THE EVANGELISM OF JAMAICAN METHODISM: HISTORICAL METHOD AND MESSAGE

PREFACE

There are some things which need to be said at the beginning of a paper such as this. It is very likely that thinking of and focusing on Jamaica, and other islands like her, as being other than a mission-field has still not achieved in practice their fullest implications. The introduction of Jamaica into this level of discussion feels like a very bold step. This island has not yet contributed to the thought processes of this Institute. By remaining silent, however, there will always be ignorance of the real potential worthiness. Therefore, it is hesitantly, tentatively that this paper is offered.

This paper will attempt to answer questions such as, "Does Jamaican Methodism have anything to say to World Methodism?; Does Jamaican Methodism share in the 'global context of personal uncertainty, social change and political conflict?; How does international Methodist practice reflect on us and we on them?"

Should this paper appear unwieldy and sometimes so general as to be lost in vagueness, please bear the following in mind. It is an attempt to concisely bring together strands of a hitherto largely oral tradition, to discern its implicit doctrine while simultaneously seeking grounding in the in the Wesleyan doctrinal conviction of the 18th century. To this last we hold it seem, somewhat tenuously at times. The history is given against the background of a general history of the Church in the Caribbean, and Jamaica in particular. There one shall attempt to see the message through the method. Then evangelism as it is executed (and we may have to contend with this ambiguity) today along with the effects will be described. Some areas of doctrine will be examined. This paper presupposes a tradition that has always declared a message but has not probed its development and which lacks a systematic method. It is pursuing a path that as far as this writer knows has never been travelled before for the public's view. So, enter with me into this voyage of much musing.

INTRODUCTION

Ask any good Methodist the question, "What does the Methodist Church preach and believe?". The core of the answer will contain the Four Universals or the Doctrinal Emphases as follows:
1. All persons are sinners.
2. All persons can be saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. All persons can know that they are saved.
4. All persons can be saved to the uttermost.

What seems to be the general understanding of these?

1. All persons are sinners. "We are born in sin and shaped in iniquity", an indication which could mean that sex is sinful (as some persons think), that all human beings are totally corrupt, or that each person is tainted by sin. Sin is more readily defined by actions rather than as a component of a person's being. The bottom line is that no one can truthfully claim not to be in need of redemption.

2. All persons can be saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to two testimonies.

   "I was walking down destruction's broad pathway, when the Lord stretched a hand from heaven. He took me from the miry clay and set my feet on higher ground. I am thanking God tonight, for he never fail me yet. He saves, he keeps, he satisfies. Please pray for me while I pray for myself."

   "I am thanking Jesus tonight for my salvation. I could not save myself. I tried everything and everything failed. But when I looked to Jesus he brought to the cleansing stream. My brothers and sisters please pray for me in Jesus's name."

These typify the popular understanding of salvation. As stated there it is incomplete. It contains some strong elements thought.

a. Being taken from a way of life that was perceived as destructive.
b. An intermingling of God and Jesus with Jesus as the mediator of salvation. A total need for Jesus is expressed. In the popular mind the only place that Satan occupies in this is that of a loser. There is no contention between God and Satan. This is God's love bearing in itself the sins of the world.
c. The removal of the power and consequences of sin as well as the making holy, which is always stated as a present continuous tense, are evident.

The missing elements are forgiveness and justification as well as a sense of God's image being restored and of reconciliation to God.
Because of these absences statements three and four will not be commented. It is possible that this paper confronts one with the potential of a realization that our history has not begun to express neither the doctrine of Assurance nor the Doctrine of Entire Sanctification. The latter admittedly is somewhat more elusive.

**A Definition of Evangelism**

Evangelism is that activity of the church by which it seeks to effectively proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. Eric Baker suggests in his book *The Faith of a Methodist* that Evangelism is an attitude, a spirit, and a living faith that finds expression in a continuous, cooperative effort on the part of the Holy Spirit and men to bring the individual into relationship with God and others through faith in Jesus Christ, God's Son.

The news of evangelism ought to be seen as good by the hearers. A church ought to bear an evangelistic spirit. The intention of effectively bringing good news of God should be pervasive of all church activity. The good news, of course, involves not only a present salvation, but also an eschatological hope. Therefore, in its theoretical statements the Methodist Church recognizes that every task, event, deed, and statement of the Church is a part of the evangelistic enterprise. Yet some activities focus the witness more sharply than others. Some more readily facilitate individual conversion, others better announce the reign of the kingdom of God, and yet others declare the eschatological hope.

**Methods of Evangelism**

Despite the breadth of the last statement, practical concentration on evangelism tends to acknowledge only particular activities as evangelistic. These may be briefly listed. There are:- a) sporadic periods of special campaigns, usually annually; b) series of crusade meetings; c) group or organization evangelism; d) person to person evangelism. This is evangelism marked by a specific intention to attempt to bring persons to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**HISTORICAL EXPOSURE**

**METHOD**

**Beginnings - Then came the Evangelicals**

When in the 17th century Jamaica was taken from Spain by Britain, the
Church of England established her presence. She came to care for, justify and defend the representatives of the absentee plantocracy. During the 18th century the Evangelicals arrived. They were represented first by the Moravians, then by the Baptists. In 1789, the Methodists arrived. Ironically, today, these four denominations are no longer known as the Evangelicals. They are now numbered among the Established, Mainline, or Traditional Churches.

When Jamaican Methodists reflect on the way we have come, we look at our arrival and the events of our developmental process. This is usually not a critical reflection. I will briefly follow the usual pattern here.

On January 19, 1789, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Coke, on one of his missionary journeys made a scheduled stop in Jamaica. He landed in what was then our capital city of vice, Port Royal. He brought with him Methodist Christianity. In Kingston he met a Roman Catholic priest from whom he rented a house in which he could hold worship services. He remained long enough to establish the work and left one Mary Ann Akle Smith in charge of the class meeting. This class meeting was to become Coke Memorial Methodist Church, the first congregation. As simply as this the work begun.

Expansion

The total story cannot be be told, but after the start by Dr. Coke the main Methodist evangelists were freed slaves, free coloureds and planters. The story is oft repeated, in the history, that lay persons, both female and male began the work and then asked for a missionary to be sent. This was congruent with events in other Caribbean islands. Methodism was introduced by a variety of free coloureds, slaves, soldiers and planters. In Jamaica the work was primarily town centred where it met with many free coloureds. The inroads made into the slave population was not as substantial as those made by the Baptists and the Moravians. Lacking modern high-powered communication media, the vehicles of transmission were simply person to person and the class meeting.

The 1830s ushered in emancipation and apprenticeship. There was an urgent need for education. Many churches started schools. So did the Methodists. Religious Education as a subject in school was compulsory at all levels. Then, Religious Education meant education in the Christian
faith. Churches managed school Boards, selected and financed the employment of teachers. Memers of staff, either began with or subsequently entered into membership with the denomination affiliated to the school. Sometimes, indeed, Church and school used the same room. Children studied amidst the symbols of religious devotion.

Enter the 20th century and the era of ecclesiastical respectability. The Evangelicals were well on the way to becoming the Established Church. Under the guidance of the British missionaries, the Methodist Church was being led into sobriety and staidness. This was most reflected in the style of worship. Worship was the Order of Morning Prayer, without deviation. Confirmation was based on a 'sure and certain' knowledge of the SENIOR CATECHISM OF THE METHODIST CHURCH. Worship seemed an endurance test rather than a joyous celebration. Nothing was to be done that even vaguely hinted of a departure from order. The Holy Spirit knew his place. The seed of future membership was planted in the Sunday School. If a sinner needed grace should don 'Sunday Best' and sit amidst the respectable or wherever they might allow him to. This church would never be debased by the scandal of open air preaching.

Analysis

Obviously, the tools of Methodist expansion depended very heavily on the initiative and momentum of the laity. The early and middle years were very risky for missionaries. Many died of Yellow Fever, Typhoid Fever and Dysentery. At one stage the worship of the Evangelicals was banned and at another time preaching licences were required of them. Some missionaries were landed in jail on account of these. Yet the work continued largely because of the faith and persistence of the laity.

Secular education used as a tool of evangelism should not be overlooked. The Church was also chaplain to the schools. This was perhaps the most effective means of ensuring the propagation of the faith. It did not always issue in conversion but ensured a dominating influence into which many persons grew. This was where a definite link should have been made between the sacred and the secular.

The strangest partnership was entertained between church worship and church life. Despite the formal stiffness of the worship these were the years when youth work seem to have flourished. Many of the oldest members of the Church will gladly recall their years in the Wesley Guild, Brigade, Scout, and Guide movements, Girls' Leagues and organized activities of the sort.
The Sunday School and these others did bear fruit of membership for the Church. The discipline of the young was a wonderful fruit of this work.

Despite all this, the Church, by its personal coldness, and its narrow field of outreach, managed to convince onlookers that it was insular and snobbish. It was accused of not carrying a burden for sinners. This view may or may not have been jaundiced but there were factors behind the accusation. We will look at these further on in the paper.

THE MESSAGE

As presented the message of Methodism seems quite straightforward. The categories which may be used seem to be "the priesthood of all believers", an "Incarnational Theology", and "the ordeliness of the Holy Spirit". There are, however, strands which colour the picture and make for a complex whole. There was a message rationally and consciously received. There was also a subliminal message received subliminally.

The Four Universals provided the core of the Church's doctrine. It carried implicitly the message of the dignity of the human being who is restored to God's image. Most of the persons used by God had emerged from the negro's perspective in slavery. That which was intuited though not necessarily verbalized was the secret of another kind of service. It was not slavery to white folk, nor was it the drudgery of survival. This was work that bestowed dignity on the worker. It resulted in action.

Hence the story of Mary Wilkinson, a free coloured, who disobeyed the law, abrogated magisterial powers and consecrated unto God the unions of black couples. This was regarded by them as being as binding as any legal marriage. She incurred the wrath of the authorities and had to flee her home for the capital, Kingston. There, between 1807 to 1814 she kept alive the congregation of the Coke Memorial Chapel which had been ordered closed. When the Chapel was reopened, by dint of her sterling efforts and guidance, the congregation had increased from 500 to 1800.

Gerhard von Rad perhaps enunciated what these people instinctively knew, that God acted in history and that he acted through human agents. Christianity cannot lay exclusive claim to the impartation of this. The story of Africans reveal a very lively spirituality and a deep consciousness
that all of life is not matter. Africans knew that the spiritual and the material had intimate interaction together. Christianity brought to these persons an opportunity to begin to act anew on that which they knew and of which a diabolical plan had attempted to rob them. Involuntary alienation form the place where 'yu nabel string bury' can kill a person's soul.

For negroes then, as it still is now, education was the key to social mobility. The Church provided it. Many illiterate adults endured much hardship and deprivation so that "fe mi pickney can get a education". The idea was always for the child to 'come out' better than the parents had. A nation has been built on this philosophy. The Church has facilitated an education with a very strong moral content. Along with other Churches we celebrate this heritage. Today, every national event includes in its celebrations a church service. There is hardly any person in leadership who was not reared under the influence of the church. Is not this evangelism in action and influence? This was Incarnational Theology without the vocabulary. It was only known that salvation was for service for the construction of holiness in individuals and the nation.

In the middle years of this century a spirituality developed that seemed to have more Old Testament content than New. The formality of worship reinforced the concept of God as wholly other. God was eminent without immanence. There was uncertainty about the position of the redeemed before God. God was vindicator rather than justifier. God was the One Who would wreak revenge, not the Love that would 'take away my sins'. The hallmark of piety and devotion was a daily diet of the Psalms. It seems there was in Methodism an absence of 'vital religion'. This it seems was a causative factor in the accusation of insularity and snobbery. The membership lacked the impetu which led to dynamic witnessing.

The membership lacked the ministry of Assurance. Since the turn of the 19th century, the challenge to commitment of one's life to Christ in a way that involved the entire person seems to have been lacking. Christianity was a cerebral assent to a philosophy and a principled way of life. Instead of a confident, "I am a Christian", Methodists would weakly and with a form of humility say, "I am trying to be a Christian". There was little evidence of regeneration. Show rather than fruit was the emphasis. There was no facility in the church, no medium to provide a growth spectrum from this perennial uncertainty to even a moment's certainty. People knew
that God blessed them and loved them. They were uncertain that, "He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death". The witness of the church had come to cause and deserve the descriptions it had gained.

This period in the Church's life saw a predominantly white British ministry. The vast majority of Jamaicans still are black people. The Church used a service book for a largely illiterate congregation. A severe demeanour and the suppression of emotions were worship concomitants. Here was something other than a distinction between the profane and the sacred. Here was a division of ethnic expression. White European patterns of behaviour were the sacred way. Negro patterns of behaviour were not to be carried into church and therefore must be profane. Therefore, negro behaviour was wrong. Negro feelings were wrong. Negro was wrong. The more negroid you were the more wrong you became.

To this day many Jamaicans await the birth of a child with bated breath. They silently hope that the baby in utero will not grow to be black nor have hair that is too kinky. Yes, more than a distinction between the sacred and the secular, this was a rending asunder of the very soul of black human beings. It was a rending that began when the first slave ship left West Coast Africa for the Caribbean, a rending that continued and continues as the borders and population of the Jamaican diaspora increases. Should it then be surprising if testimonies lack evidence of a sense of forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, and the restoration of God's image? By the nature of its worship the Methodist Church continues to unwittingly sanction this ghastly error. Healing at the deepest levels of the human psyche still needs to take place.

A dualism has resulted. A sharp delineation between, and a feeling of certainty about that which is sacred and that which is profane, a divorce between worship and reality. Thus Rev. Ashley Smith, President of the United Theological College of the West Indies can correctly write,

"... the poor usually have two theologies. The one theology prescribed by those who write down the belief of those of the top, which theology they pretend to accept because they are aware of the consequences of rejecting it outright. The other is their private unwritten theology which underpins the faith which gives them inner strength...because they have to go on pretending that they subscribe to the 'theology of the place'...people in this category remain alienated from themselves and as a consequence, their development as persons is arrested..."(1)
THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

Religious Surfeit

The message of evangelists in Jamaica has become hackneyed phrases. It is possible to think that only the faithful are still listening. The majority of the population still have, at least, 'the faith of devils'. Jamaicans know Christianity and are bombarded by the old time message 'ad nauseum'. Even the faithful can sometimes experience this nausea. At last count this tiny island of just under 1200 square miles was accommodating nearly 300 Christian denominations. And there are yet other religions.

New Sins

Some of these are not new but they are emerging with frightening intensity. One can list massive migration, moral decrepitude, stagnation and regression in family life, abuse of even more sophisticated drugs, child abuse, suicide, increased crime and growing disregard for life, corruption in high places, economic instability, increased sexism in the workplace, increased insanity, severe poverty, malnutrition, lawlessness, pornography, violence, even societal ambivalence toward the church. The list is still incomplete. Underlying all of this there appears a tremendous self-hate. Put more positively it is an inability to love oneself. Despite all the activity, the successes and the influence it still remains true that, 'that truly the harvest is plentiful'.

Developing Pluralism

The first real challenge to the Christian faith was Rastafarianism, at first a cult of the dispossessed and marginalized, it has infiltrated the middle and upper classes and the intelligentsia and has won converts and advocates from amongst them.

Now there is an increasing Moslem presence as well as followers of the Bahai faith. One is not allowed to ignore the Jehovah's Witness, the Reunification Church and the Mormons. The Jewish faith is also present but has a very low profile. Nonetheless they are among the wealthiest in the island. The Jews and the Christians have a very close relationship.

Challenge of New Denominations

The Pentecostals and the Evangelicals are not properly regarded as new
The Pentecostals arrived first. Handclapping, aisle rolling, shouting "hallelujah", they announced their presence in Jamaica with tongues, prophecies, and wondrous healings. Many of the island's poor gravitated towards these groups. These folk could express themselves there. The new Evangelicals arrived closely on their heels.

Both groups bombarded their hearers with frequent altar calls. The horrors of hell were graphically described and it was made explicit just how to avoid them. In worship the Pentecostals laughed, they clapped, they experienced a sense of triumph, they shouted, they danced. Their services were long, tumultuous and eventful. They had nightly week meetings. Their members frequented hospitals and jails. They were found in the highways and the hedges, on the street corners and in the backyards and living rooms. They prayed and won converts. Their membership became committed to a very pietistic and dualistic way of life. Many Methodists who regularly donned their spiritual corsets and went to the Methodist Church in the morning, unknown to their ministers, took off the corsets in the evening and went and jumped with these folk in the evening. While jumping they sang,

"O precious is the flow That makes me white as snow."

Being justified now meant being 'just-as-if-I'd-never been black'.

The Evangelicals were of a more sober expression than the Pentecostals. Their potency and threat lay in their message. Simply put it had four points.

1) We all have sinned and gone astray.
2) Jesus Christ died to save us from sin.
3) We are saved from sin if we believe in Him.
4) We are saved to be fruitful.

While preaching this they did not miss an opportunity to attack the Established Churches. They said, "God is not a grandparent", "We are people of the Bible, not a creed", "No baptism, no Christianity, no Christianity, no heaven", "You can't be a warm Christian if you worship in a fridge".

Despite a rigid dualism in their message their imbalance was to be a corrective for the other imbalance which existed in the likes of Methodist...
practice. (The day is with us when the barriers of distrust and spiritual snobbery are slowly breaking down as we learn from each other.) Through them God came amongst the people and searched for them. The Methodists had been sitting and waiting for the people to come into the church building to look for God.

Methodist membership began to slip. These two groups were almost devastating in their exposure of Methodist weakness.

Then Came the Charismatics

They came with a Holy Spirit expression that drew the urban middle classes. Here God's Spirit could be seen at work without the disorderly excesses of the traditional Pentecostals. Members of this group 'rejoiced in the Lord', they were exorcised, they spoke in tongues, they prophesied, they healed, they counselled. Oh, how they loved one another and anyone who dropped in to visit them. They were attractive. They grew. The Methodist Church trembled.

Ecumenical Development

Since the 1960s and the development of the United Theological College of the West Indies, there has been a convergence in the messages of the Established Churches. The College was built to serve the two-fold purpose of theological training and ministerial formation. To quote Rev. Clifton Niles, "The only lessons in Systematic Theology that a Methodist will get come from a Presbyterian, Pastoral Care and Counselling from an Anglican, Homiletics from a Baptist, Christian Education from the Disciple of Christ, and other subjects from a mixture of Moravians, Methodists, Lutherans, and the list could go on. This statement would be true for any denomination of the mainline churches. One might even study Liturgics at the feet of a Roman Catholic. For all practical purposes there has developed a great similarity of expression between all mainline churches. Understandably, there is a deeply shared history, a commonality of experience, and we are all battling the same problems.

We have reeled together under the impact of the Pentecostals, Evangelicals and Charismatics. We are in the process of 'girding our loins' and adjusting our historical patterns. Simultaneously, the Evangelicals have begun to learn about wholistic salvation. The message content of each group has been altered. Some more radically than others,
CONTEMPORARY METHODIST RESPONSE

There has been a response on many fronts. The Social Outreach of the Church has continued and expanded. Two or three years ago yet another high school was opened. The Church has sponsored many Basic Schools, a government innovation of the 70's. There are now skills training projects, income generating projects, girls' home, a school for girls who have fallen by the wayside of the regular school system, medical clinics, counselling centres, and financial donations to sundry charities.

In recent years there has been increased attention paid to campaign evangelism. This has involved crusade meetings, street meetings, house-to-house visitation campaigns, person-to-person campaigns. It has been urged that class meetings and church organizations be used as instruments of the evangelistic process.

Attention has also been given to the worship experience. A new liturgy is being experimented with. The horizontal axis has been developed. Milestones in human life are celebrated; the peace is passed on and persons know the other's presence. These are, however, only moments in the liturgy which still has not incorporated the black pathos.

Learning the lessons of our history, we have seen an upsurge in enthusiastic lay participation in the Church to good effect. The message is even entering the workplace. There during lunch breaks Christians gather together at agreed times for prayer, fellowship, and discussion.

There are still problems, however. The work among young people has been heartening but is not yet as satisfactory as it should be. More deeply, a divorce has occurred between our method and our message. One wonders how much of the blame for this can be laid at the feet of the impact of the Pentecostals and Evangelicals. The initial critical responses to their message was not systematically followed through. Their was increased teaching of the Four Universals along with declarations of the validity of Infant Baptism. It seems, however, that the full impact of Evangelical dualism was not discerned. Certainly, Methodism is at point where education is now only an offering to the society via the government. It is an offering based on our message but stands at the threshold of no longer being a medium for the message. The fulness of Incarnational Theology, once achieved, has dissipated. Perhaps another paper could explore this reality, its causes, and its potential consequences.
THE NEED

This denomination needs to critically and honestly reflect on the effects of its work at all levels of society and of human consciousness. The work of evangelism needs to discover within its assent to wholeness a possible subtle, tacit affirmation of dualistic thought. Perhaps, indeed, as Marshall McLuhan expounded, the medium is the message. Between the method and the message there must be wholeness.

We need to discern more deeply the movements of God in our history and present age. There is a relationship between the religion of our national heroes and their contribution to our nation. There is a message from God in those sons and daughters of our nation who gain international distinction though fighting the tide of opposition from more powerful foes. These need to be discerned, declared and interpreted in terms of the Gospel in its totality. God has been giving answers but perhaps we have not been hearing well enough. A very deep work of the Holy Spirit is needed.

CONCLUSION

The Methodist Church in Jamaica does share in the 'global context of personal uncertainty, social change and political conflict'. This paper has, I am sure, told only a small part of the story. There has been a focussing on the unhealed negro psyche, the effect of worship on it. This needs further study. A balm is needed which does not seem to be found in simply saying, "God loved you so much that He died for you".

By being presented this paper implicitly believes that evangelism as practised by Jamaican Methodism does have something to say. It is offered that extraction may take place. The challenge which lies before us and in which we participate is to find a way of being so faithful to the Gospel that in this age our message be meaningful and proceed in power and fulness, with effectiveness.

"To serve the present age, My calling to fulfill,
0 may it all my powers engage To do the master's will".

- ALTHEA SPENCER-MILLER

Reference Books - COASTLANDS AND ISLANDS and FOREVER BEGINNING.