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Eternal Salvation, Temporal Freedom: Support of the Bahamian “Native Baptists” by the British Baptist Missionary Society in the Nineteenth Century

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Edward S. Curtis (1868-1952), a photographer who spent his life documenting Native Americans and their culture in twenty volumes, had quite a disturbing wish upon encountering an isolated group of people living on an island near Alaska. Observing their simple happiness, so far untainted by an intruding Western World, he proclaimed that, should missionaries ever find their way toward the island, he trusted that “the sea would due its duty and swallow them up”.¹ This kind of feeling is exemplary of a sentiment too often expressed towards those who are viewed as imposing their way of life and Christian doctrine upon other nations of the world; it is seen as disturbing pristine, unique cultures, largely due to a lack of concern for the lives and society of a people, and an interest only to have souls conform to Christian belief, and then move on.

J. Gresham Machen wrote:

It is only by a baseless caricature that Christian missionaries are represented as though they had no interest in education or in the maintenance of a social life in this world; it is not true that they are interested only in saving individual souls and when souls are saved leave them to their own devices. On the contrary[,] true Christians must everywhere be united in the brotherhood of the Christian Church.²

Such an interest in the education and betterment of societal life as a necessary and natural part of evangelizing the world for Jesus Christ was an obvious mark made by the British who came to the Bahamian Islands in the nineteenth century on behalf of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS). These missionaries exemplified the kind of positive social impact missionaries who are seeking to save souls can have when completely committed to God and the lives of the people they are evangelizing and discipling.

The all-encompassing work of the BMS missionaries in the Bahamas with the slaves and freed blacks, who made up the “Native Baptists”, was an important example of how effective missionary work is not only concerned with saving souls, but also with investing all energies into the spiritual, educational, and societal betterment of the people. The missionaries made such a difference because

¹ American Masters, *Coming to Light: Edward S. Curtis and the Native American Indians*, prod. Ann Makepeace Productions, 90 min., New York?, date?, documentary that aired on WQED, Pittsburgh, April, 2001.

² J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923) , 157.

they took on all the natives' needs: spiritual and literacy education, the building of their churches and schools, training and preparation to be able to properly minister the Gospel themselves, sharing in oppression, and freedom of worship and emancipation from slavery.

The Bahamian islands presented a unique mission field for the British Baptist missionaries; by the time they arrived, there were no genuine native peoples. And, Christianity existed in the form of the Anglican Church of England, and primitive, Native Baptist churches made up of slaves and freed blacks, the latter who were fervent in their faith, but profoundly ignorant of the basics of Christianity due to illiteracy and a lack of training. British missionaries came to the Bahamas with the challenge to correct, instruct, and educate these so-called Native Baptists to improve their spiritual and societal lives.

EARLY HISTORY IN THE BAHAMAS, AND THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIANITY AND THE “NATIVE BAPTISTS”

The Bahamas is a chain of 700 islands and 2,300 rocks and cays that range from about 50 miles east of the tip of Florida, to nearly the same amount north of Haiti; they stretch 550 miles north to south, and 200 miles wide.³ In October of 1492, the Bahamas was the first place that Christopher Columbus landed in the Americas. From 1520 to 1648, the islands were nearly uninhabited, after Spain abducted the native people and hauled them off to Cuba and Hispaniola to mine gold. Puritans from Bermuda fleeing religious persecution arrived in 1648 and were followed by English immigrants who settled the island and named it New Providence, making Nassau its capital in 1695.⁴

The first English settlement in the seventeenth century almost exclusively represented the Christian faith in the islands for the next 200 years. By 1734, the Anglican Church was the official church of the Bahamas, and it began to be supported financially by the government in 1795.⁵ Anglican membership grew at the end of the eighteenth century when Loyalists fleeing the American

³ Patricia E. McMulla, *Bahamas* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1999) , 19.

⁴ *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 1, 180.

⁵ Antonina Canzoneri and Michael C. Symonette, *Baptists in the Bahamas: An Historical Review* (El Paso, TX: Baptist Spanish Publishing, 1977) , 5.

Revolution began to arrive.⁶ The Loyalists were given land grants in the Bahamas by Britain; many were plantation owners with slaves, whom they brought with them to continue their exploits.⁷ From 1783 to 1785, several thousand Loyalists arrived, doubling the population of whites on the islands; they also brought 4,000 slaves with them, tripling the number of blacks.⁸ These North America slaves were the beginnings of Baptist churches, which the BMS missionaries came to support, correct, and train in the nineteenth century. The “fore-runner” of concerted Baptist work in the Bahamas during the eighteenth century was Frank Spence, a slave who went to the islands with a group of Loyalists from Florida and South Carolina in 1780; he taught Baptist doctrine in Nassau and built a place of worship on the south side of Fort Fincastle.⁹ By 1834, he served a chapel able to hold 900 to 1,000 people.¹⁰ A freed American slave, Prince Williams, left South Carolina with a small group of evangelists to come to Nassau in 1790. They arrived from Florida in a small, open boat and began teaching their revivalist faith in the open bush to the south west side of the Government House. This group became the Bethel Baptist Church in 1801 or 1802, the first Baptist Church in the Bahamas. Prince Williams became its pastor in 1822.¹¹

A black preacher known only as “Brother Amos”, another freed slave who was a friend of George Leile (an ex-slave who pastored the Church at Yamacraw in Savanna, Georgia, and later was a pioneer Baptist evangelist in Kingston, Jamaica in 1783), went to New Providence as an evangelist, and had about 300 church members in 1791, and 850 by 1812.¹² “Brother Amos” was an “outstanding leader and organizer” from the church at Silver Bluff, South Carolina -- the first separate Negro Baptist church in the U.S., founded between 1773 and 1775 -- which served as the

⁶ *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, s.v. “Caribbean.”

⁷ McMulla, 33.

⁸ *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 1, 180.

⁹ Canzoneri and Symonette, 1.

¹⁰ Antonia Canzoneri, “Research on the History of Baptists in the Bahamas,” *Caribbean Archives* 5 (1976) : 43.

¹¹ Canzoneri and Symonette, 3, 11; R. Lofton Hudson, “A Note on Bahama Island Baptist History,” *Review and Expositor* 49 (April 1952) : 176-7.

mother-church of several Baptist missions. “Amos” left America about the same time as George Leile.¹³ There was significant fruit from what may likely be attributed to the works of “Amos”, as, according to Peter Brewer, a letter was sent in 1815 to inform British Baptists of:

“ ... an eminently gracious revival of religion” among the coloured people of New Providence. On 25th December 1814 some 280 persons, who had satisfactorily related their experiences to the church, were baptized, following some nine or ten testimonials as to their character, and have the permission of their masters. The ordinance was administered by their aged pastor [presumably “Amos”], who remained in the water to do so from eight in the morning until two in the afternoon ... Another fifty were baptized on New Year’s Day, following yet more time of examining them ... the messenger was dispatched to England to share their joy and to ask for help in the provision of Bibles, Testaments and Religious Tracts, and in furthering the objects of the Bahamian Baptists ... the letter indicates a concern for further teaching of the church and a desire for help from outside.¹⁴

Another black ex-slave from America who was instrumental in church planting in the Bahamas was Shaper Morris, who lived in Nassau for some time before moving on to serve in a church at Turk’s Island. Morris was “among those Native Baptists who looked upon the arrival of the first BMS missionary ‘as the answer to fervent prayers’.”¹⁵ The Holy Spirit was working among the Native Baptists, and they recognized a need for instruction in righteousness; they sought out the British Baptist missionaries and were ripe for the arrival.

There were two major reasons the Native Baptists needed instruction: (1) an experiential understanding of Christianity based on revival movements from the United States that the Native Baptists in the Bahamas were influenced by, along with a possible African mysticism view of worship; and (2) the fact that they were illiterate and uneducated, and deliberately kept that way by their masters, who did not allow them any chance of learning the truth of Scripture. “When the Baptist Missionary Society eventually began work in these islands, the missionaries met existing churches having a revivalist tradition superimposed on African background. This caused them problems in

¹² Arthur Charles Dayfoot, *The Shaping of the West Indian Church, 1492-1962* (Barbados: Press University of the West Indies, 1999) , 129; Azariah McKenzie, “Baptists of the Caribbean and Their Attitude Toward Other Christians,” *Foundations* 17 (Jan. - Mar. 1974) : 52.

¹³ Peter Brewer, “British Baptists Missionaries and Baptist Work in the Bahamas,” *Baptist Quarterly* 32 (April 1988) : 295.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 296.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 296.

varying degrees ... ”¹⁶ This background created a form of Christianity that lacked a sure foundation on Scripture. One Anglican clergyman who arrived in Long Island in 1799, observed that the negroes were “misled by strange doctrines”, and black preachers were “artful and designing, making a merchandise of Religion”. He cited one black preacher as so “impious” that he boasted a “familiar conversation with the Almighty, and [pointed] out the place where he had seen Him.”¹⁷ However, as in America, the Church of England contributed to this problem, leaving blacks uneducated and to their own devices. According to historian Michail Crafton, “As to the slaves, many of the masters considered that Christianity would demoralize them by teaching them notions of equality, and preferred the slaves to linger on in their dimly remembered African superstitions.” Thus, “the Bahamas remained until the nineteenth century almost a godless place ... ”¹⁸ And, while much Christian activity began to awaken with some of the early Native Baptists evangelizing the Bahamas, sound Christian instruction, leadership, and direction was sorely needed to grow on a firm, Biblical foundation. The BMS missionaries answered the call.

THE BRITISH BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY AND NATIVE BAPTIST CHURCHES IN THE BAHAMAS

The British Baptist Missionary Society was a mission arm of the Particular Baptists of Britain which stemmed out of the zeal of its founders for bringing the Gospel to the nations of the world. It was William Carey (1761-1834), a shoemaker, whose writings and address to the Baptist Association in 1792, drove deep interests towards a concerted missionary effort. As a result of his persuasions, Andrew Fuller resolved that at the Association’s next meeting of ministers, “ ... a plan should be prepared for the purpose of forming a society for propagating the Gospel among the heathen.”¹⁹ Soon after, the BMS was founded and began to send out missionaries.

¹⁶ Ibid, 295.

¹⁷ Canzoneri and Symonette, 2.

¹⁸ Ibid, 4.

¹⁹ William John Henderson, *Holding the Ropes*, in *The Centenary Volume of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792-1892*, ed. John Brown Myers (Holborn, E.C.: Baptist Missionary Society, 1892) , 1.

Moses Baker, a Native Baptist who “longed to be taught the ways of the Lord more perfectly,” sent word to BMS missionary Dr. Ryland (1753-1825) in Jamaica (the headquarters of BMS activity in the West Indies), asking for British teachers to be sent to the Bahamas to instruct the Native Baptist churches. The BMS heard that seven to eight thousand blacks had been baptized, and had been planning on helping them for some time.²⁰ Joseph Burton (retired in 1838) and his wife, the first BMS missionaries to the Bahamas, arrived in Nassau on January 29, 1833, and were well received by the government, Anglicans, Methodists, and Native Baptists. At that time, about 20 Baptist churches or “societies” existed. Kilner Pearson (d. 1834) and his wife arrived in November of the same year. The missionaries sought out the Baptists on the island, and reunited the divided groups of Sharper Morris and Prince Williams at Bethel Baptist Church. On July 6, 1834, Sharper Morris suggested that the BMS missionaries replace him as the ministers of Bethel Baptist Church; the church agreed, and the missionaries and the BMS became associate trustees of Bethel Baptist Church with joint ownership. Prince Williams left the church, perhaps due to disagreement with joint ownership, and created the St. John’s (Particular) Baptist Church of the Native Baptists Society.²¹ Joseph Burton gave Prince Williams and his group \$200 to begin this church.²²

When Burton first arrived, the population of the Bahamas was 16,500: 4,200 were white, 3,000 were free blacks, and the rest (majority) were slaves; perhaps this explains the early feature, particularly by Anglican slave holders, of not teaching writing at Sabbath Schools for slaves, so they would not write “seditious pamphlets”.²³ Burton found the Native Baptists had entered bad times between 1815 and 1833:

Among the population of between nine and ten thousand there was a considerable number of persons calling themselves Baptists ... The people were in bondage, and addicted to all the vices of slavery, while little had been done for their religious benefit, and the leaders of the so-called Baptist churches were illiterate -- only one could read. The people who followed

²⁰ Ibid, 10; Canzoneri and Symonette, 12.

²¹ Canzoneri and Symonette, 12-13; Canzoneri, 41.

²² Hudson, 177.

²³ Canzoneri, 24, 28.

them indulged in many superstitious practices, and paid scant regard to the moral precepts of the Gospel.²⁴

In a report to Dr. Ryland in Jamaica, Burton shared: “I never met one of [the Native Baptists] able to read a chapter correctly; and the first prayer which I heard offered by one of the members was partly offered to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” The BMS *Centenary Volume* commented that “the negroes were in a most benighted condition: those in whom the Divine life had been implanted sadly needed instruction, while some who made loud professions of religion mistook physical excitement for spiritual fervor.”²⁵ Later, it noted:

Notwithstanding, the members of these imperfect communities hailed Mr. Burton’s arrival with gladness, although the first duty of the missionary was to uproot prevailing superstitions and declare to them the grace of God, which taught them that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. And after several years of devoted labor he was instrumental in laying the foundations of a work which God has eminently blessed. This was followed up by a band of earnest Christian workers, who, in succession, were sent forth by the Society, and around when the people gathered in increasing numbers.²⁶

Burton began by replacing superstition with sober living, and examined church members all over the island. He built Zion Mission Church, and set up preaching stations across New Providence. While not all “old Baptists” joined the BMS, the twenty Baptist churches Burton found had “a fervent desire to receive religious instruction”, and “his labours were truly apostolic during his stay, and the name of Joseph Burton is written in many hearts even now.”²⁷ The BMS missionaries accepted members only in accordance with Baptist doctrine and policies consistent with other parts of the world: a correct understanding of salvation, leading moral lives, and being married to the person one lived with.²⁸

BMS work increased steadily as they expanded to unreached parts of the Bahamas. By 1835, they had established six chapels and four Sabbath Schools to teach reading and the Bible; of the 20 to

²⁴ Brewer, 297.

²⁵ Henderson, 10.

²⁶ David Jonathan East, *West Indies*, in *The Centenary Volume of the BMS*, 209.

²⁷ Brewer, 297.

²⁸ Canzoneri and Symonette, 12.

30 native teachers, only one could read the Bible, and most did not know the alphabet. There was such great interest in receiving education that some people walked 17 miles over rough roads to attend the Sabbath School in Eleuthera. Burton taught young native men with plans for them to be schoolmasters across the islands; his first pupils were Archibald Taylor, Samuel Boodle, and Samuel Burton.²⁹ Taylor, who was first converted by Pearson, studied reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic, and copied theological lectures under Burton; in addition, he wrote sermons for Burton to correct, and was used as a leader in mission work to Grant's Town.³⁰ This interest of having natives properly instructed to lead their own churches was a commendable feature of the BMS missionaries, and a sign of their commitment to the full lives of the natives. While the missionaries first served as pastors and preachers for most of the churches, they immediately invested resources in preparing the natives to take on the work themselves. A native preacher taught by missionaries preached at Bethel each Sunday morning. Later on, native preacher James W. Sweeting was ordained as pastor of Bethel in December of 1898. Besides Sabbath Schools, the missionaries began a Bible Society in Nassau, Temperance Societies, Juvenile Missionary Societies, and day schools, and they began using native leaders in churches. By 1851, at the insistence of Henry Capern (d. 1883), who came to Nassau in 1840, the BMS Committee ordained some of these leaders, and the BMS Society subsidized their salaries.³¹ "Capern spent a great deal of time training a native ministry. He was convinced that work needed to be done by these men, with only [the] white missionary as superintendent."³²

An 1874 report on BMS work in the West Indies cites 16 Bahamian islands with churches under the BMS, and notes that "the communities are only occasionally visited by missionaries," and "their regular religious instruction, their discipline and the administration of ordinances of the Gospel, are the work of a body of native pastors raised up on the spot ..."³³ Toward the close of the century,

²⁹ Canzoneri and Symonette, 13, 28.

³⁰ Ibid, 13.

³¹ Ibid, 14, 31.

³² Ibid, 36.

³³ Ibid, 37.

with effective development of the Native Baptists' ability to correctly minister the Gospel to their own people, the BMS ended direct support by 1897.³⁴ The BMS *Centenary Volume* noted that near the end of BMS involvement, native pastors "more or less educated for the work" presided over churches in each of the numerous islands near Nassau;³⁵ it began to focus its resources in other areas in more dire need. BMS efforts in the Bahamas portray a fine example of how effective missions should not only preach the Gospel and hope to see God convert many, which also was the case, but should also be concerned with educating and enabling native peoples to teach the Gospel on their own, trusting that God will be faithful to complete the good work He begins as His people are trained to serve and follow Him.

While the BMS moved on to other lands, they set up an institution for further instruction and development of Native leaders to continue the work. The BMS *Centenary Volume* comments: "The most important development of the life in our Baptist Mission [in the West Indies] was doubtless the establishment of Calabar College for the education and training of a Native Ministry,"³⁶ where "worthy natives would be trained for the ministry ... with BMS support, up to four students being supported at any one time."³⁷ The college opened in October of 1843, as the "first cooperative theological school in the Western Hemisphere", grew and moved to Kingston, and eventually merged into the United Theological College of the West Indies.³⁸

BMS ENDURES OPPRESSION WITH BLACKS, AND HELPS BRING THEM FREEDOM

Slavery and oppression were evils that blacks endured in the Bahamas, as they had in America. In the "Laws of the Bahamas", two references to an old law, which was supposed to have still existed in 1800, forbade preaching the Gospel to slaves. In 1800, an act was passed that forced all free blacks to purchase and wear a medal the size of a dollar that had the person's initials,

³⁴ Ibid, 42.

³⁵ East, 209.

³⁶ Ibid, 204.

³⁷ Brewer, 300.

³⁸ East, 204; McKenzie, 55.

certificate number, and the word “free” engraved on it, to be worn in public view at all times.

Between 1816 and 1821, a Police Act forbade religious services between sunset and sunrise, making it nearly impossible for slaves to congregate.³⁹ The blacks also faced religious persecution:

“[Sabbath meetings] ‘of these poor afflicted bondsmen’ brought upon them the ridicule and displeasure of their employers and neighbours. They were often obliged to meet at night for fear of interference. Stones were often thrown at them, and even those whose duty it was to preserve the peace sought opportunities to break up their meetings.”⁴⁰

The Bahamian Governor’s Dispatches note that in September, 1838, Governor Francis Cockburn complained about black Baptist preachers Williams and Burns, and inquired how to curtail them. A staunch supporter of Anglican expansion, he complained for years to the British Secretary of State about missionary Capern, who was attracting many Anglican blacks. At one point, Cockburn required indentured persons to attend the Church of England, but Capern resisted it until ruled invalid in 1841. Later, when Anglican clergymen stormed a Baptist chapel in Exuma in 1844, to hold their own services in it, and had the preacher and others who resisted beaten, arrested, and imprisoned, Capern had the Baptists acquitted with legal help.⁴¹ Canzoneri duly notes: “BMS missionaries were instrumental, along with Presbyterian and Methodist ministers, in bringing freedom to the Bahamas for the preaching of the gospel and in worship.”⁴²

But as the BMS missionaries ministered to the Native Baptists, they were disliked and persecuted by the Anglicans for their association with slaves and freed blacks. In Jamaica, the heart of BMS work in the West Indies, white planters had been fighting preaching by “dissenters” to slaves for years; they even passed laws to such ends.⁴³ It was this persecution faced by Joseph Burton while stationed in Jamaica that caused him, in part, to leave for the Bahamas, as he was “due to be tried at

³⁹ Canzoneri, 42, 46.

⁴⁰ Brewer, 296.

⁴¹ Canzoneri, 43; Canzoneri and Symonette, 33.

⁴² Canzoneri and Symonette, 32.

⁴³ Ibid, 12.

the Kingston assizes for preaching, although he had the proper licence ... ”⁴⁴ Brewer notes that “the growth of the Bahamas churches was ... very hard won,” and illustrates this point with an excerpt from a letter by Mrs. Kilner Pearson to her pastor in 1842, who:

“appeal[ed] for his help in recruiting a missionary for the ‘out islands’. Such a missionary must be motivated only by the constraining love of Christ, and must ‘work for souls irrespective of respectable associations etc. The Baptists, by identifying the interests of the black people with their own, are low enough in the world’s esteem ... ”⁴⁵

McKenzie concurs that the BMS missionaries endured quite a struggle:

For the first hundred years of the existence of the Baptists in the Caribbean, they had to engage in a serious battle for survival. They were adjudged a sect. Their leaders were labeled fanatics, rabble-rousers, sometimes subversives, who were inciting the black illiterate population to riot and thus constituting a threat to the establishment which saw the church as an adjunct of the state, and thus to offend one was to offend both. Baptist leaders were constantly under suspicion by leaders of the state and the established church. They were watched, persecuted, and subjected to all kinds of intimidation, harassment, and humiliation because they sided with the oppressed against the oppressors.⁴⁶

In siding with the oppressed blacks, the BMS missionaries were stalwarts not only for the freedom of Native Baptists to know the Gospel and worship the Savior, but also for their eventual emancipation from slavery in the colony:

... the story of the emancipation struggle and victory is in large measure the story of Baptist endeavor to be the church in the life of society. Baptists like William Knibb, Thomas Burchell and James Phillippo have become immortalized in Caribbean history, for while they were not the only ones to expose the barbarity and inhumanity of slavery, they certainly constituted the avant-garde in the campaign. It has been rightly said that no history of these islands would be complete without reference to the Baptists.⁴⁷

At an annual BMS meeting at Spa Fields Chapel, London, in 1833, William Knibb gave his own witness of the atrocities of slavery in Jamaica, and implored his listeners to bring the vice to an end: “And if I die without beholding the emancipation of my brethren and sisters in Christ, then, if prayer is permitted in heaven, I will fall at the feet of the Eternal, crying: Lord, open the eyes of Christians in England to see the evil of slavery and to banish it from the earth.” According to the

⁴⁴ Brewer, 296.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 299.

⁴⁶ McKenzie, 54-5.

BMS *Centenary Volume*, “ ... excitement endured, and the Christian Church and Anti-Slavery societies united in one fixed determination. Large and enthusiastic meetings were held ... at which, with wondrous energy, Knibb, and Burchell, and Phillips stormed the hearts of their countrymen until the Imperial Parliament passed the Act of Emancipation.” The Abolition of Slavery Act was passed in 1833, and on August 1, 1834, all slaves were made free; after four years of service as paid apprentices through the Apprenticeship Act, which cost their former masters 20,000 pounds as compensation, they became legally free in 1838. The BMS *Centenary Volume* noted: “Emancipation had revolutionized the state of society. The transition from slavery to freedom was great. The change was believed to be owing to missionary influence ... the great avowed friend ... of the slave.”⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

As of a 1990 census, Baptists make up 31.2 percent of Christians in the Bahamas, compared to Anglicans and Roman Catholics making up 16 percent combined.⁴⁹ This majority is due, no doubt, in part to the tremendous efforts of the BMS missionaries in the nineteenth century towards the education and instruction of the Native Baptist churches. The BMS *Centenary Volume* suggested the following as “methods by which the results have been attained”:

- (1) Faith in the manhood, the mental capabilities, and the religious aptitudes of the African race.
- (2) The preaching of the Gospel as the divinely appointed means of reconciling man to God.
- (3) The organisation of Christian churches for fellowship, edification, and discipline.
- (4) Division of the churches into classes; the leaders; with the pastor as presiding elder, constituting a presbytery in each church.
- (5) In Jamaica, the Baptist Union, consisting of the associated churches, meeting in annual session by their representatives -- pastors and delegates -- the latter appointed by the churches themselves.
- (6) Co-operation for church extension and missionary work “in regions beyond,” and support of Calabar College and day and Sunday schools.⁵⁰

These methods are worthy of any missionary effort to consider in bringing the Gospel message to peoples around the world, so that they are eventually able to teach, exhort, and minister

⁴⁷ Ibid, 53.

⁴⁸ Henderson, 12; East, 192-3; McCulla, 34.

⁴⁹ *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 1, 180.

⁵⁰ East, 216.

themselves. While there were other influences that caused the BMS to leave the Bahamas at the end of the century, it is impressive to see how they invested so much to seeing the Native Baptists able to carry on with a grounded faith on their own. It is also worth noting that during the cholera epidemic in the Bahamas from October of 1852, to January 29, 1853, Henry Capern was one who initiated and executed house-to-house visitation, taught sanitation as prevention, and sought out and treated the ill; due to his efforts with others, many lives were saved.⁵¹ As well, in a master's thesis in 1959 on the "Educational Policy in the Bahamas Up to 1823 and Its Determinants", a section credits the educational value of Baptist church services in the very beginnings of Bahamian education.⁵²

While the British missionaries of the Baptist Missionary Society saw God bear much fruit in conversions and discipleship of Native Baptists in the Bahamas in the nineteenth century, clearly, their missionary zeal was equally accompanied by an earnest concern for all aspects of the natives' lives, as should any legitimate Christian missionary effort. While God is concerned with the eternal salvation of His people around the world, He does not turn His face away from their temporal well being; neither should His missionaries, and the BMS were committed to both. It is no surprise, therefore, that a letter printed in the *Nassau Guardian* in 1886, testifies that the members of "... the Baptist Missionary Society ... in the Assembly, in the Pulpit, and in the Courts, immediately after the Emancipation of the Slaves in the British West Indies, kept 'watch and ward' over the infant liberties of the coloured people of this colony."⁵³ Praise be to God that the sea did not swallow the BMS missionaries up on their journey to the Bahamas.

⁵¹ Canzoneri and Symonette, 36.

⁵² Canzoneri, 49.

⁵³ Canzoneri and Symonette, 32.

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