are thin board covered externally with blue paper and joined by a leather strip (now much decayed) over the binding.

The contents consist of quarterly accounts of income and expenditure. The chief element in the income side is a table giving the names of the various sections of the circuit, their membership, and their quarterly contributions. The expenditure side was dominated by the salaries, rents, lodging allowances, children's allowances and travelling expenses of the ministers. In the earliest accounts there was very little else, but a feature of the accounts is the way in which the rapidly developing circuit acquired new sources of income to match a broadening range of expenditure. The accounts were kept by several different individuals and their work varied greatly both in the degree of detail which they provided and in the clarity of its arrangement. However, it is possible to discern on the income side contributions under the headings of "missionary money" and "contingent fund" presumably raised by collections; "love feasts" and simply "collections" and income from hiring preachers, notably William Clowes, to other circuits. The broadening of the expenditure pattern was less marked but postage and travel to meetings may be singled out as appearing with greater frequency. Both sides of the accounts contain references to chapels. On the income side this sometimes appears simply as a figure received from a particular chapel, at others it is described as pew rent. On the expenditure side payments are usually for rent, more rarely for cleaning. It is by no means clear why a minority of chapels should have had some or all of their expenditure passed through these accounts while the majority were dealt with locally. The only clue is that the chapels mentioned were generally rented properties and it may be that while freeholds were dealt with entirely by the trustees the circuit was in some sense the tenant of leasehold premises.

It will be clear from what has already been said that the information to be derived from these accounts relates chiefly to the membership, organisation and staffing of the circuit. The kind of information

provided and the changes which can be traced can be illustrated by contrasting the accounts for the first and last quarters in the book. In June 1825 the circuit was divided into fourteen sections : five in East Yorkshire (Hull, 659 members ; Driffield, 353 ; Bridlington, 290 ; Keyingham, 150 ; Scarborough, 193) four in the Durham/Yorkshire borders (Darlington, 225 ; West Gate, 700 ; Shotley Bridge, 162 ; Barnard Castle, 152) three in Cumbria (Penrith, 150 ; Whitehaven, 202 and Kendal, 91) and outposts in Sheerness, 36 and London, 179. They were served by twenty eight preachers. By 1833 there were twelve sections with a membership of 3523 and 258 on trial. The East Yorkshire section covered roughly the same areas but Driffield and Bridlington had merged and Barton (Lincs) had separated from Hull. The northern areas had been reduced. Barnard Castle and West Gate remained along with Alston, an offshoot from the latter, while Cumbrian representation was confined to Whitehaven and Kendal. There were mission sections at Thorne (West Yorkshire) and Norwich. The ministerial staff remained at about 28 but it seems that there were some changes during the quarter and some temporary employments so that the number of people employed may overstate the number in post at any one time. In both 1825 and 1833 the ministerial staff included a number of women. Even when briefly summarised it can be seen that these accounts provide a wealth of detail which inevitably raises more questions than it answers. The problem of chapels has already been touched upon, another relates to the extent of the sections of the circuit. What areas did they cover and how many, how large and where were their constituent societies ? Some answers to these questions may be found by a detailed examination of these accounts, for others it will be necessary to search elsewhere. Besides being a key source for our understanding of the organisation of the Hull Circuit during its expansionist phase these accounts are of relevant use to more specialised investigations such as the early development of Primitive Methodism in the localities which it covers and the careers of individual ministers.

GEOFFREY W. OXLEY

[Mr. G. W. Oxley is the Kingston upon Hull City Archivist.]

The Early Methodist Class Meeting : its Origin and Significance by David Lowes Watson (Discipleship Resources, Nashville (1985) : pp. xiii, 273, \$10.95)

This study by an English scholar who is now Director of Covenant Discipleship in the United Methodist Church has a practical as well as an academic purpose, as an underpinning of the Covenant Discipleship Group movement in America. As its title indicates, it focuses mainly on the early development of the class meeting as much from a theological as from a historical viewpoint. Its later decline is only briefly charted. A series of appendices contain much useful and interesting primary material.

J.A.V.

THE ANNUAL MEETING AND LECTURE

ONE of the delights on the occasion of the Annual Meeting and Lecture is when friends foregather to enjoy food and fellowship. This year was no exception as members, generously invited to tea by Mrs Joyce Swift, wife of our late Treasurer and Registrar, enjoyed a sumptuous repast provided by the ladies of Goldenhill Methodist Church, Tunstall.

Annual Meeting

The President of the Society, the Rev. A. Raymond George, having opened the meeting with prayer, received the apologies for absence and then called the roll of members who had died during the past year. The meeting stood in remembrance. The minutes of the 1985 Annual Meeting were read, adopted and signed.

The officers were re-elected with just the one change of Conferences Secretary, the Rev. Peter Howard being replaced by the Rev. T. A. Macquiban. Mrs V. E. Vickers (Registrar) reported on the membership of the society and the Treasurer, Mr Ralph Wilkinson, submitted the accounts, which are printed on page 187. On his recommendation, it was agreed that the current rates of subscription (see inside front cover for details) should be maintained for the coming year. Grateful thanks were expressed to Mrs Vickers and Mr Wilkinson for their work during a difficult year. Mr E. A. Rose, the Editor, stated that the delayed issues of *Proceedings* were in the press and that the situation would soon be regularised. It was agreed that issues would now be dated February, May and October. Mr Rose again appealed for articles on aspects of twentieth century Methodism and also for shorter articles to supplement the longer papers he had in hand. Comments on the contents of *Proceedings* would be appreciated so that the needs and interests of members could be catered for.

The President reported from the sub-committee set up to consider the library about the progress of negotiations with the Principal of Southlands College. Many problems still remain but a working relationship had been established and Mr George was authorised to continue the negotiations. The Librarian (the Rev. K. B. Garlick) and Mrs Joyce Banks (Assistant Librarian) gave reports and the meeting expressed its thanks to them. Reports were presented from the Publishing Manager, the Local Branches Secretary and the Exhibition Secretary. The retiring Conferences Secretary, Peter Howard, reported on the successful WHS/WMHS Conference held at Wesley College, Bristol during Easter Week 1986 and members who had been present expressed their thanks to him for all his work. His successor, Tim A. Macquiban, informed the meeting that the next Conference would be held from 5th-8th April 1988, possibly at York or Manchester. The General Secretary stated that the lecturer for 1987 would be the Connexional Archivist, the Rev. William Leary; his chosen subject was to be 'John Wesley: Man of One Book'.

After a number of announcements and items of other business, Mr George expressed the thanks of the society to Goldenhill Methodist Church for their hospitality and the meeting closed with the grace.

Annual Lecture : 1986

The Rev. Dr. Norman W. Taggart, in the bicentenary year of Methodist Missionary work overseas appropriately chose as his chairman the Secretary

of the Overseas Division, the Rev. Dr. Albert W. Mosley and as his subject—'Methodist Foreign Missions: the first half century'. The insights he provided in the origin and development of our missionary work with all its problems and successes enthralled the attentive audience. The lecture is published in this issue of *Proceedings*.

E. DOROTHY GRAHAM

FRANZ HILDEBRANDT DD PhD

DR Hildebrandt contributed little to our *Proceedings*, but his immense services to the study of the Wesleys leaves us all in his debt and merit a tribute in our pages.

Born the son of a professor in Berlin on 20th February 1909, he studied theology after the German fashion in Berlin, Tübingen and Marburg, publishing his doctoral thesis in 1931. In 1933 he entered the ministry of the Lutheran Church, among the last to be ordained before the Nazis took over the State Church. A close friend of Niemöller and Bonhoeffer, he assisted in the organisation of the Confessional Church and the 'Barmen Confession' of principles, which defied Hitler and his confederates. He came to Britain in 1937 and having discovered the Wesleys and their hymns he became a Methodist minister in 1946, serving for five years in the Cambridge circuit before moving to Nicolson Square, Edinburgh. In this period he continued writing; his own apologia, so to speak, *From Luther to Wesley*, was published in 1951.

Two years after his appointment to Edinburgh he was invited to a professorship at Drew University. This period saw him established as a leading theologian, marked by evangelical scholarship, strongly-held views on churchmanship—the Hildebrandt of the Barmen Confession was not to be forgotten—and increasing devotion to the message of the Wesleys. In 1954 he delivered the Harris Franklin Rall Lectures in Evanston, published later as *Christianity according to the Wesleys* and dedicated to his former congregations at Romsey and Edinburgh; four years later came the *Wesley Hymn Book*; it was always a matter of deep regret to him that he could find no Methodist publisher to undertake it. In 1962 he was appointed one of the observers at the Second Vatican Council—where he made his own distinctive contribution; something of the atmosphere and activities of that experience were recalled in his wife's impressions, *Rome Diary*. Whilst at Rome he wrote his most massive work, *I offered Christ; a Protestant Study of the Mass*, published over both an American and the Epworth imprint; in this book, as so often, Charles Wesley is his standard of faith.

From Drew he returned in retirement to Edinburgh, but unhappy at the Anglican-Methodist Conversations and what he saw as the prospect of re-ordination, he resigned from the Methodist ministry. His commitment to the hymns of Charles Wesley was second only to his commitment to the Bible and he was asked to edit volume VII of the new edition of the *Works*—that dealing with the 1780 Hymnbook. He suffered a serious stroke in August 1985, which led to his home-call on 25th November. As Christian theologian, Wesley scholar, devoted pastor, man of integrity and especially as devoted servant of Christ, he was an example to us all. May he, being dead, yet speak.

OLIVER A. BECKERLEGGE

WESLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Financial Statement, 1st January to 31st December 1985

INCOME.	£	EXPENDITURE.	£
Unexpired Subscriptions at 1st January 1985 (estimated)—		<i>Proceedings</i> and Printing ...	3,067
Ordinary Members ...	946	Library—	
Life Members ...	600	New Acquisitions, etc. ...	79
Received during year ...	2,613	Lecturer's Honorarium, etc. ...	30
Income Tax recoverable ...	3	World Methodist Historical Soc. ...	182
	<hr/>	Administration Expenses ...	1,164
	4,162	Advertising ...	18
<i>Less</i> Unexpired Subscriptions at 31st December 1985 (see Balance Sheet—estimated)	1,696		
	<hr/>		
	2,466		
Irish Branch ...	174		
Sale of Publications ...	154		
Conference Lecture Collection	25		
Library—Tickets, Donations, Sales	706		
W.M.H.S. Newsletter ...	59		
Advertisements ...	117		
Bank Interest ...	412		
War Stock Dividend ...	8		
Excess of Expenditure over Income ...	419		
	<hr/>		
	£4,540		<hr/>
			£4,540

Balance Sheet as at 31st December 1985

LIABILITIES.	£	ASSETS.	£
Unexpired Subscriptions—		3½% War Stock (at cost) ...	225
Ordinary Members (estimated)	1,146	Sundry Debtors ...	108
Life Members (estimated) ...	550	National Savings Bank ...	1,762
	<hr/>	Trustee Savings Bank ...	555
	1,696	Midland Bank (Current A/c) ...	275
Sundry Creditors ...	755	" (Deposit A/c) ...	2,067
Accumulated Funds b/fwd. ...	2,962	Cash in hand—Registrar ...	2
	<hr/>	Library and stocks of Publications (unvalued)	
	5,413		
<i>Deduct</i> Excess of Expenditure over Income ...	419		
	<hr/>		
	£4,994		<hr/>
			£4,994

19th June 1986.

(Signed) RALPH WILKINSON, *Treasurer*.

AUDITOR'S REPORT

I have audited the financial statements in accordance with approved auditing standards. The amount of subscriptions paid in advance by members includes estimates based upon a reasonable interpretation of the available data. No account has been taken of subscriptions in arrears at 31st December 1985, whether or not recovered since, but any previous arrears received during the year are included in the above figures. Other assets and liabilities have been independently verified.

Subject to the matters mentioned above, in my opinion the financial statements give a true and fair view on an historical cost basis of the state of affairs of the Society as at 31st December 1985, and of its deficit for the year then ended.

Barron & Barron,
Bathurst House, 86, Micklegate, York.

(Signed) W. B. TAYLOR,
Chartered Accountant.

BOOK NOTICES

Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750-1850 by David Hempton.
(Hutchinson, 1984, pp 276, £13.95)

This book returns to the well-ploughed field of the relationship between Methodism, in what now has to be called its early period, and politics. Dr. Hempton is lecturer in modern history at the Queen's University of Belfast, and he has a strong interest in ecclesiastical history. Whether his approach will recommend him to Methodist readers is not quite clear. His discussion of Roman Catholic Emancipation between 1790 and 1830, one of the more original parts of his book, offers an example of his method. He says that in this period Methodist opposition to Roman Catholicism became more public and more political. Methodist anti-Catholicism ruined its chances of missionary expansion in Ireland, he says, but it paid unexpected returns in England. 'Not only did it cement Methodist respectability in the eyes of aristocratic Tories and Protestant Anglicans, but it strengthened Methodist roots in English popular culture at a time when its opposition to popular radicalism threatened its survival in industrial districts.' In fact, he concludes, in their opposition to radical politics and Irish Catholics, the Wesleys set themselves against the two principal liberal crusades of the first half of the nineteenth century: religious equality and the extension of political influence to new social groups. These are not the only negatives which affect his picture of Wesleyanism between 1800 and 1850. It is part of his general thesis that Wesleyanism also broke with popular revivalism, and so dug another gulf between the Old Connexion and the working-class. These were the vital years in Wesleyan history, he argues, because it was then that Wesleyanism failed to sink deep roots into working-class culture, and therefore lost the chance to become the focus of popular religion.

Dr. Hempton's position marks an advance, in as much as he drops implicitly the older view that Methodism played a vital role in English politics in the early Victorian period. Wesleyanism in particular never functioned as part of the political forces which were demanding change, but gratefully accepted the ability of the ruling groups to maintain social order. What seems less certain to me is that one can relate the Wesleyanism of the 1800s, then moving into a third generation, to the emergence of 'working-classes' in the industrial districts. Wesleyanism was largely the product of an internal readjustment of the English religious sub-culture to the early eighteenth-century Hanoverian settlement, which confirmed the eclipse of 'historic Dissent', relegated Roman Catholicism to the backwoods for a century, and defined 'Anglicanism' as a conciliatory 'civic religion'. The unconciliated found themselves in limbo, and Wesleyanism expressed a limited alienation from the 'soft' absolutism of the Hanoverians, who showed no interest in forming the kind of links with this English version of Pietism which the Prussian government formed with its own Pietism. Given its eighteenth-century history, I don't think that there was ever a serious possibility that Wesleyanism could have sunk deep roots into a working-class culture: it was always moving away from the 'lower orders', without making much progress, in the early nineteenth century, towards a fixed social identity. There was no question of choice, and to the extent that a working-class 'culture' may be said to have developed by 1848 it was hostile to Pietism. What mattered most in the religious world in those years was the gradual return of Catholicism into the main stream after 1829: Wesleyan anti-Romanism showed an instinctive appreciation of the importance of the

change, which was to be symbolised by the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in 1850, but in practice it was to be Catholicism which grew and Methodism which declined. It is unlikely, however, that the political choices made by men like Jabez Bunting affected the outcome, or that Methodism could have found a proletarian constituency to balance the consequences of the Irish famine.

All Methodist historians will find David Hempton's approach refreshing, and he has much new information both about Methodism and Ireland and about Methodist involvement in education. It is still true, however, that we need new conceptual tools for our interpretation of this area of recent religious history.

JOHN KENT

The Irish in World Methodism, 1760-1900 by Norman W. Taggart (Epworth Press 1986. pp. xvii + 222, £12.50)

This book does not disappoint the high expectations which one brings to it, and that is already saying a great deal. Its author is uniquely qualified to undertake a task of this scope, since he has been a missionary in India, for some years Home Secretary of the Methodist Church Overseas Division, and is now Superintendent of the Belfast City Mission.

Dr Taggart has tested these qualifications to the full by attempting, in limited space, a survey which could easily have become patchy and episodic. Not only does the story as a whole cover the world; some of the individuals had extraordinarily varied and chequered careers—William Butler in India and Mexico, John McKenny in South Africa, Sri Lanka and Australia, and John Barry in Jamaica, Canada and Bermuda. The author lets us see them as whole, often complex, living people, in a way often missed in histories of a particular area, and sometimes even in general surveys.

The author has wisely chosen a twofold approach: biographical and thematic. In addition to the figures already mentioned, chapters are devoted to Adam Clarke and William Arthur, and to James Lynch of Sri Lanka and India; to the role of the WMMS in relation to Ireland; to Irish emigration; to lay pioneers and leaders; and to Canada. The study opens with a chapter on "the Irish and Methodism's world outreach", which among other things corrects exaggerated claims for Ireland's contribution in both people and money. It ends with an assessment of the period in the light of the predominant concerns of mission today. An appendix lists Irish-born Methodist ministers and probationers in Canada.

Lives and themes flow into each other; the main concern of the chapter on Clarke and Arthur is rightly with the theology of mission, and the account of Barry's work broadens into an analysis of Wesleyan policies on slavery. Correspondence with the Mission House is not entirely concerned with dishonoured bills and unauthorised travel; it touches sensitively if incidentally on major questions of theology.

The author's complex task is carried through with fine and balanced judgement. There is no hint of hagiography; yet in the end the story is inspiring, both in itself, and also because it is so well and simply told. The numerous quotations, from archival or not easily accessible sources, are so quotable

that this reviewer must impose on himself an almost total ban in this respect. The author is particularly good at drawing out significant elements, and expressing them succinctly.

There is really almost nothing in this book to criticise. On trivialities, it would have been more helpful for all abbreviations (xvii, 202) to have been explained in one place, and for the spelling "Sinhalese" to have been used consistently outside quotations.

Just one question remains in the mind of a non-Irish reader. William Butler is quoted as saying, a few years before he died :

Dear old Irish Methodism ! If I have been of any use in this wide world,
I owe it, under God, to her.

It would be good to know a little more of the distinctive character and flavour of Irish Methodism, which made this story possible, and now gives coherence to the record of it. But that, perhaps, is another story.

PAUL ELLINGWORTH

Endless Song by Elsie W. Cooper, with Foreword by Kenneth G. Greet.
(WMHS Publications, 1986, pp. 122 plus, £2.75 plus postage.)

Endless Song is a simple story, simply told, of *Lark Rise* genre, a family history as far back as great-grandmother, with domestic pets not forgotten. Claim to be noticed and, I imagine, to be published by the WMHS is that the writer married a Methodist minister, the Rev. Frank M. Cooper, though one could wish that Mrs. Cooper had given us more views of Methodism "through a manse window", so to speak. However, what we do have is a delightful picture of a life as it was lived—from village scenes and customs in peaceful Edwardian days to those terrific upheavals during the Bristol blitz. The closing chapter is "a moving plea for peace to be given a chance in our nuclear age". The title is taken, very appropriately, from the first line of a poem (? by Mrs. Cooper), "My life flows on in endless song" and the sub-title, equally appropriate, reads, "A Celebration of Life".

JOHN C. BOWMER

John Wesley and the Methodists by Cyril Davey. (Marshall Pickering, 1985, pp 46, £4.95.)

This is intended as a popular introduction to Methodism for British and American readers and is everything such a book should be : balanced, readable, accurate for the most part and beautifully illustrated in colour throughout. Within severe limits of space, Cyril Davey manages to give us a life of John Wesley, a glance at Charles and his achievements, a history of Methodism and its divisions, a survey of Methodism's expansion overseas including America and a sketch of the present situation.

Inevitably, there are a few slips : John Wesley died aged 87, not 88 (p.4), Deighton Street should read Dighton Street (p.30), the date of 1779 with relation to Wesley's ordinations is clearly wrong (p.30), the origin of the New

Connexion was not confined to the North East (p.32), laymen were first admitted to the Wesleyan Conference in 1878, not 1871 (p.34), the account of the origin of the UMFC on page 34 is somewhat garbled and a full page portrait of Queen Victoria (p.35) seems of doubtful relevance.

This book fulfils the need for a simple and attractive account of our Church. One wonders why such a book was not commissioned by our own publishing house.

E.A. ROSE

Welsh Chapels, by Anthony Jones. (National Museum of Wales, 1984, pp.87, £3.50.)

Churches in Bristol, by Bryan Little. (Redcliffe Press, 1967, pp.46, £1.25.)

To many, Wales and chapel are synonymous and so a booklet profusely illustrated with both black and white and colour plates is most welcome. The ultimate plea of the author is that although not all chapels can or should be preserved, the chapels of Wales must not be dismissed *in toto* and the best examples should be retained, possibly by amalgamation of churches. In presenting his case he traces the origins of Welsh Dissent and then looks both at the architectural designs and the architects responsible for this once familiar Welsh landscape feature.

As an introduction to Welsh chapel architecture this book is highly recommended and those concerned with recording chapels could learn from the author's presentation of his material. His photographic techniques are worthy of consideration, especially the way he retains the feeling of curvature at Llandudno, Ebeneser Methodist. Another useful contribution is on the rebuilding of chapels, selective illustrations being used to show how a particular facade was changed. Inevitably the book is primarily concerned with Welsh-speaking chapels but a clearer distinction perhaps could have been made between Calvinistic Methodists and Wesleyan Methodists, both English and Welsh speaking.

Bristol may only be separated from Wales by the Severn Estuary but the city's religious history is quite different. Belated note should be made of this booklet which, although mainly concerned with Anglican churches built since the Medieval period, also gives brief potted histories and descriptions of some Nonconformist and Methodist examples. A number of the churches are illustrated.

D. COLIN DEWS

LOCAL HISTORIES

In place of our normal listing of local histories, in this issue we give brief notices of those which call for a fuller treatment on account of their length and quality. First, a very belated review of *Methodists of West Somerset* by A.G. Pointon (106pp, £3 post free from the author at The Flat, No 1 High Street, Dunster, Minehead, Somerset, TA24 6SF). This is a model circuit history, in an area which combines two very different traditions—rural Methodism

'evangelical, self-contained, wary of other denominations' and urban Methodism 'middle-class, liberal and ecumenical'. The book is carefully organised, with chapters on the individual societies, both Wesleyan and Bible Christian, followed by three omnibus chapters on organisation and finance, worship and Sunday School work, and is a perceptive survey which never fails to relate the chapels to the community of which they are part.

Also from the West of England comes *Bible Christians of the Forest of Dean* by the late George E. Lawrence, (60pp, £2.50 from 'Westbury', Upper Road, Pillowell Lydney, Glos. GL15 4QZ). The Bible Christians reached the Forest in 1826 and their impact on the area is faithfully chronicled here, both in chapel building and personalities. There is much about the Batt family, who produced a Bible Christian President of Conference. *This Other Eden* by David Clarke (139pp, £6 from Wesley Manse, Warwick Road, Kington, CV35 0HN) shifts the scene to Westmorland and is a fine study (based on the author's PhD thesis) of Methodism in the Upper Eden Valley. The changes and continuities in the life of the chapels and their communities over two centuries are described with sensitivity and out of deep personal knowledge. It is good to see ample justice being done to the Primitives and the Free Methodists as well as the dominant Wesleys.

Methodism in the Countryside : Horncastle Circuit 1786-1986 by J.N. Clarke and C.L. Anderson (218pp, £5 plus 60p postage from Mr Anderson at 26 West Street, Horncastle, Lincs, LN9 5JF) is the book for those who look back wistfully to the full-length local histories of the past, for here is a truly Victorian amplitude of detail. Excellent use has been made of a wide range of both manuscript and printed sources, including material now in Australia. The statistically minded will devour the numerous graphs, tables, charts and maps, while those with a biographical concern will find much of interest in the numerous pen portraits, which include Robert Carr Brackenbury, Thomas Williams, missionary to Fiji and Australia, Thomas Jackson, Charles Richardson, the 'Lincolnshire Thrasher' and Sir Henry Lunn. With its plentiful illustrations and detailed index, this history is excellent value and deserves a wide sale.

To set against these studies of rural Methodism, we have John Banks's centenary history of the Manchester and Salford Mission: *The Story . . . So Far* (186pp, £5.50 from The Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester, M1 1JT). As might be expected, this is a most readable account of a 'mission alongside the poor' that has taken many forms in its hundred years' existence. It is popular and straightforward, full of good stories and particularly good on recent events with which Mr Banks has been personally involved. For anyone who has read the older histories and the biography of Samuel Collier there is little that is new in the earlier chapters but this in part reflects the loss of many of the Mission records.

Finally, another contrast. From Ireland we have *A Tale of Two Churches* by Isobel Law (103pp, n.p. from the author at 103 Gregg Street, Lisburn, Northern Ireland, BT27 5AW), a most handsome and well researched history of Methodism in Priesthill, Lisburn. Priesthill was one of the original societies of the Methodist New Connexion in Ireland and the only chapel to change hands in 1798, during the troubles in the Lisburn circuit that led to the New Connexion work there. There is much information here about this little-known strand in Irish Methodist history.