

# THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL and the Methodists.

by Bernard Lauwyck



Next to the Roseau Cathedral stands the Bethesda Methodist Church, with a most beautiful bell tower. Its architectural style stands in great contrast to the neo-Gothic Roseau Cathedral. The square base of the tower, signifying the material world or earth, is transformed into an octagon or 8 sided tower at the top, symbolising spiritual rebirth, regeneration and the “eight day”, Sunday, on which the resurrection of Christ took place.

Fascinated by this splendid belfry, I wanted to find out more about the Methodist Church, which produced such beautiful hymns and architecture and share this with you. Also do I want to highlight the cooperation between Methodists and Catholics in the distant past, despite many stories to the contrary.

I found out that the Methodist revival originated in England in 1739. It began with a group of men, which included John Wesley and his brother Charles, as a revival movement within the Church of England. The movement focused on Bible study and a methodical approach to scriptures and Christian living. They were accustomed to receiving communion every week, fasting regularly, and abstaining from most forms of amusement and luxury. They also frequently visited the sick and the poor, as well as prisoners. (Wikipedia). John Wesley believed that all could be saved, not just the “elect” as in the predestination theory of John Calvin and the Calvinists. The Methodist body split from the Anglican Church in 1784.

An interesting quote from Roger Scruton in his “Our Church: A personal History of the Church of England” illustrated the spectrum of beliefs that the Anglican Church enveloped, not always with great success. Mr. Scruton wrote that John Wesley and John Henry Newman were “*The two greatest apostles of Christ that the Church of England has produced, and it could contain neither of them*”.



John Wesley(1703-1791) inspired and started the Methodist Church and Blessed John H. Newman (1801-1890) became a Roman Catholic Cardinal.

Methodism came to the Caribbean in 1760 when the planter, lawyer and Speaker of the Antiguan House of Assembly, Nathaniel Gilbert, returned to his sugar estate in Antigua after a meeting with John Wesley in Britain (see Blackman, Francis “*John Wesley 300: Pioneers, Preachers and Practitioners*”).

According to Dr. Lennox Honychurch the first “*Methodist missionary activity in Dominica dates from January 1787 when Dr. Thomas Coke visited Dominica*”. Thomas Coke (1747 – 1814) is known as the Father of Methodist Missions. “*He preached in the house of Mrs. Webley*” (see *The Dominica Story* by Lennox Honychurch) .

By 1865 “*The Methodists had powerful men on their side. The most vocal was the teacher- preacher- news editor- politician George Charles Falconer, followed by the converted descendants of the old French families, Bellot and Fadelle*” (see “*Historic Roseau*” by Dr. Lennox Honychurch). The Methodist community was growing and soon the Bethesda Methodist Church was started and reached completion in 1893.

In 1864 the third Bishop of Roseau, René Marie Charles Poirier, bought a large property from the family of the Hon. W. Davis on the East coast of Dominica, later to be called San Sauveur. This was a Methodist dominated area.

In a letter from Bishop Poirier to the Pontifical Missions Society in Rome dated 25 November 1866 we read and translate from French “*We also have an orphanage under construction. The stones, sand, la chaux (or lime mortar) are transported by carts that several Methodists land owners had the pleasure to make available to us; we have been aided by many persons of goodwill. This is the mission of Saint-Sauveur, where we have installed a mechanical saw, powered by a watermill. So we are supplied by timber.*”

The “Annales de la Propagation de la Foi, Vol. 38” provide us with more information as was printed in a Roseau Methodist newspaper run by Mr. Falconer :  
*“Today we have the agreeable duty in offering our tribute to the chief of the Roman Catholic Church in this island, for the good he has done and still doest... Since his arrival here on Dominica, the bishop has continued with great zeal the work of his predecessor, in supporting the orphanage for young girls, under the direction of the religious ladies of the Faithful Virgin. The number of these orphans, taken from all walks of life of the colony, including the Carib Indians, stands at 60 today. This is a work of faith; a work of love, for which the bishop and the Sisters do not receive a penny from the colonial treasury. Even more, the bishop maintains a school for 160 boys in Roseau, a free school for girls and 4 other schools for small children, with a total attendance of 337. We learn that the Very Rev. Prelate just bought one of the grand properties from the deceased Hon. W. Davis, au Vent-de-l’ille, between Castle Bruce and Petite Soufriere, in order to build there a catholic church and also to start an industrial (vocational) school where young people could learn agriculture and other skills and crafts. His Lordship wants to do for boys what he did already for girls. Our fervent hope is that, with the blessing from God, this venture will be successful. And that within some years this neglected area of Dominica, will have an active population of industrious trained*

*and skilled workers and a middle class of landholders which will be a godsend and blessing for Dominica in regards to agriculture, both physically and spiritually.”*



St. Joseph the Worker window in Roseau Cathedral

I wanted to share this with you.

With this article, I want to thank the Methodist congregation, office staff and minister Rev. Josiah for their cooperation, goodwill and assistance during the period when the roof tiles were removed from the Cathedral. As the works on the Cathedral will continue soon, they will be inconvenienced again and again by this renovation project and I hope they will bear with us.

Let Peace be on Earth to all People of Goodwill !

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