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The Caribbean and West Indies

Natalie A. Zacek

In comparison not only with metropolitan Britain but with its North American colonies, the history of the Anglican Church in the West Indies—defined for the purposes of this chapter as Barbados, Jamaica, and the federated Leeward Islands colony, which consisted of the islands of Antigua, Montserrat, Nevis, and St Kitts (also known as St Christopher)—has not received significant scholarly attention, due not only to the paucity of surviving local records but also to a long-standing tendency for both contemporary observers and modern scholars to view these plantation-centred settlements as ‘tropical hellhole[s] of dissipated whites’.¹ In a much quoted phrase, the writer Charles Leslie, who visited Jamaica in the 1730s, described that island’s elite as ‘lov[ing] a Pack of Cards better than the Bible’.² But while the Church struggled to establish itself in the West Indian colonies, it nonetheless played a crucial role in the secular, if not always in the confessional, identity of the islands’ white inhabitants, emerging as an integral element of their self-image as ‘Englishmen transplanted’.³

Throughout the period under study, metropolitan observers were on the whole highly critical of the state of Anglican observance in the West Indian colonies. The clergyman-philosopher George Berkeley spoke for many of his fellow churchmen when he wrote in 1725 that ‘there is at this day, but little sense of religion, and a most notorious corruption of manners, in the English colonies settled on the continent of America, and the islands’. To Berkeley, this unhappy state of affairs could best be remedied by sending more and better qualified clergy ‘to reform morals, and soften the behaviour of men’, as in his view the Anglican churches throughout the colonies were ‘a drain for the very

¹ Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York, 2004), p. 8.

² Quoted in Michal J. Rozbicki, ‘The Curse of Provincialism: Negative Perceptions of Colonial American Plantation Gentry’, *Journal of Social History*, 63 (1997): 727–52 (pp. 732–3).

³ Larry Dale Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted: The English Colonization of Barbados, 1627–1660* (New York, 2003).

dregs and refuse' of British clergymen.⁴ The physician Robert Poole, who was an adherent of George Whitefield, and who travelled throughout the West Indies in the late 1740s, complained repeatedly that the various churches at which he attended services were 'thinly visited and carelessly attended to', which he interpreted as a sign of the settlers' irreligious nature, as corroborated by the fact that 'many of those who call themselves Christians, [were] keeping open Shop, with their Goods publickly exposed to Sale' on Sunday, and that even those who attended services 'by their Behaviour, seem'd pretty great Strangers to the Duty of worshipping God with Decency and Reverence'.⁵ The situation was apparently little improved in Jamaica in the 1820s, as the Revd Richard Bickell observed the 'too general profanation of the Sabbath' by white and black residents alike. Although Bickell praised the attempts, however fruitless, of Jamaican clergy to bring about the moral reformation of their communities, he complained that a dearth of 'regular and pious clergymen' in the colony had resulted in the ordination of some ministers 'that would not otherwise have been admitted into the church, and several of whom... have not been so attentive to their arduous duties as they should have been'.⁶ Maria Nugent, the wife of the governor of Jamaica (1801–6), was similarly critical of the quality of that colony's clergy; she found Kingston's church 'pretty, and well fitted up', but 'the service was miserably performed, by a *Scotch* reader, and a *Welsh* preacher'. Lady Nugent was still less impressed by the religiosity, or lack thereof, displayed by members of the local elite; following a dinner-party conversation, she reported that 'some of the opinions of the gentlemen were shocking. No one professed to have the least religion, and some said it was all a farce'.⁷

But despite these criticisms, it would be inaccurate to conclude that the majority of colonists in the English West Indies were either hostile or indifferent to the practice of Anglican religion. The majority of the settlers prided themselves on their English heritage, and even those inhabitants who were apathetic in spiritual matters, or who begrudged payment of the taxes levied to construct and maintain churches and pay clergymen, viewed the Anglican Church as a principal source of English national identity, and saw at least tacit conformity with that Church as a line which definitively separated the true-born Englishman from a variety of feared or despised 'others'. These were, principally, the Spanish, England's original enemy in the settlement of the Americas; the French, their principal opponent from the mid-seventeenth

⁴ George Berkeley, 'A Proposal for better supplying of Churches in our Foreign Plantations', in *The Works of George Berkeley*, ed. G. N. Wright, 2 vols. (London, 1843), II, p. 281.

⁵ Robert Poole, *The Beneficent Bee: or, Traveller's Companion* (London, 1753), pp. 353, 330, 315.

⁶ Richard Bickell, *The West Indies as they are* (London, 1825), pp. 95–6.

⁷ Frank Cundall (ed.), *Lady Nugent's Journal* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1907), pp. 215, 99 (italics in original).

century until the end of the Napoleonic Wars; and the Irish in the metropole and the empire. They also included commercially useful but culturally alien groups such as the Jews; the puritans, Quakers, and other Nonconformists, who symbolized the religious extremism of the Cromwellian era; Native Americans and enslaved or free persons of African descent. Even the least enthusiastic Anglican communicant was aware that his religion differentiated him from those whom he considered his enemies or inferiors, and that it afforded him a privileged legal and political status in colony and metropole alike, one which made him a full participant in the political, social, and economic life of his community. West Indian colonial governors might have been willing to overlook their constituents' indifference to spiritual matters, or to grant certain rights and privileges to wealthy settlers who were probably covert Catholics, as long as they outwardly conformed to Anglicanism. But as their appointments granted them authority over spiritual as well as administrative and military matters, they were also keen to prove to metropolitan authorities that 'God Almighty [was] devoutly and duly served throughout [their] Government'.⁸

Numerous challenges presented themselves to those who hoped to create a fully functioning Church of England within the West Indian colonies. The first order of business was the creation of parishes; while Barbados had been thus organized as early as 1629, with Jamaica following suit within a few years of its accession by England from Spain in 1655, progress was considerably slower in the Leeward Islands, sections of which continued to record their inhabitants by the use of the military unit of the division as late as 1681.⁹ But the formation of parishes was the beginning, not the end, of the process of creating a religious infrastructure; once an island had come under the Church's aegis through the establishment of these units of religious authority, it was necessary that each parish be provided, by the combined efforts of colony and metropole, with churches and clergymen. But in the politically and environmentally volatile world of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century West Indies, neither buildings nor ministers were easily acquired or maintained.

The French raids of 1666–7, in conjunction with the Anglo-Dutch conflict at that time, saw the destruction of three of St Kitts's churches and both of those which had been erected on Montserrat. The latter were rebuilt, but were destroyed again in an earthquake which struck the island on Christmas Day 1672. Leeward governor Charles Wheeler reported in 1671 that 'the islands have made liberal provisions for the maintenance of clergy, and are everywhere

⁸ 'Instructions for our Trusty and Welbeloved Daniel Parke Esqr', 18 June 1705, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, William L. Clements Library, Shelburne Papers.

⁹ Robert Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 92; Donald B. Cooper, *The Establishment of the Anglican Church in the Leeward Islands* (Stillwater, OK, 1966), p. 15.

erecting churches and chapels'.¹⁰ Nonetheless, he expressed his disgust that the 'near 10,000 Christian Subjects' of the Leewards relied for their spiritual well-being upon 'but two in Holy Orders, both scandalous livers, and one a notable schismate'. When Wheeler's successor, Sir William Stapleton, made a report to the Board of Trade in 1673, he claimed that, although Nevis had 'some few Ministers', there were none anywhere else in the Leewards.¹¹ While Barbados had not suffered French attacks in the course of these hostilities, in the 1670s several parishes lacked incumbents, and those who were in post appear to have been unordained men recruited from amongst the island's laity.¹² At this time there were only four clergymen to serve Jamaica's fifteen parishes, and one of these was also the island's sole schoolmaster.¹³

Such complaints would be heard again and again over the next century. Governors bemoaned the lack of clergy and the perceived shortcomings of those available, and ministers were infuriated by the paucity of attenders and by the lack of churches or the smallness and dilapidation thereof. Meanwhile, islanders often resisted paying taxes for the support of the Church. This was not always the case; by the late seventeenth century, the islands boasted a number of impressive religious edifices. In Port Royal, Jamaica, the merchants of this booming port paid for the construction of an imposing church building, which 'provided a physical space for business affairs and granted the merchants a degree of moral legitimacy' in a town notorious throughout the Atlantic world as a sink of iniquity.¹⁴ In Bridgetown, Barbados's capital, St Michael's church, completed in 1665, was a substantial brick structure with tall, arched windows, a crenellated parapet, and two rows of interior columns.¹⁵ The cartographer Richard Blome described one of Montserrat's churches, rebuilt after the depredations of warfare in the 1660s, as being 'very fair... of a delightful Structure... the Pulpit, Seats, and all the rest of the Carpenters and Joyners Work, being framed of the most precious and sweet-scented Wood'; while in St Kitts 'the English have erected five fair Churches, well furnished with Pulpits, and Seats of excellent Joyners work of

¹⁰ Cooper, *Establishment*, pp. 20–1; British Library [BL], Egerton MS 2395, Papers Relating to the English Colonies in America and the West Indies, 1627–99, f. 528; petition of Wheeler to Charles II, 20 July 1671, in W. Noel Sainsbury (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and the West Indies, 1669–1674* (London, 1889), p. 243.

¹¹ Cooper, *Establishment*, p. 94.

¹² Larry Dale Gragg, *The Quaker Community on Barbados: Challenging the Hegemony of the Planter Class* (Columbia, MO, 2009), p. 77.

¹³ Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1972), p. 157.

¹⁴ Louis P. Nelson, 'Anglican Church Building and Local Context in Early Jamaica', in Kenneth A. Breisch and Alison K. Hoaglund (eds.), *Building Environments, Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture 10* (Knoxville, TN, 2005), p. 66.

¹⁵ Louis P. Nelson, *The Beauty of Holiness: Anglicanism and Architecture in Colonial South Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009), p. 255.

precious Wood'. But this rapid development of the ecclesiastical landscape was undercut by the effects of ongoing warfare between the English settlers and their French neighbours. In 1712, the church of St Thomas Lowland, Nevis, was burned; that of St Anthony on Montserrat 'was much defaced by the Enemy, the few Books . . . Stolen and Lost and the ministers Robb'd of all they were masters of', to such a degree that David Bethun, the rector, begged the bishop of London in 1715 to send him some books, ornaments, bibles, and prayer books to replace those that had been lost or destroyed.¹⁶

Even in times of peace, West Indian colonists were often reluctant to devote tax revenues to the construction of new churches or the repair of existing ones. In 1720, for example, the Antiguans expressed a deep unwillingness to pay for the erection of a church in the parish of St Philip, as 'there was already a Church and a Chappel of Ease, both in very good repair', and 'it was unreasonable to build a new church for the convenience of eight or ten people, who were the only men that contended for building the same, when the majority of the inhabitants were against it'.¹⁷ A few years later, when Antigua's new parish of St George was separated from that of St Peter's, the residents of the former elected not to construct a new church or chapel, but instead to use the small chapel at Fitch's Creek as their place of worship.¹⁸

It would be easy to interpret this unwillingness to devote public funds to the building, maintenance, and rebuilding of churches as an indication of the low value which West Indian colonists placed on religious observance. But as we have seen, between 1666 and 1713 the Leeward Islands were raided and ruined on numerous occasions by French attack, and all of the English colonies in the West Indies were constantly subject to hurricanes, earthquakes, and other natural disasters, in the course of which the built environment was repeatedly devastated. Vere parish church in Clarendon, Jamaica, for example, was damaged in the great earthquake of 1692, rebuilt, then devastated by hurricanes in 1712 and 1722.¹⁹ To many settlers, it made little sense to devote large sums of money to the erection or repair of elaborate church buildings if they were likely to be destroyed within a few years; low wooden structures were far more likely to survive hurricanes and earthquakes than were taller ones built of stone. Unlike, for example, colonial Virginians, West Indian planters did not conceive of 'the house of God [as] the residence of the greatest gentleman in the neighbourhood'; as Robert Poole noted, they seemed no more or less

¹⁶ Governor Walter Douglas to Mr Hoare, 5 Apr. 1714, Oxford, Rhodes House Library, SPGL C/WIN/ANT11; Bethun to the bishop of London [1715], Lambeth Palace Library [LPL], Fulham Palace Papers, General Correspondence: Section B-WI, vol. XIX, Leeward 1, 1681–1749.

¹⁷ *Journal of the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, from January 1722–3 to December 1728* (London, 1928), p. 20.

¹⁸ Vere Langford Oliver, *The History of the Island of Antigua*, 3 vols. (London, 1894), I, p. xcvi.

¹⁹ Nelson, 'Anglican Church Building', p. 65.

keen to attend services in a church ‘almost destroyed by Time and Negligence’ than in one which boasted ‘a very neat Altar-Piece’ and ‘ornamental Gilding and Painting’.²⁰ Moreover, individual residents frequently made generous gifts to their parish churches. In Nevis, St Thomas Lowland’s parish church was the beneficiary in 1679 of the will of Sir Francis Morton, the president of the island’s council and the colonel of its militia, who left twenty thousand pounds of sugar for the maintenance of the church and the purchase of communion plate for it. In 1703 Henry Carpenter of Nevis left the sum of £200 sterling to St Paul’s parish, Charlestown, for the purchase of books on history and divinity ‘to found a Library . . . for the encouragement of Piety and Learning’; and St John’s church in Antigua had by the mid-eighteenth century acquired an impressive set of communion silver, as well as life-sized lead figures of Saints John the Baptist and John the Divine, apparently prizes seized from a French ship from Martinique at the beginning of the Seven Years War.²¹ As early as 1645, Barbadian settlers were leaving funds to their parish churches for the purchase of ‘some ornament’ or ‘other needful things’, and guidebooks to Jamaica repeat the unfortunately unverifiable legend that the communion silver of St Peter’s church, Kingston, was the gift of the notorious pirate-turned-governor Henry Morgan.²² After the parish church of St Michael, Barbados (later the island’s cathedral) was destroyed by a hurricane in 1780, the vestry raised £10,000 by public subscription to rebuild it.

The quantity and quality of available clergy remained a vexed issue within the West Indian colonies throughout the period under study. Charles II had commanded the bishop of London to supply ministers to the island colonies, and William III directed the bishop to apply to the Treasury for funds to cover the costs of these clergymen’s passages across the Atlantic.²³ The governors of the various West Indian colonies were designated by the bishop as his ordinaries, an ordinary being ‘a sort of lay bishop’ responsible for appointing ministers to the islands’ parishes, but a governor who was indifferent to religion or who was preoccupied with warfare, slave rebellion, mercantile crisis, or a poor sugar crop was unlikely to devote much effort to locating appropriate candidates, giving rise to situations such as that of late eighteenth-century Jamaica, in which there was one Anglican minister for every 1,500

²⁰ Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (New Haven, CT, 1986), p. 164; Poole, *Bee*, pp. 363, 30.

²¹ William Smith, *A Natural History of Nevis* (Cambridge, 1745), pp. 213–14; Vere Langford Oliver, *The Monumental Inscriptions of the British West Indies* (Dorchester, 1927), 108; Vere Langford Oliver, *Caribbeana*, 6 vols. (London, 1909–19), IV, p. 289; ‘A Layman’, *Antigua: The Story of the Cathedral and Parish Church of St John, 1678–1932* (Guildford, 1933), pp. 28, 31.

²² Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted*, p. 73; Calvin Bowen, *Guide to Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1958), p. 35.

²³ Gerald Fothergill, *A List of Emigrant Ministers to America, 1690–1811* (Baltimore, MD, 1965), p. 1.

white residents.²⁴ Moreover, few clergymen were keen to commit themselves to even a short term of service in the islands, as many of the reports submitted to the bishop by those who made the voyage described their experiences in highly negative terms. Not only were the individual churches frequently in an advanced state of dilapidation, but from a financial standpoint life in the islands could be very difficult. In 1705, the Revd Francis Le Jau, who had served for five years as Montserrat's only Anglican cleric, reported to the newly founded Society for the Propagation of the Gospel that 'everything there, particularly cloathing...[was] three times as dear as in England', that his parishioners had provided him with 'a house built with wild canes, thacht, but never finished', and that they had never made good on their promise to pay him an annual supplement of £60 sterling; he claimed that without the financial assistance provided by the famously pious Governor Christopher Codrington and a few other leading residents, 'he must have perished through want'.²⁵ In 1720 John Anderson, formerly a grammar school teacher in Lambeth, London, made similar complaints, claiming that the clergy of St Kitts 'have had no other settlement but voluntary contributions...which is the reason this place has had more ministers...than I can well remember to reckon up, the incumbent being required to shift for himself by going to some Colony as soon as any considerable arrears became due to him'. As the Rev Henry Pope wrote from Nevis to the bishop of London, Edmund Gibson, in 1723: 'Your Lordship may plainly perceive there is little encouragement for clergymen to waste themselves in this scorching climate; for after many years we are but where we were, tied down to a poor stipend which will scarce find us meat, drink, and clothes.' He implored Gibson to find him a living in the metropole, 'resolving rather there to accept of the smallest thing in your Lordship's gift, than to live miserably here'.²⁶

These difficulties notwithstanding, the quality of the West Indian clergy, in contrast to their quantity, was relatively high, although one English visitor to Jamaica in the late eighteenth century claimed that its clergymen were 'much better qualified to be retailers of salt-fish, or boatswains to privateers, than ministers of the Gospel'.²⁷ Le Jau had received a doctoral degree from Trinity College, Dublin, and had been made a canon of St Paul's Cathedral, a comfortable and prestigious post he chose to leave in favour of ministry in the West Indies and, later, in South Carolina.²⁸ The clergy of eighteenth-century

²⁴ Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford, 1971), p. 25.

²⁵ Quoted in C. F. Pascoe, *Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G.: An Historical Account of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1701–1900*, 2 vols. (London, 1901), I, p. 211.

²⁶ Quoted in Cooper, *Church*, pp. 10, 28.

²⁷ Quoted in Nelson, 'Anglican Church Building', p. 68.

²⁸ Cooper, *Church*, p. 20.

Montserrat included Rees Daly, Lewis Gaillard, and Richard Molineux, all of whom had matriculated at Oxford; in Nevis, William Smith and John Langley were Oxford graduates, and Thomas Powers had been a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. Kittitian clergy included Walter Thomas (MA Oxon), John Merac, who held a law degree from Cambridge, Thomas Paget, a fellow of King's College at the same university, and James Ramsay, a former naval surgeon who became a celebrated abolitionist via his widely read *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the West Indian Colonies* (1784).²⁹ Jamaican ministers included the Cambridge graduate Thomas Pierce Williams (active 1812–13) and David Duff from the University of Aberdeen (1793–1814), and in Barbados the Revd Benjamin Spry (1773–1806) was not only an Oxford graduate but also the brother of William Spry, the island's governor between 1767 and 1772.³⁰

The criticisms posed by West Indian ministers regarding the progress of the Church within the islands should be interpreted with a degree of scepticism. On the one hand, those who regaled the bishop and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel with triumphant accounts of their endeavours may have hoped to advance their metropolitan careers; on the other, those whose letters were replete with details of their poverty and of the settlers' irreligion may have done so in order to justify their lack of success, or to convince sympathetic readers to find them positions in England. Others may have suffered initial disappointment when faced with low attendance at services or popular ignorance of Anglican doctrine, but learned to adjust their expectations to their environment. Robert Robertson, who served as minister at St Paul's, Nevis, from 1707 to 1737, appeared to have accepted the prevailing opinion amongst the island's white population that '[they] thought they did pretty well in keeping the Face of Religion amongst themselves on the Lord's Day', although he was sad to note that, whereas he had at the time of his arrival attracted 150 or more attenders to his Sunday services, by 1724 that number had dropped to sixty or seventy, which he attributed not to a loss of communal piety but to 'the strange decay' of Nevis's white population in the face of warfare and natural disaster. He wrote wryly that 'most people here are fond enough of frequent preaching... they would have the Minister go to church, but will not do so themselves, and none are louder this way than some that never go to church', a plaint echoed around the same time by Charles Leslie, who reported that the churches of Jamaica were in a

²⁹ Oliver, *Monumental Inscriptions*; Margaret Deanne Rouse-Jones, 'St. Kitts, 1713–1763: A Study of the Development of a Plantation Colony', PhD thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 1977, p. 160.

³⁰ Clergy of the Church of England Database, <<http://theclergydatabase.org.uk>>, accessed 11 June 2014; Oliver, *Caribbeana*, III, p. 209.

'dismal' state and rarely open for services.³¹ William Smith claimed that West Indian planters were not innately irreligious, but rather were frustrated by the fact that, instead of being allowed to choose their own clergymen, they were reliant upon those selected by the governor or the bishop, most of whom were not true 'West India Clergymen' but rather 'Great Persons Sons, Relations, and Dependants' from the metropole.³² Even the generally censorious physician Poole, who so harshly criticized the unimpressive churches and small congregations he encountered in the islands, found some grounds for optimism regarding the settlers' commitment to the Church; at Parham, on Antigua's northern coast, 'the Congregation was pretty large, considering the Place, and we had a very excellent Discourse, by an old Gentleman'. Poole praised the women he saw at services in Montserrat, noting that, rather than using religious gatherings as a venue in which to display the latest fashions, a criticism frequently lodged in London and in the southern mainland colonies, 'they go in a decent Matron-like Manner, regarding Dress but little, after the Manner of true Housewives, whose Minds are occupied in something more noble'.³³ By contrast, Charles Leslie reported that in Jamaica church service was the venue for a fashion parade, in which the planters replaced their usual attire of head-kerchiefs, linen drawers, and vests with wigs and 'silk Coats, and Vests trimmed with Silver'.³⁴

As Donald Cooper has noted, West Indian settlers throughout the period under study were 'not anti-religious as such', and they 'were willing to give lip service to the church so long as it did not oppose them'.³⁵ The Anglican Church of the region developed a 'latitudinarian philosophy' in the face of the limited availability of clergy and the general lack of religious fervour among its white residents. Yet it was also a Church which 'complemented a slave-owning society with its emphasis on hierarchy, authority, and obedience'.³⁶ Until the nineteenth century, while the Moravians, the Methodists, and especially the Baptists made many converts among the enslaved, it was almost exclusively the Church of the islands' white residents. On rare occasions a slave or a free person of colour, usually female and often of mixed race, might be in attendance. Poole saw a 'young Negro Woman receive the holy Sacrament' on Easter Sunday in Antigua, and the minister of St John's Fig-tree Church, in Nevis, baptized in the summer of 1763 Eve, an 'Adult Mulatto the property of Frances Brodbelt'. But from the beginnings of slavery in the English colonies the perceived clash between making a man a Christian and holding him as

³¹ Robert Robertson, *A Letter to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of London, from an Inhabitant of His Majesty's Leeward-Caribbee Islands* (London, 1730); Oliver, *Caribbeana*, III, p. 322; Nelson, 'Anglican Church Building', p. 68.

³² Smith, *Natural History*, p. 212. ³³ Poole, *Bee*, pp. 327, 361.

³⁴ Quoted in Nelson, 'Anglican Church Building', p. 72. ³⁵ Cooper, *Church*, p. 35.

³⁶ Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, PA, 2000), p. 31.

chattel encouraged slave-owners to oppose aggressively the conversion of their slaves to Anglicanism. As early in the development of the slave system as the late 1640s, the English traveller Richard Ligon reported that Sambo, an African slave on Barbados, was 'kept out of the Church' because his owner feared that, 'being once a Christian, he could no more account him a slave'. As a result, nearly all such attempts by Church of England ministers were met with hostility. Le Jau, for one, claimed that masters refused to allow the conversion of their slaves because they would then be forced 'to look upon 'em as Christian brethren and use 'em with humanity'.³⁷ While the Moravians, who arrived in the Leewards in the 1750s, and the Methodists, whose theology was introduced to Antigua in 1760 by a prominent convert, the planter Nathaniel Gilbert, were both keen to include slaves and free people of colour in their services, most West Indian clergymen appear to have upheld the colour bar, often, like William Smith, sharing their parishioners' anxiety that 'a Slave . . . once Christened, conceits that he ought to be upon a level with his Master, in all other respects'. When James Ramsay adopted an abolitionist stance and offered religious instruction to St Kitts's slaves, his actions inflamed communal opinion to the point that local whites attacked him in print, refused to attend services at his church, and caused him to flee to England for his own safety.³⁸

Despite facing discouragement and sometimes open hostility from the ranks of the planters, the Anglican Church did not entirely abandon the project of evangelizing the enslaved. Other than Ramsay, the most famous proponent of the religious instruction of slaves was the younger Christopher Codrington, an Oxford scholar, military commander, Barbadian planter, and Leeward Islands governor, who in 1710 left his two Barbadian estates and their hundreds of slaves to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Codrington's intent was that the revenues generated by these vast sugar plantations would support the creation and maintenance of a college for the training of Anglican missionaries, at which were to be 'maintained a convenient number of professors and scholars who should be under the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and be obliged to study and practise physick and chirurgery as well as Divinity, that by the apparent usefulness of the former to all men they might both endear themselves to the people and have the better opportunities of doing good to men's souls whilst taking care of their bodies'.³⁹

³⁷ Oliver, *Caribbeana*, IV, p. 23; C. S. S. Higham, 'Early Days of the Church in the West Indies', *Church Quarterly Review*, 92 (1921), p. 127; Pascoe, *S.P.G.*, p. 211. See also C. S. S. Higham, 'The Negro Policy of Christopher Codrington', *Journal of Negro History*, 10 (1925): 150–3; Richard Ligon, *A true and exact History of the Island of Barbadoes*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Indianapolis, IN, 2011), p. 101.

³⁸ O'Shaughnessy, *Empire*, p. 31.

³⁹ Quoted in W. T. Webb, 'Codrington College', *Mission Life*, 5 (1874): 207–8.

While the estate's slaves were to be the source of revenues which would support this project, Codrington's intention was that they would also serve as a model population of enslaved converts. But, as Travis Glasson has observed, the college's experience 'starkly reveals how the Society's program intersected with the bitter reality of slavery'; in 1745 the missionary Joseph Bewsher was forced to admit that fewer than twenty Codrington slaves 'could repeat their catechism', let alone be considered fully converted to Anglicanism. In a situation in which the plantation's white personnel 'wielded both the Bible and whip in the SPG's name', it is not surprising that the majority of the enslaved rejected Christianity, often in favour of obeah or other African-derived spiritual traditions which appalled the missionaries and their supporters.⁴⁰ On the Codrington plantation, as elsewhere in the West Indies, the slaves were suspicious of any minister or missionary 'who eat with manager, and drink with manager, and manager tell him what to say to us', and were all too aware of the power of what David Lambert has termed the 'clergy-planter nexus'.⁴¹

As described earlier, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Anglican Church struggled to find its footing in the West Indian colonies. It was frequently short of money, churches, clergymen, and (perhaps most importantly) public commitment, let alone enthusiasm. Yet Anglicanism in and of itself was a crucial source of identity at both the individual and the communal level in these colonies. To be an Anglican was to be part of an Atlantic community centred upon a Protestant vision of empire, one which in this period was in the process of commercially and militarily eclipsing its 'papist' rivals, Spain and France. The Church placed colonists and colonies within a 'Great Chain of Being' which linked them to God, the monarch, Parliament, and the English people, and endowed them with a set of rights and responsibilities which they believed, with some accuracy, to grant them a degree of political and spiritual liberty unique within early modern Europe and its overseas empires. Within the colonies, being a part of the Anglican Communion differentiated between white and black, master and slave, as well as between people who could claim the right to full participation within the political realm and those who could not. Churches, even if little used or dilapidated, 'played a specific role in the [West Indian] landscape... [they were] signifiers of white authority in a landscape that was more African than English in appearance', and they allowed white colonists to believe that they had succeeded in transforming tropical islands inhabited largely by enslaved

⁴⁰ Travis Glasson, *Mastering Christianity: Missionary Anglicanism and Slavery in the Atlantic World* (New York, 2012), pp. 143, 166, 163.

⁴¹ Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837* (London, 1968), p. 129; David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics, and Identity during the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 19.

Africans into 'little Englands'.⁴² Simultaneously, being an Anglican communicant, however minimal one's spiritual or financial commitment to the institution, allowed the islands' white male inhabitants full participation in the local militias and political establishments, opportunities denied throughout this period to the West Indies' significant populations of Jews, Quakers, and Catholics, and so defined the parameters of normative masculinity.⁴³ Thus, the history of the Anglican Church in Britain's West Indian colonies can be read as one of success as well as of struggle, and the Church's position in colonial West Indian society appears as simultaneously marginal and central.

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⁴² Nelson, 'Anglican Church Building', p. 69.

⁴³ See Natalie A. Zacek, *Settler Society in the Leeward Islands, 1670–1776* (Cambridge, 2010), chs. 2–3.