



THOMAS COKE AS MISSION HISTORIAN: A CASE STUDY OF THE BAHAMAS¹

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Thomas Coke (1747-1814) was characterized by John Vickers as “the one-man band” of mission among the British Methodists. Vickers rightly attributed the eventual establishment of the (British) Wesleyan Methodist Mission Board (1818) to Coke’s efforts and example.² Coke was the theoretician, administrator, fund raiser, and historian of the earliest Wesleyan Methodist Missions. His influence is seen in nearly every aspect of the early Wesleyan Methodist expansion beyond England and Scotland.

Here the focus of attention is on his massive three volume work entitled, *A History of the West Indies*.³ The title accurately describes the contents of the volumes. Drawing on the work of earlier authors on the West Indies, Coke summarized the geography, flora, fauna, colonial history, and the mis-

¹ Image Of Thomas Coke, Drew University Methodist Reference Collection, Madison, New Jersey.

² John A. Vickers, “One-Man Band: Thomas Coke and the Origins of Methodist Missions,” *Methodist History* 34 (1996): 135-147; John A. Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism* (Nashville, New York: Abingdon Press, 1969). See also John Pritchard, *Methodists and their Missionary Societies, 1760-1900* (Ashgate Methodist Studies Series; Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 9-29.

³ Thomas Coke, *A History of the West Indies, containing the Natural, Civil, and Ecclesiastical History of each Island: with an Account of the Missions instituted in those Islands, from the Commencement of their Civilization; but more especially the Missions which have been established in that Archipelago by the Society Late in Connexion with the Rev. John Wesley* (Vol. 1: Liverpool: Printed by Nuttall, Fisher, and Dixon, Duke Street, 1808; Vol. II: London: A. Paris, Printer, Printed for the Author and to be had of the Rev. Mr. Blanchard, 1810; Vol. III: London: Printed for the Author, 1811).

sion history of each island individually. He included information about the missions of the Catholics, Moravians, and the London Missionary Society/Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) as well as Methodist Missions.

How accurately did Coke present the part that he knew best, that is, the early history of Methodist mission? The goal of this essay is to ascertain, based on a case study of the early developments of Methodism in the Bahamas, the strengths and weaknesses of Coke's portrayal of those developments. The method of this essay is to note early mission theory, funding and governance, to identify the audience of *A History of the West Indies*, and to describe Coke's historiography and sources. Then Coke's analysis of the development of early Methodism in the Bahamas will be discussed in light of the extant sources.⁴

Coke, Wesley and Early Mission Theory, Funding and Governance

It is important to note that at the time of Coke's writing, the relationship between the missionary endeavors conceived, directed, funded, and written about by Coke were in tenuous relationship with the evolving structures of Methodism in Great Britain. It had been so from the beginning. During the course of 1783, Coke published *A Plan of the Society for the Establishment of Missions among the Heathen*.⁵ It was circulated to persons of means irrespective of religious affiliation. The project was apparently undertaken without informing Wesley. Because of Wesley's antipathy, the publication produced little if any financial or moral support and appears to have had little effect.

The next year, 1784, Coke was sent off by Wesley to attend to the Methodist work in the former colonies of North America. In 1786, Coke published his *Address to the Pious and Benevolent, proposing an annual subscription for the support of the missionaries in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, the Isles of Jersey, Guernsey and Newfoundland, the West Indies, and the Provinces of Nova Scotia and Quebec*.⁶ That year, Wesley ordained

⁴ This essay, especially the later portion on Coke's analysis of the Bahamas, should be read in conjunction with David Bundy, "The African and Caribbean Origins of Methodism in the Bahamas," *Methodist History* 53.3 (April, 2015): 173-183. See also the recent work of Nadeen BENEBY, *From Joseph Paul to Autonomy: The Story of Bahamian Methodism's Early Beginning to the Granting of Autonomy* (n.p.: n.p., n.d.) and of Michael N. JAGESSAR, "Early Methodism in the Caribbean: Through the Imaginary Optics of Gilbert's Slave Women—Another Reading," *Black Theology* 5.2 (2007): 153-170. Thanks to Bahamian historian Carl Campbell for recently calling these last two items to my attention.

⁵ Folio, no publication data, 4 ff. The first page was reprinted in Cyril C. Davie, *The Man Who Wanted the World: The Story of Thomas Coke* (London: Methodist Missionary Society, 1947), plate following page 90. It is important to note that Coke's mission plan was published a decade before William Carey began his call for Baptist mission; it would appear that Carey drew heavily from Coke and Wesley.

⁶ Thomas Coke, *Address to the Pious and Benevolent . . .* (London: n.p., 1786), 12 pages.

My very dear Sir

near Plymouth, Jan. 6. 1784.

Let Mr. Butcher do not neglect to send you one of our Plans for the
 establishing of Foreign Missions, I take the Liberty of doing it. Ten
 subscribers more, of ten guineas N^o Ann. have favoured me with their
 names. If you can get a few subscribers more, we shall be obliged to
 you.

We have now a very wonderful outpouring of the spirit in the
 West of Cornwall. I have been obliged to make a Winter-Campaign of it.
 I preach here & there out of Doors.

I beg my affectionate respects to Mr. Fletcher.

I trust you to pray for

Your most affectionate Friend & Brother

Thomas Coke

Jan 6, 1781 letter from Thomas Coke to John William Fletcher (1729-1785) urging him to raise further funds to support Foreign Missions, Thomas Coke letters, Drew University Methodist Reference Collection, Madison, New Jersey.

three individuals for service in Nova Scotia and Antigua⁷ in cooperation with Coke. One of those ordained by Wesley, for service in Newfoundland, was William Hammett. But no resources were provided, either by Wesley or the Methodist Conference, to implement the project. Because of storms at sea, all ended up in the Caribbean. Hammett, who has a central role in the early history of Bahamian Methodism, was stationed on St. Christopher's for a year, before nearly dying from persecution in Jamaica whence he was rescued by Thomas Coke.⁸

This first visit to the West Indies began Coke's career of raising funds (often by begging door to door in London), supervising, encouraging, and occasionally rescuing missionaries. There were additional voyages to the West Indies.⁹ For the rest of his life, he worked under the shadow of the nascent

⁷ Antigua planter Nathaniel Gilbert and two of his slaves visited England in 1758 and were converted. Wesley anticipated that these should eventually be included in the Methodist fold, but made no provisions for such although this experience no doubt influenced the permission granted Coke to send missionaries there. See John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley* ed. N. Curnock, IV, 247. On Coke's role in the area, see Thomas Coke, *Extracts of the journals of the late Rev. Thomas Coke, L.L.D. Comprising several visits to North-America and the West-Indies; his tour through a part of Ireland, and his nearly finished voyage to Bombay in the East-Indies: to which is prefixed, a life of the doctor* (Dublin: Printed by R. Napper, 1814); W. Thomas Smith, "Thomas Coke and the West Indies," *Methodist History* 3.1 (1964): 1-12; and especially in John Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism*, 149-172 *et passim*.

⁸ On Hammett, see the crucial article by D. A. Reily, "William Hammett: Missionary and Founder of the Primitive Methodist Connection," *Methodist History* 10 (1971): 30-43.

⁹ Thomas Coke, *A Journal of the Rev. Dr. Coke's Third Tour through the West Indies in Two Letters to the Rev. J. Wesley* (London: J. Paramore, 1791); Thomas Coke, *A Continuation of the Rev. Dr. Coke's Third Tour through the West Indies in a Letter to the Rev. J. Wesley* (London: J. Paramore, 1791).

Methodist juridical structures but was largely autonomous in the project. He raised the funds necessary to maintain the missions and to assist the missionaries, often giving from his own resources. In addition to the West Indies, he became involved on the European Continent, visited The Netherlands, and worked with French prisoners of war held in England, on the Channel Islands, and eventually in France. As noted, he was also heavily involved in North America, an involvement that is better known.¹⁰

Coke was interested in the African slaves on the British islands of the Caribbean, both for their own sake, and for his larger dream of a viable mission force, made up of African Methodists, in Africa. He had earlier attempted and failed in a mission effort to Sierra Leone. In his 1789 report to supporters of the Methodist missions, he made his dream explicit: "I doubt not but the day will arrive, when Negro-Preachers may be found that will carry the Gospel into the Negro-land (Africa)."¹¹

Coke's Audience

Coke was very conscious of his audience for *A History of the West Indies*. As one might suspect, the primary audience was not the Methodist leadership, although he certainly would have had those persons and structures in mind. The "Dedication" makes it clear that the primary audience of *A History of the West Indies* was the body of donors whose "liberal exertions" had resulted in "a conspicuous demonstration, that those who are sunk in heathenish darkness, are not outcasts of the divine mercy."¹² Coke stated that "the work before you is chiefly indebted to your beneficences" and that he had "acted as a medium of your bounty, and transmitted beyond the Atlantic the favors which you have so generously conferred." The volumes were provided "to give some account of the issues of your liberal actions, that you may, from these circumstances, calculate upon the effects of your munificence, and permit that calculation to operate in the direction of your future

¹⁰ On Coke in America, see Frank Baker, "Dr. Thomas Coke: The First Methodist Bishop," in Frank Baker, *From Wesley to Asbury*, 142-161; Warren T. Smith, "Thomas Coke's Contribution to the Christmas Conference: A Study in Ecclesiology," in *Rethinking Methodist History* ed. R. Richey and K. Rowe (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 37-47; and John Abernathy Smith, "Cokesbury College: Kingswood in America," *Methodist History* 28 (1990): 219-236.

¹¹ Thomas Coke, *To the Benevolent Subscribers for the Support of the Missions Carried on by Voluntary Contributions in the British Isles, West-Indies, for the benefit of the Negroes and Caribbs* (London: n.p., 1789), 17.

¹² Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I: v. There were earlier published reports to donors, "subscribers," for example, Thomas Coke, *To the Benevolent Subscribers for the Support of the Missions carried on by voluntary contributions in the British islands, in the West-Indies, for the benefit of the Negroes and Caribbs* (London: n.p., 1789); Thomas Coke, *An Address to the Subscribers for the Support of the Missions carried on by voluntary contributions for the benefit of the Negroes in the British Islands, in the West-Indies* (London: n.p., 1790); and Thomas Coke, *A Statement of the Receipts and Disbursements for the Support of the Missions established by the Methodist Society, for the instruction and conversion of the Negroes in the West-Indies addressed to the Subscribers* (London: n.p., 1794). Coke's *History of the West Indies* was selected for focused attention because it purports to be a "history" rather than a report.

course.”¹³

Then Coke described his actions in mission work as marked by “integrity,” “some degree of adventure,” and undertaken “with no small confidence . . . on the blessing of God.” He insisted that “success has justified the experiment; it has given sanction to the future enterprise, and therefore perseverance in the ancient path becomes a duty which requires no comment.”¹⁴ Coke urged the donors to give again: “That the contributions made by you have produced no pecuniary embarrassments in your temporal circumstances, is a truth I flatter myself you will readily allow.” He described them as “not being impoverished by your generous exertions.” Their giving had produced results of which they can have “pleasing reflections” and that will “be a continual source of gratification.” The mission results are finally connected to their eschatological destiny: “They are such as you need not blush to own, either in your departing moments, or in the day of retribution.”¹⁵ Finally he noted that:

to meet in the world of spirits, thousands of our Negro brethren, who have happily escaped from the corruption of their own hearts, and the miseries which result from guilt, through the merits of that Saviour, whose infinite love we have been made instrumental in communicating, must be a source of joy which we have not language sufficiently energetic to express and which will submit to no description. The arduous task imposes silence on me; and my powers are absorbed in a pleasing contemplation. I anticipate the ecstasy that overwhelms me. I sink beneath the pressure of that glory, which is too exalted to be told and too dazzling to be pursued; and humbly join my prayers to yours that we may be ‘stedfast, [sic] immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord.’¹⁶

Thus, this massive history is a mission report to the donors of the results of their investments, and a request for future funding. One wonders to what extent it was ever read by its intended audience or if its mass was the appeal! The result of Coke’s efforts was a work of 1,465 pages.

Coke’s Scholarly Sources and Historiography

In the preface to *A History of the West Indies*, Coke indicated his sources. For the “natural and civil”¹⁷ he acknowledged that he had drawn upon “early Spanish, Italian, and French historians . . . Oviedo, Peter Martyr, Las Casas, Herrera, Rochfort, Du Tertro . . . and . . . the Abbé Reynal.”¹⁸ The English sources: “Robertson’s History of America, Sloane, Long and Beckford, on Jamaica; and lastly, the third edition lately published of a very accurate, and ample, civil and commercial History of the British West Indies, by Bryan

¹³ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, iv.

¹⁴ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, vi.

¹⁵ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, vii.

¹⁶ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, viii.

¹⁷ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, 10.

¹⁸ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, 13

Edwards, Esq. to whom the palm of superiority may be justly assigned.”¹⁹ Despite the extensive information available in the secondary sources, Coke identified a lacuna in the work of earlier scholars which he used to justify his tomes: they had neglected to discuss the “ecclesiastical” or “the progress of Christianity in these islands through the instrumentality of British Protestant ministers.” Edwards devoted “not more than three pages to the cause of the Gospel of Christ.”²⁰

An explicit goal of the work was to provide comprehensive up-to-date information on the West Indies.²¹ However more important was his effort “to rescue the gospel from those shades which infidelity and the vices of professors have thrown upon it . . . by a faithful narrative of the labours of the Christian Missionaries.” The evidence for both the labors of the Christian missionaries and for the barbarities of the colonialists and their economic system was not gathered from secondary sources, he insisted, but from his “personal observation” in the “superintendency” of the mission work for many years and through “correspondence with those ministers of Christ who have left their native country to engage in that blessed work of spreading among the Heathen the unsearchable riches of Christ.”²² The originals of most of these letters and reports are in the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Society (WMMS) Archives at the School for Oriental and African Studies at the University of London.

It was expected that providing information about the reality of the colonial system would open him up to criticism, but he insisted that the evidence was clear.²³ Here he was walking a fine line with his donors, and that fine line was tacitly acknowledged. The greed of the colonial system and its abuse of the African slaves and “Colored,” he insisted, were horrific beyond belief. The competition of the nation states exacerbated the cruel and inhuman system of slavery, and its attendant inhumanity, a system maintained to enrich England, the other European states, and the Americans. This system was developed and maintained by “nominal” Christians, “these base professors of Christianity, and real votaries of superstition . . . disgrace the religion which they profess . . . by instances of human depravity as will hardly admit of any parallel . . . actions which are almost too shocking to admit belief.”²⁴

In articulating his historiography, Coke was caught between his scholarly abolitionist instincts and his colonialist supporters. He discussed how history is a “science” that reveals character, helps one to see the consequences of actions, and allows for global awareness and global interpretation of events,

¹⁹ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, 14. Coke tacitly admits in a note to the above list that his extensive borrowing leaves him open to criticism, but noted that everyone before him copied others and that even Edwards, from whom he slavishly copied lengthy passages, admitted that he had compiled material from many sources without attribution!

²⁰ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, 14.

²¹ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, 15.

²² Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, 24.

²³ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, 24, 41, *et passim*.

²⁴ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, 23.

thus enabling one to learn from the past for present action. He insisted that it demonstrated the importance of social justice. And then, Coke added one thing that has not yet received sufficient attention in the historiography of World Christianity: that is the degree to which a goal of Christian mission was to make the enslaved persons docile and content with their present state and therefore less rebellious. He observed that the spread of Protestant faith in the West Indies kept the slaves from taking revenge on the White oppressors as happened in Haiti. This, he allowed, should be appreciated as a commercial advantage for the donors and an important reason for supporting Methodist mission!²⁵ It was an early statement of the “opiate for the masses” thesis.

When he took up the subject of what he called the “moral and civil condition” of the Africans, he made clear his participation in the general European perspective on Africa. Despite his appeals for humane treatment of African slaves, Coke’s racism and acceptance of the European stereotypes of Africans is striking. He insisted “the negroes could have had no previous conception of those restraints which the gospel was about to impose The design of Christianity was to oppose the lawless sallies of their unruly appetites.” They were “lost in the abyss of iniquity,” in “modes of conduct” that had become “habitual.” “Their reasoning powers having never been called into action, were in a torpid state.” In their “moral state we beheld them enslaved to every vice, and working all kinds of uncleanness with greediness.”²⁶ The Africans are sex-crazed, undisciplined, immoral creatures with no active ability to think. Therefore what could be expected but their debasement in slavery?

He never explicitly stated that their “civil state degraded to the most abject condition into which human nature could possibly enter,” that is, their condition in the slave system was not their fault! The logic was that God ordains all, even the situation of the slaves. The current social degradation of the slaves was for their eventual transformation, if not in this world, then in the next. He did allow that it was reasonable that the Africans should have trouble seeing “the wisdom, and justice and power of God” when they were being abused as slaves by Christians who professed to believe in God.²⁷ In the midst of this analysis he suggested that the “abominable” slave trade should be stopped even though he saw it as part of the “vast designs of God.”²⁸ The “Introduction” demonstrates the ambiguities of the Methodist mission project for the African diaspora: Coke was caught between guilt and gratitude for the slave system on which his access to Africans and his funding depends. It also presages the segregation of Methodists in the post-slave trade era of the Caribbean.

²⁵ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, 17-21.

²⁶ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, 29-30.

²⁷ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, 31-41.

²⁸ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, 38.

Coke's Presentation of the Bahamas in *A History of the West Indies*

In *A History of the West Indies*, Coke discussed The Bahamas in volumes one and three, the last dated 1811. In the first volume, depending on the writings of Spanish writers, attention was given to the genocide exacted upon the original inhabitants of The Bahamas. These peoples were deported to work in the mines on the Island of Hispaniola, where they died; the original inhabitants of Hispaniola had already been killed in the Spanish quest for mineral wealth.²⁹ He returned to the subject of The Bahamas in the third volume, noting that before the English settlements and the development of agriculture on the larger islands (using slaves to cultivate the islands), The Bahamas had been an empty pirate haven, occasionally contested by France, Spain, and England, with England eventually gaining final control by cooperating with the pirates who were mostly English.³⁰

The importance of the American Revolution in populating The Bahamas with refugees was acknowledged as Loyalists sought to escape “those factions which deprive empires of their tranquility.”³¹ To this growing population William Hammett, Coke's estranged former associate in the Caribbean, then in South Carolina, sent in 1794 a missionary “to the Bahama Islands, the inhabitants of which, at this period, were living almost without hope and without God in the world.”³² He acknowledged that the three missionaries successively sent by Hammett were not successful. It is important to note that Coke, despite his concerns for The Bahamas, never visited those islands, neither did his retired estranged former assistant William Hammett.

In 1796, “some pathetic letters” were sent to Coke, “setting forth the deplorable condition of the now forsaken society, and imploring him to send them a minister . . .” On this invitation, William Turton was sent to the Bahamas, from Antigua via New York, arriving in Nassau on October 22, 1800.³³ All information from this point was filtered through the missionaries, but also filtered the letters of the missionaries.³⁴ Letters were cited in the annual summaries of information provided. Coke cited letters from appointed Wesleyan Methodist missionaries, William Turton and John Rutledge for all information after 1800.

Before the appointed Wesleyan Methodist missionaries arrived in 1800, Coke attributed conversions to the Hammett missionaries, while acknowledging their defective mission efforts and the scandals of their lives among the Bahamians. It was admitted that “a Black man, named Anthony Wallace,” found a home for Turton, nursed him to health, and had kept the small congregation of sixty persons together, but that the chapel “was tak-

²⁹ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, I, 95-96; 132-139.

³⁰ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, III, 193-198.

³¹ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, III, 198.

³² Coke, *History of the West Indies*, III, 200-201.

³³ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, III, 201-202.

³⁴ The printed texts, as can be analyzed from extant originals, were quite accurately transcribed by Coke.

en possession of by a Mr. Paul who during the interregnum, had separated from the deserted Methodists.” Turton informed Coke that the “professing people” were “totally unacquainted with the doctrines and disciplines of the Methodists, though they had retained the possession of both among them.”³⁵ Apparently neither Turton nor Coke realized the contradiction embedded in this analysis. How could they be “totally unacquainted” with the precepts of Methodism if they were a practicing Methodist community “possessing” the doctrines and disciplines of the Methodists? As indicated in an earlier essay, the roles of Paul and Wallace were much more important than Coke and Turton admitted.³⁶ From 1800, the history is a year-by-year description of developments in The Bahamas, continuing through 1809, based on missionary letters from which excerpts are included.

Coke, and to a lesser extent Turton, downplayed the significance of the African-Bahamian role in the development of Methodism. They were portrayed as helpless, hapless figures in the drama. In an earlier essay the narrative of the African and Caribbean origins has been examined. Those data are conclusive. The African-Bahamians were anything but passive actors. The first years of Methodism were shaped and guided by Joseph and Susannah Paul, until they were displaced by the Hammett missionaries, who nearly destroyed the thriving Methodist community. It was claimed that the African-Bahamian persons knew nothing of the theology and practices of the Methodist faith. Yet they evangelized, preaching outdoors under the trees, probably meeting in homes, and then they formed a trust, bought land, and built a large chapel, the foundations of which can still be seen. Paul as defacto pastor sent the converts to the Anglican Church for communion as Wesley earlier had counseled. When the chapel was retained by Paul after the Hammett missionary caused schism, the Wallace family provided a house for Methodist worship which they remodeled at their own expense to meet the needs of the congregation. In later documents it was admitted that the Pauls led class meetings for the converts.³⁷

Turton, as the son of a Caribbean planter who rejected the colonialist slave owner ethos for the Methodist ministry, appears to have melded seamlessly into the continuing Methodist community in The Bahamas. Despite discounting the adequacy of their understanding of Methodism, he appears to have respected and appreciated the efforts of the African-Caribbean people who remained part of their community, and their letter to Coke suggests this was genuinely reciprocated. His ministry focusing on the African-Bahamian community was crucial for the early development of Bahamian Methodism. In many ways he appears to have been a bridge between the socially marginalized Methodists of the Bahamas and the larger Methodist world and Bahamian social and political developments in which they had no voice.

³⁵ Coke, *History of the West Indies*, III, 202-203.

³⁶ David Bundy, “African and Caribbean Origins of Methodism in the Bahamas,” 173-178.

³⁷ Bundy, “African and Caribbean Origins,” 177.

Conclusion: Coke as Historian

Thus Coke's *History of the West Indies* did not give credit to persons of African descent for the establishment of Methodism in The Bahamas. As a historian he was caught between his roles as abolitionist and mission fund raiser. His efforts to keep his donors happy significantly affected his historiography.

Having opined that Africans were degenerate, dependent, and unable even to think, he could not give them credit. To give them credit would mean for Coke admitting that his analysis of Africans was incorrect. It would also mean that he did not need as many funds to convert the Africans, since the Africans could be effective evangelists and pastors in their own right. Therefore Coke suggested that the Hammett missionaries (albeit flawed) were the ones who established the Methodist community that was "held together" with great difficulty by an African-Bahamian who was in total ignorance of Methodist doctrine and polity. This was asserted despite the fact that even the narratives of Coke and Turton indicate Wallace played important roles in the survival and continuance of the Methodist tradition, even after the Wesleyan Methodist missionaries had arrived.

The "White" women were in a similar category. The two wives of Turton were not named in the *History*. This despite the fact that one served as a class leader and interim pastor during the illness, nor were her death or Turton's second marriage mentioned. While it was part of European culture of this period to assume that the role of women was to be the supporters of their husbands, Turton's 1817 letter to his colleagues clearly indicates that his wives played crucial leadership roles in the congregations and mediated between the congregation and Turton.³⁸ They, like the African-Bahamians, were written out of the narrative of the mission. To highlight their importance on the "mission field" would have detracted from the importance of the White European Wesleyan Methodist male missionaries.

Coke and the missionaries were caught in the same intellectual and moral trap. To admit that the church was established by a Black man and nearly destroyed by appointed White missionaries would make them no better, maybe even less able, than Black men. The missionaries would no longer be the "pioneers." One would be able to argue that they were no longer necessary to the process of evangelism, and that the funds being raised might be better used in other ways. Coke and the missionaries wanted and needed to control and be the subjects of the mission narrative.

Practically, this meant that the Methodist missionaries in The Bahamas came to fit into, support, and accept the logic of the three-tiered racial system—White, Colored, Black—in the Bahamas, with separate Black and White congregations. The African-Bahamian evangelists were part of the

³⁸ William Turton to Rev. Fathers and Brothers, March 22, 1817, in William Dowson, *A Mission to the West India Islands: Dowson's Journal for 1810-1817*, ed. A. Deans Peggs (Nassau: Deans Peggs Research Fund, 1960), 48; reprinted in *Celebrating 200 Years of Methodism at Ebenezer 1802-2002* (Nassau: Ebenezer Methodist Church, 2002), 14.

larger slave and Loyalist Black cultures of the Caribbean. All of their work needs to be understood in that context. The experience of the Loyalist Blacks in the Bahamas, that large number of free or indentured African-Americans who arrived in the Bahamas during the 1780s, was crucial to the development of Methodism. The Methodist mission, soon after the arrival of the missionaries, took on the structures of the larger society. That is, churches became segregated according to race, a transition which can be seen in the statistics reported by Coke and his successors. Thus at the beginning of the writing of the Methodist version of the history of World Christianity, it was truly a history of the efforts of the missionaries.³⁹

³⁹ The Caribbean islands had similar but different experiences. See, for example, Noel F. Titus, *The Development of Methodism in Barbados, 1823-1883* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1994).