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Edward E. Andrews
Providence College

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**“Christian Missions and Colonial Empires Reconsidered:
A Black Evangelist in West Africa, 1766-1816”**

**Edward E. Andrews, Ph.D.
Department of History
Providence College**

The Journal of Church and State

Historians have traditionally looked at Christian missionaries in one of two ways. The first church historians to catalogue missionary history provided hagiographic descriptions of their trials, successes, and sometimes even martyrdom. Missionaries were thus visible saints, exemplars of ideal piety in a sea of persistent savagery.¹ However, by the middle of the twentieth century, an era marked by civil rights movements, anti-colonialism, and growing secularization, missionaries were looked at quite differently. Instead of godly martyrs, historians now described missionaries as arrogant and rapacious imperialists. Christianity became not a saving grace but a monolithic and aggressive force that missionaries imposed upon defiant natives. Indeed, missionaries were now understood as important agents in the ever-expanding nation-state, or “ideological shock troops for

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¹ The work of Kenneth Scott Latourette exemplifies these tendencies. See especially Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, 7 Volumes (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937-1945). In his presidential address to the American Historical Association, Latourette suggested that all scholars pursue what he called a “Christian understanding of history.” See Latourette, “The Christian Understanding of History,” *American Historical Review* 54 No. 2 (January 1949): 259-76. See also the work of Bishop Stephen Neill, especially Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986). Andrew Porter suggests that this missionary-as-martyr interpretation is still alive and well within the circles of church historians. He notes that their “own evident confessional commitment, the tendency to hagiography or institutional piety, the study of the missionary past with the commitment of the determined reformer intent on future success, both seem almost as strong as ever.” See Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant missionaries and overseas expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2004), 2. For an example of how Catholic historians constructed a hagiographical history of a famous Indian convert in French Canada, see Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

colonial invasion whose zealotry blinded them.”² British historian Brian Stanley regrets that this symbiotic relationship between “the Bible and the flag” in Western expansion has now become “one of the unquestionable orthodoxies of general historical knowledge.”³ Although emotionally appealing to many, the imperial approach was not completely intellectually satisfying. As James Axtell noted, the post-1960s interpretation was “little more than the familiar Eurocentric plot turned on its normative head”: missionary heroes became the villains, indigenous victims became the new heroes, and Christianity and indigenous religions were still viewed as mutually incompatible.⁴ Native preachers were rarely taken seriously by either group of scholars because they were not orthodox enough for one and not “authentic” enough for the other.⁵ Both the missionary-as-saint and

² David J. Silverman, “Indians, Missionaries, and Religious Translation: Creating Wampanoag Christianity in Seventeenth-Century Martha’s Vineyard,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series LXII: 2 (April 2005): 144. In this quote Silverman is assessing the historiographical interpretation of missionaries, not arguing that they were in fact ideological shock troops. For more on Silverman’s work on indigenous Christianity on Martha’s Vineyard, see Silverman, *Faith and Boundaries: Colonists, Christianity, and Community Among the Wampanoag Indians of Martha’s Vineyard, 1600-1871* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For a recent study of the hagiographic interpretation of native converts, see Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Finally, for a few examples of the imperialistic interpretation of American missions, see Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); and Henry Warner Bowden, *American Indians and Christian Missions: Studies in Cultural Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). For the African context, see the important works by the Comaroffs, in Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Volume Two. The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). See also the extended reviews of the Comaroff’s work in Paul S. Landau, “Hegemony and History in Jean and John L. Comaroff’s ‘Of Revelation and Revolution,’” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 70 No. 3 (2000): 501-519; and Elizabeth Elbourne, “Word Made Flesh: Christianity, Modernity, and Cultural Colonialism in the Work of Jean and John Comaroff,” *The American Historical Review* 108 No. 2 (April 2003): 435-459. For the imperialistic interpretation, see also Landeg White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

³ Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester, England: Apollon, 1990), 12. Both the missionaries-as-saints and missionaries-as-imperialists approaches to Protestant missions leave little room for indigenous Christians. In the first interpretation, Anglo-American missionary activity was emphasized to glorify and memorialize the philanthropic efforts of a more “civilized” people. On the other hand, the newer scholarship emphasizes resistance, often violent, to Christian missions. In both accounts native Christians and the indigenous Christianities they create are rarely taken seriously.

⁴ James Axtell, “Review: Invading America: Puritans and Jesuits,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 14 No. 3 (Winter 1984): 636.

⁵ Terence Ranger is right to note that scholars have too frequently employed circular reasoning to mark out the boundaries that define indigenous peoples as “authentic” or not. He suggests that scholars have defined anti-

missionary-as-imperialist framework therefore left little interpretive space for the hundreds of native preachers who actively participated in British evangelical efforts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Examining indigenous missionaries complicates these oversimplified dichotomies, for native evangelists were neither imperialists nor ignorant of the society that they tried to “gospelize.” In fact, those very reasons, in addition to their ability to speak indigenous languages, persuade extended kinship networks to embrace the gospel, work for less pay, and resist certain diseases, made them much more than a paltry addition to the missionary corps. James Axtell has estimated that there were 133 Native American preachers during the American colonial era alone.⁶ My estimates, which include black preachers and Indians throughout the Atlantic world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, put the number well above 300.⁷ While historians of nineteenth century British missions have already begun emphasizing the vital role of native missionaries and using their histories to reconceptualize the relationship between religion and empire, scholars of the early modern Atlantic trail far behind in that regard.⁸ This essay corrects that imbalance by examining one eighteenth

Christian, anti-imperial societies as authentic ones, leaving little room for any sense of indigenous Christians – in America or in Africa – as “authentic.” See Terence Ranger, “Christianity and Indigenous Peoples: A Personal Overview,” *The Journal of Religious History* 27 No. 3 (October 2003): 255-271. For more on the problem of authenticity in native voices, see the introduction to Hilary E. Wyss, *Writing Indians: Literacy, Christianity, and Native Community in Early America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 1-16. Rachel Wheeler has also criticized previous scholars’ search for “authentic” voices and argues that focusing on religious practice, rather than belief, helps to avoid getting entangled in that thorny conceptual problem. See Wheeler, “Women and Christian Practice in a Mahican Village,” *Religion and American Culture* 13 No. 1 (Winter 2003): 27-67.

⁶ James Axtell, “Some Thoughts on the Ethnohistory of Missions,” *Ethnohistory* 29:1 (Winter, 1982): 36.

⁷ See Edward E. Andrews, “Prodigal Sons: Indigenous Missionaries in the British Atlantic World, 1640-1780,” (PhD Dissertation, University of New Hampshire, 2009).

⁸ For recent scholarship on indigenous peoples in the British Empire, see Peggy Brock, ed., *Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005); Brock, “New Christians as Evangelists,” 132-152; Brock, “Two Indigenous Evangelists: Moses Tjalkabota and Arthur Wellington Clah,” *The Journal of Religious History* 27 No. 3 (October 2003): 348-366; Porter, *Religion versus Empire?*, 163-190; Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989); Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity: The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003); Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley, eds., *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799-1999* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans

century indigenous evangelical enterprise – Philip Quaake’s mission to West Africa – to argue that the relationship between religion and empire in the early modern Atlantic world was much more tenuous and ambiguous than historians have previously recognized.

In spite of the abundance of primary source material on African Anglican missionary Philip Quaake, he remains a fairly obscure figure.⁹ Kweku, as he was originally called, was born into a

Publishing Company, 2000), 147-282; Marilyn Robinson Waldman, Olabiyi Babalola Yai, and Lamin Sanneh, “Translatability: A Discussion,” *Journal of African Religion* 22 Fasc. 22 (May 1992): 159-172; Terence Ranger, “Christianity and Indigenous Peoples: A Personal Overview,” *The Journal of Religious History* 27 No. 3 (October 2003): 255-271; Ranger, “Religious Movements and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *African Studies Review* 29 No. 2 (June 1986): 1-69; Ranger, “Mission Adaptations of African Religious Institutions: The Masai Case,” in *The Historical Study of African Religion*, ed. Terence Ranger and I. Kimambo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 221-251; Elizabeth Elbourne, *Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions, and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799-1853* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2002); Elbourne, “Early Khoisan Uses of Mission Christianity,” in *HMissions and Christianity in South African History*, ed. C. Bredekamp and Robert Ross (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press, 1995), 65-96; Elbourne, “Indigenous Peoples and Imperial Networks in the Early Nineteenth Century: The Politics of Knowledge,” in *Rediscovering the British World*, ed. Philip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005); J.D.Y. Peel, *Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968); Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 589; Paul Stuart Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (London: James Currey, 1995); John K. Thornton, “The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491-1750,” *The Journal of African History* 25 No. 2 (1984): 147-167; Thornton, “On the Trail of Voodoo: African Christianity in Africa and the Americas,” *The Americas* 44 No. 3 (January 1988): 261-278; Susan Neylan, “‘Eating the Angel’s Food’: Arthur Wellington Clah - An Aboriginal Perspective on Protestant Missions in Northern British Columbia, 1857-1909,” in *Canadian Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples: Representing Religion at Home and Abroad*, ed. Alwyn Austin and Jamie S. Scott (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 88-110; and Neylan, *The Heavens are Changing: Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missions and Tsimshian Christianity* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003). See also Tiyo Soga, *The Journal and Selected Writings of the Reverend Tiyo Soga* ed. Donovan Williams (Cape Town: Rhodes University, Grahamstown, A.A. Balkema, 1983); and Tolly Bradford’s forthcoming dissertation on native missionaries in nineteenth century British missions (University of Alberta). See also a roundtable discussion of Africans and missions in Derek Peterson, Jean Allman, Paul Landau, Nakanyike B. Musisi, Carol Summers, Kathleen R. Smythe, and Barbara Moss, “Special Issue: Africans Meeting Missionaries,” *Journal of Religious History* 23 No. 1 (February 1999): 1-127. For more on how Africans, subcontinental Asians, and other groups appropriated Christian literature like John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and situated it into their own cultural contexts, see Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of The Pilgrim’s Progress* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004). I would like to thank Nancy Jacobs for this last reference. For recent revisions of the relationship between empire and Christian missions, see Andrew N. Porter, *Religion Versus Empire?: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), Norman Etherington, ed., *Missions and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), and Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*.

⁹ The most important examinations of Quaake are Travis Glasson, “Missionaries, Methodists, and a Ghost: Philip Quaake in London and Cape Coast, 1756-1816,” *Journal of British Studies* 48 No. 1 (January 2009): 29-50; Ty M. Reese, “‘Sheep in the Jaws of So Many Ravenous Wolves’: the Slave Trade and Anglican Missionary Activity at Cape Coast Castle, 1752-1816,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34 No. 3 (September 2004): 348-372; Margaret Priestly, “Philip Quaake of Cape Coast” in *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, ed. Philip D. Curtin (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967); F.L. Bartels, “Philip Quaake, 1741-1816,” *Transactions of the Gold Coast and Togoland Historical Society* I No. 5 (1955); and Frank J.

prosperous family of Fetus, a group of Gold Coast Africans whose language fell within the Akan dialect.¹⁰ He was sent from West Africa to England when he was a young boy, tutored by Anglican ministers for over a decade, ordained as a missionary, and finally sent back to Africa in February of 1766. He lived on the Cape Coast for half a century, writing over 40 letters – totaling nearly 200 pages – to the Anglican missionary organization that supported him as well as other correspondents throughout the Atlantic world.¹¹ Unlike sermons, tracts, or missionary accounts, Quaake’s letters were never meant for public eyes. He knew the letters would be added to the official missionary record, but since they were not public documents *per se*, they avoided the rhetorical and formulaic devices of most published missionary writings and revealed a candid, often critical, analysis of his mission. Even when he dressed his letters in the language of Christian humility, Quaake still used them as an opportunity to formulate and articulate his relationship with the empire he was trying to fashion and the indigenous peoples he was hoping to save. Philip Quaake’s mission to the Cape Coast therefore presents a rare opportunity to examine how native missionaries carved out a space for indigenous Christians while simultaneously offering alternative conceptualizations of the relationship between religion and empire.

Klingberg, “Philip Quaake: Pioneer Native Missionary on the Gold Coast, 1765-1816,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 8 No. 4 (October 1939): 666-672. Bartels and Priestly both offer standard chronological examinations of Quaake, though Priestly’s contribution includes transcriptions of some of Quaake’s letters. Klingberg and Reese, however, focus on the contribution that Quaake made to West African education. Glasson’s recent article is the most insightful, for it situates Quaake into larger transatlantic conversations about Methodism and slavery. There is also a brief discussion of Quaake in Daniel C. Littlefield, “‘Almost an Englishman’: Eighteenth-Century Anglo-African Identities,” in *Cultures and Identities in Colonial British America*, eds. Robert Olwell and Alan Tully (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 70-94. Ty Reese and Vincent Carretta are currently editing a collection of Quaake’s letters and writings.

¹⁰ They lived in what is now modern-day Ghana. Quaake’s last name (actually Kweku in Fetu) meant born on a Wednesday.

¹¹ The letters are available under two different titles. The first is Philip Quaake, *Letters of the Rev. Philip Quaake of West Africa* (East Ardsley, England: Micro Methods Ltd., 1980-1985). The second is Philip Quaake, *The Letters of Philip Quaake, 1766-1811* (East Ardsley, England: E.P. Microform, 1970s). There are only a handful of libraries that own these microforms, and the originals are housed at the Rhodes House Library, Oxford University. Although there is no notable difference in content or format between the two letter collections, I have used the first one throughout. They are simply referred to as *Quaake Letters*.

“A Black Among Blacks”

In the early 1750s, an English missionary stationed in New Jersey implored his Anglican sponsors to let him begin a risky mission in West Africa. They consented and, by 1752, Thomas Thompson had established the first official Anglican mission at the slave-trading Gold Coast. Influenced by recent developments in American missionary practice – the Great Awakening had unleashed a tremendous amount of native missionary projects in the 1740s and 50s – Thompson immediately set out to train native peoples to serve as his assistants. Only two years after he arrived, he had hand-picked three young boys to go to England to be trained as missionaries.¹² One of the boys died and another went insane. Philip Quaque, however, finished his training by 1765 and sailed to West Africa in 1766. By that time, Thompson had returned to England because he feared the impact that the African climate would have on his body. The comparative experiences of Thompson and Quaque help illuminate the ways in which native evangelists embraced Anglican missionary practice and rhetoric while simultaneously inviting indigenous neophytes into a community of Christians.

Like white missionaries throughout the world, Philip Quaque considered himself a central figure in the spiritual battle against what he perceived to be superstitious fetishes in the form of traditional African customs. Although he was born in Africa, his time in England was formative, as he conceived of England and the people residing there as models of Christian piety, charity, and obedience. He described Old England as “that blessed Christian country” and took pride in his several years of English education and training.¹³ By contrast, Quaque characterized his native

¹² The first boy, named William Cudjoe, apparently went insane. The second, Thomas Caboro, died after he arrived in England.

¹³ Quaque to the SPG, 19 March 1774, *Quaque Letters*. Other Black Atlantic writers held much more ambivalent views of England and its people. James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, for example, changed his mind several times on the piety and decency of English people. See James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, “A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw An African Prince, as Related by

Africa as a “barren country” full of “Desolate Parts” and inhabited primarily by “poor, Superstitious and Idolatrous People.”¹⁴ These Africans, Quaake believed, were “poor unthinking and lamentable Creatures” who lived in a barren spiritual landscape marked by avaricious vice, gross paganism, and wicked idolatry.¹⁵ In spite of his reservations about African religion, however, Quaake held fast to the policy that he could never *compel* his audiences to convert, no matter how “poor” they appeared.¹⁶ This was a policy that the SPG practiced throughout the Atlantic world. Just two years after Quaake arrived in Africa, Anglican theologian William Knox suggested in a pamphlet that “if any success be expected from among the Indians, it must be founded on this principle, *that nothing is to be pressed upon them*; their own desires must move foremost, and those will always carry them to ask, as much as they can receive.”¹⁷ Protestant missionaries thus sincerely believed that forced conversions were an underhanded strategy, for Christianity implied free will, and it would have been theologically irresponsible to impose conversions on anyone. Native peoples had the freedom to seek their salvation just as they had the freedom to reject it.

Although conversion was a matter of free will, native missionaries still perceived themselves as instruments that God used to bring about spiritual transformations. Quaake considered himself as such, and he often followed the strategies and methods used by his predecessor, Thomas Thompson. Like Thompson, Quaake believed that if he were to convert the West African coastal peoples, he had

Himself, in *Pioneers of the Black Atlantic*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and William L. Andrews (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998), 48-52.

¹⁴ Quaake to the SPG, 6 August 1782 and 19 August 1771, in *Quaake Letters*.

¹⁵ Quaake to the SPG, 7 March 1767, in *Quaake Letters*.

¹⁶ The same rhetoric based on spiritual poverty and pity was also evident in American missions. See Laura M. Stevens, *The Poor Indians: British Missionaries, Native Americans, and Colonial Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

¹⁷ William Knox, *Three Tracts Respecting the Conversion and Instruction of the Free Indians, and Negroe Slaves in the Colonies. Addressed to the Venerable Society for Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (London: s.n., 1768), 15.

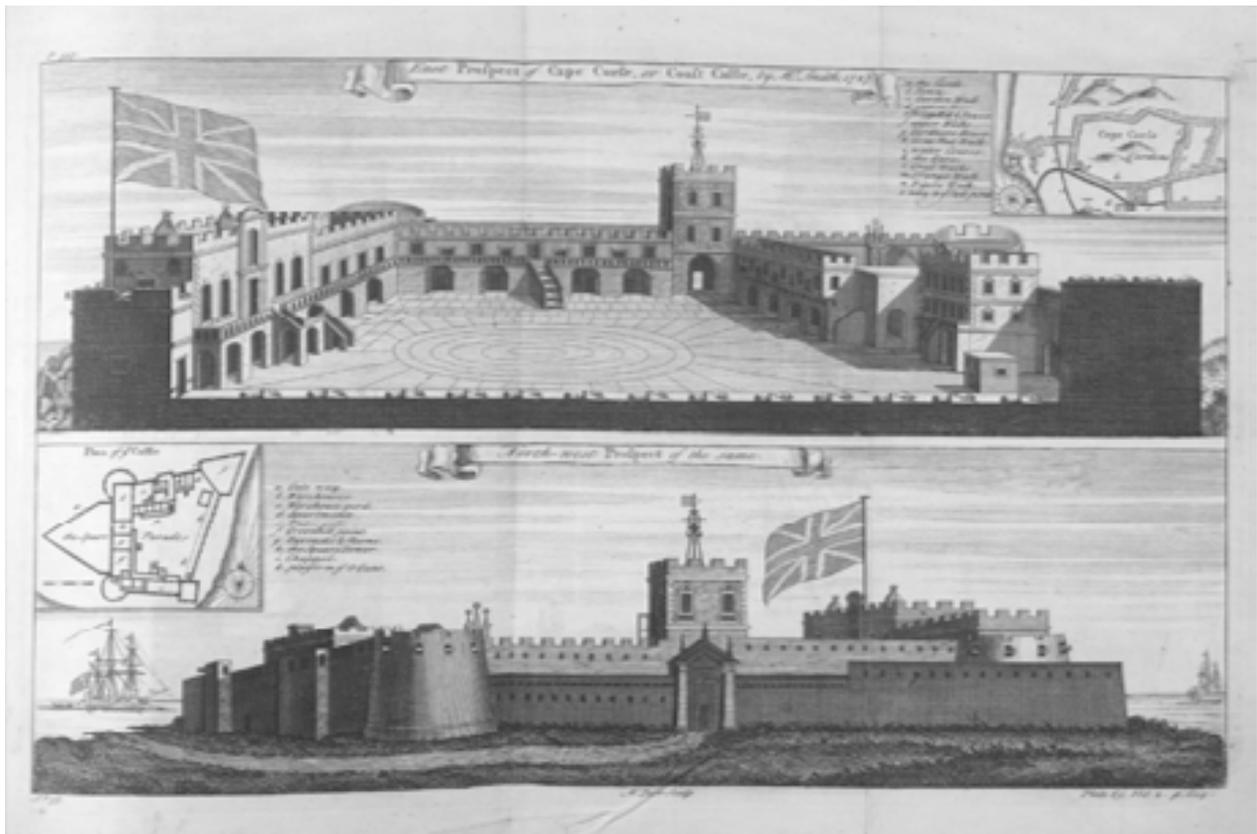
to start with their Cabosheers, or local rulers. Convincing the Cabosheers and other local penyins (elders) to convert would represent a major spiritual victory and vindication for Quaque. These Alpha Africans were the most respected people in Cape Coast society and their conversion could produce a trickle-down effect, resulting in the spiritual salvation of hundreds of thousands of souls. The stakes were high. Cudjo Cabosheer, in particular, was a popular, amiable, and well-respected leader on the Cape Coast in the 1760s and 1770s. Quaque witnessed a testament to Cudjo's popularity firsthand when upwards of one million people paid their respects to the coastal leader when he died in 1777.¹⁸ Quaque probably expected him to embrace Christianity fairly easily, for he was an uncle to Quaque, he was the one who sent Quaque to England in the first place, he had his own children sent there earlier, he supported the creation of a Christian school for local African children, and he even let Quaque preach in his own home.¹⁹ But the Cabosheer viewed Christianity as a tool of diplomacy. In fact, Thompson had earlier described the Cabosheer as very conversant in English and possessing "a good Knowledge of many Things relating to the Government and Affairs in *England*."²⁰ It is likely that all of his gestures were actually diplomatic maneuvers designed to gain favor with English officials and advance his commercial interests. In fact, Andrew Porter has suggested that many indigenous peoples, throughout all of the Christian mission experience, accepted Christian schooling while rejecting Christianity itself. Porter claims that they did this because they "found via English a flexible entrée to international commerce, which they were able to turn to their

¹⁸ Quaque to the SPG, 17 January 1778, in *Quaque Letters*. Thomas Thompson, in his *Account of Two Missionary Voyages*, suggests that the real "king" in that part of Africa not Cudjo Cabosheer, but his little brother, named Amrah Coffi. The Cabosheer was initially offered the kingship but he declined it.

¹⁹ There is much confusion about the relationship between Quaque and the Cabosheer. While some sources say that the Cabosheer was Quaque's father, it is most likely that Quaque was either a grandson or a distant relative. Margaret Priestly suggests that Quaque referred to Cudjo as "nana," meaning grandfather or chief. See Priestly, "Philip Quaque of Cape Coast," 106.

²⁰ *Thompson, An Account of Two Missionary Voyages*, 34.

advantage.”²¹ When Quaake pushed the Cabosheer on conversion, the latter could only slyly respond that he was “too old to enter into Covenant with God.” Quaake simply retorted that “if you willingly become so, by your good example, no doubt but that all your Subjects will in all probability become so too.”²² Cudjo Cabosheer never did take the bait and Quaake had to find other ways to preach to Africa’s black population. Like Thompson before him, Philip Quaake failed to convert the most important African leaders on the coast.



“Cape Coast Castle, Gold Coast, 1727.” A view of Cape Coast Castle based upon William Smith’s *A New Voyage to Guinea* (originally published in 1704 but reprinted throughout the eighteenth century) and found in Thomas Astley’s *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels* (London: s.n., 1745-47). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

²¹ Andrew Porter, “Church History, History of Christianity, Religious History: Some Reflections on British Missionary Enterprise Since the Late Eighteenth Century,” *Church History* 71 No. 2 (September 2002): 579.

²² Quaake to the SPG, 28 September 1766, *Quaake Letters*.

After being rebuffed by Cudjo and other leaders, Quaake sought to preach on his own. Although he was a “native African” he followed many of the missionary models he had learned during his training and that were already employed by Thomas Thompson years before. Both Thompson and Quaake acknowledged that Africans had some notion of a deity, for they did have a word for God: *Yangcúmpong*. One converted African even told Thompson that he believed he was “*Yangcúmpong’s* Man,” a true servant of God.²³ And yet, the tenacity of African religious practices made both missionaries doubtful of any future success. Quaake scoffed at traditional African funerary customs, arguing that they demonstrated the “Depravity and Obduracy” of the “Apish” Africans.²⁴ He marveled at what he perceived to be the idolatrous practices of Africans, constantly railing against the fetishism that he witnessed all around him: sacrifices to goddesses, congregating at sacred rocks, and sacrificing fish as a way to contain disease. Whether Quaake knew it or not, Cape Coast Africans were experiencing major social, demographic, and cultural changes. As Margaret Priestly has noted, the recent aggression of the Ashanti, coupled with migratory movements of Fanti peoples into the Cape Coast area, ensured that Fetu natives like Quaake’s family and others would begin to absorb some elements of Akan culture into their own local, indigenized traditions. What Quaake was witnessing was therefore not a static state of primordial religion, but rather a complex synthesis of various cultural elements from several African groups.²⁵ Quaake never made that distinction, and he constantly asserted that all indigenous religious customs, practices, and beliefs were childish and barbaric. In this way Quaake was little different from his white counterparts.

Indeed, Quaake’s letters constantly attacked what he perceived as the indecency of African religions. At a large Christian service in the fall of 1767, Quaake adopted Thompson’s tactic of

²³ Thompson, *An Account of Two Missionary Voyages*, 44.

²⁴ Quaake to the SPG, 17 January 1778, in *Quaake Letters*.

²⁵ Priestly, “Philip Quaake of Cape Coast”, 103.

attacking “their absurd Notions.” He reported to the SPG that, during his sermon, he “exposed and ridiculed greatly the folly of their Idolatrous and Superstitious Customs of adoring Fetishes.”

Quaque said the audience was impressed, but one of the local penyins later told him that Christianity was not for them because “they were but Black Men, and the only Means or Books afforded by Him to them is their Fetishes.”²⁶ In a rather brilliant rhetorical gesture, this penyin identified “books” as a kind of fetish, downplaying the relationship between literacy and religious salvation and tacitly implying that the Bible, too, was a kind of fetish. Whether Quaque caught onto this gibe or not, it nevertheless reflected many Africans’ resistance to Quaque’s Christian message. They had their own systems of thought and religion that satisfied their needs. Many saw no reason to change them.

But Quaque was not completely inflexible. His strategies in that 1767 service also demonstrate the ways that he tried to negotiate his way into the hearts and minds of the Africans on the coast. At previous services he noted that some of the local Africans would hear him patiently and attentively, only to bask in the pleasures of hard liquor immediately after he had finished speaking. While Quaque might have been flattered that they offered to drink “upon my Head” – meaning they would drink to his health – he was initially disturbed by such excessive use of liquor. At the same time, Quaque understood that the exchange of rum was central to the slave trading economy of the Cape Coast and that there was little he could do to root out drinking among the coastal population. Instead of pointing out the consumption of liquor as yet another one of their horrific sins, Quaque actually began using it as a temptation for Africans to come to his religious services. He admitted that he gave a group of Africans “a flask of Liquor, thinking that that might be the means of enticing them over to it, and told them that now they must not neglect my coming, whenever I officiate in Town.” While Quaque’s bribe might have been morally suspect, he believed he was cleverly exploiting existing social conventions of a community that was fundamentally rooted in exchange.

²⁶ Undated letter from Quaque to the SPG, probably written in the fall of 1767, in *Quaque Letters*. See footnote 13.

He supplemented his liquor bribe with the singing of the psalms, a standard missionary tactic designed to introduce indigenous communities to biblical knowledge. It apparently had a moving effect on the audience. Since coastal inhabitants were allegedly “fond of Music,” they “hearkened to [the psalms] with due Attention, and expressed a Great Veneration” towards them.²⁷ For all native missionaries throughout the Atlantic world, the psalms could serve as a gateway through which indigenous peoples might gain access to revealed religion. Psalms were therefore just as convenient to have on hand as any fiery sermon, bible, catechism, or (in Quaque’s case) a flask of rum.

Philip Quaque also recognized that evangelical efforts among Africans generated certain theological and ecclesiastical conundrums that challenged both white and indigenous evangelists. Thomas Thompson, Quaque’s predecessor, found this out when he tried to preach on a Sunday, when everyone was out fishing. After asking around, he learned that Cape Coast residents took Tuesday off instead of Sunday, leaving him with a theological (not to mention logistical) problem that he never really resolved.²⁸ When Philip Quaque went to baptize two small infants, he was unable to find suitable sponsors for the children. He wrote back to the SPG and wondered if West Africa’s visible lack of professing Anglicans would make it permissible for him to baptize them without sponsors, or even to have “heathen” parents step in as sponsors.²⁹ For white and native missionaries, shoehorning vital Christian rituals like the Sabbath and conversion into local, traditional religions was often a taxing process. Although some Africans undoubtedly found some aspects of Christianity appealing, missionaries still struggled to impose important ecclesiastical policies in native territory.

In spite of these challenges, Quaque went further than his white counterparts in trying to situation Africans into a larger sacred history of Christianity. He pursued this goal by frequently

²⁷ Undated letter from Quaque to the SPG, probably written in the fall of 1767, in *Quaque Letters*. See footnote 13.

²⁸ *Thompson, An Account of Two Missionary Voyages*, 36-37.

²⁹ Quaque to the SPG, 28 September 1766, in *Quaque Letters*.

comparing Africans to the Israelites, Egyptians, and even the English themselves.³⁰ In one letter to the SPG he reminded his benefactors that Africans were not entirely unlike the generations of English pagans who lived before themselves. “England formerly [was] much troubled with Idols and false Notions,” Quaque argued, “till at length the Son of God...came down from Heaven, and revealed his Ways to them.” God then “made some Pastors and Teachers, who [knew] much more of this Will and were to be sent One by One into different Parts, to instruct and bring over the Ignorant, that they also might know Him and his Will and so believe in Him, by the forsaking and throwing aside of their Fetishes and false Notions.”³¹ By comparing Africans with English, Quaque hoped to shift attention away from racial discourses of difference while simultaneously arguing that Africans had a vital place in future Christian history.

Not content with only comparing Africans with the pre-Christian English, Quaque also compared contemporary religious interactions with episodes found in scriptural history. In other words, Quaque believed that scenes from the Bible were literally playing out over and over again in the West African context. For example, Quaque cited one African tradition of a man’s brother inheriting his property and identity – including wife and family – when the man dies. This custom seemed to be “the established system thro’ out the whole African Country.” Quaque compared the practice to a similar question posed to Jesus by the Sadducees in the 22nd chapter of the book of Matthew.³² In doing so, Quaque was not only positioning himself as a spiritual descendent of Christ, but also describing Africans as latter-day Sadducees who could eventually be converted and

³⁰ Colin Kidd has recently argued that, in spite of some radical Enlightened thinkers to establish races as innately and irrevocably separate (including having separate origins) most early modern theologians continued to believe in the fundamental unity of the human race and the redeemability of the world’s indigenous peoples. See Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 79-120.

³¹ Undated letter from Quaque to the SPG, probably written in the fall of 1767, in *Quaque Letters*. See footnote 13.

³² Quaque had mistakenly argued that this was taken from the 22nd chapter from the Book of Mark. This might have been disturbing to his Anglican supporters, since Mark did not even have 22 chapters.

redeemed. By comparing Africa to Christianity's primitive origins, Quaque reminded his English backers that, despite the great obstacles there, Africa and Africans could be redeemed. In this way Quaque espoused a kind of benevolent evangelicalism that would avoid the essentializing tendencies of contemporary racial discourses while chalking religious differences up to culture. Africans, in other words, were not *inherently* savage, barbaric, or superstitious. Their culture had made them so. This is perhaps why Quaque established and taught in several schools by the end of his career, hoping to compel future native missionaries to carry on the work he had been doing for decades.³³ Quaque constantly sought to carve out a narrative space for Africans by consistently arguing that they were not natural barbarians, but rather Christians in the making. In this sense Quaque was articulating what historian James Sidbury has called an "affiliative" interpretation of African identity. He perceived Africans as divided, disparate, and at an early stage in human cultural development, but he nevertheless envisioned a day in which evangelical Christianity would bind them together and shape their collective destiny as a nation.³⁴ Quaque's visions for an African spiritual future were therefore much more inclusive and expansive than those of his white contemporaries.

How, then, should we understand Quaque's unique experiences as an African preaching to Africans? Scholars have recently invoked the models of "hybridity" and "syncretism" to conceptualize cultural interactions and translations between Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans during the early modern period. These models help explain how indigenous peoples could appropriate some aspects of Western European culture (especially religion, forms of trade, and military techniques) while simultaneously fusing them with their own traditions, cosmologies, and

³³ Ty Reese has adequately covered the nature and impact of Quaque's educational efforts. See Reese, "'Sheep in the Jaws of So Many Ravenous Wolves,'" 348-372. Interestingly, one of the schools that sprang up was run by a group of Englishmen known as the "Torridzonian Society," once again revealing the early modern English obsession with climates, bodies, and Aristotelian geography. Quaque was hired to teach in their school.

³⁴ Sidbury traces the distinction between "affiliative" (identity based upon a conscious affiliation) and "filiative" (identity based upon a shared family or kinship lineage) in Sidbury, *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

practices. On the surface, it would seem that native missionaries were hybrid creatures *par excellence*, human embodiments of the meeting of Western and indigenous cultures. Quaque certainly revealed some of this hybridity by choosing to marry a local African girl after his English wife died.³⁵ He even acted as “interim chief” for a group of Africans during an itinerant preaching tour at Dixcove Fort to the north.³⁶ And yet, even though Philip Quaque still considered himself an African, his identity was first and foremost as a Christian.³⁷

Quaque’s identity as a Christian trumped his identity as an African, and he actively distanced himself from other non-Christian Africans in order to preserve his identity as a pious Christian.³⁸ In doing so, he railed against the inherently “avaricious disposition of the Blacks” and was personally pained by the fact that even his relatives took his advice only when it came to worldly – not spiritual – matters.³⁹ Probably expecting a significant amount of deference from his potential African neophytes, Quaque was irate that they “foolishly” regarded him “in no other Light than as one of themselves.”⁴⁰ Although Quaque’s skin color identified him as an African, his training had firmly established him as highly educated member of the English clerical class. When he was training in England he probably had a regimen fairly similar to the training of other SPG missionaries, which

³⁵ However, Quaque actually reported in his letters that he did this to squash any controversies resulting from romantic jealousies. Marrying an African girl could both solidify ties with the local population and essentially take him off the market of bachelors on the coast.

³⁶ Quaque to Edward Bass of Newburyport, 31 July 1775, *Quaque Letters*.

³⁷ Literary scholar and postcolonial theorist Edward Said explained that, when European commentators encountered and wrote about new and exotic peoples, they were not just objectively describing what they saw, but actually creating their own oppositional identities based upon their perception of what constituted “otherness.” Europeans who wrote about other peoples, Said argued, were implicitly writing about, and defining, themselves. Through his own writings to the SPG and his correspondents in the American colonies, Philip Quaque engaged in the very same narrative project as European colonizers. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

³⁸ As noted earlier, there is an excellent discussion of Quaque’s identity in Littlefield, “Almost an Englishman,” 70-94.

³⁹ Quaque to the SPG, 13 October 1811, *Quaque Letters*.

⁴⁰ Quaque to the SPG, 12 June 1780, *Quaque Letters*.

demanded that he demonstrate a superior knowledge of “Greek, Latin, Scriptural and Church history, the Bible, the Prayer Book, the Creeds, and the Thirty-nine Articles.” He might have even dabbled in a bit of Hebrew.⁴¹ In spite of this academic pedigree, Africans as well as English traders and governors still perceived Quaque as an African. They paid him scant attention, much less respect. Caught between the English who rebuked him and the Africans who ignored him, Quaque could only write, near the end of his life, that “a Prophet has not honor in his own Country.”⁴² In assailing African customs while simultaneously offering their practitioners a central place in future Christian history, Quaque staked out a spiritual middle ground that was situated uncomfortably between African and English worlds.⁴³ As Quaque found out, it was lonely in the middle.

Religion Versus Empire?

In a recent book published for the Oxford History of the British Empire, Norman Etherington argued that “the greatest difficulty faced by those who have tried to argue that Christian missions were a form of cultural imperialism has been the *overwhelming evidence* that the agents of conversion were local people, not foreign missionaries. None of them were coerced into believing and very few were paid.”⁴⁴ Etherington went on to discuss examples from nineteenth century India and South Africa, but we have seen that he might have also applied this model to Protestant missions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indigenous actors were central to missionary work throughout every Protestant mission, and the case for eighteenth century Africa was certainly no

⁴¹ Alfred W. Newcombe, “The Appointment and Instruction of S.P.G. Missionaries,” *Church History* 5 No. 4 (December 1936): 347.

⁴² Quaque to the SPG, 13 October 1811, *Quaque Letters*.

⁴³ See Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) for more on the concept of a “middle ground” in American history.

⁴⁴ Norman Etherington, ed., *Missions and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7. The italics are mine.

different. Given the centrality of native agents to Protestant missionary work, the relationship between missions and empire needs to be reexamined.

Nevertheless, historians have often ignored the experiences, attitudes, and impact of indigenous actors, at all levels, in the history of missions. I have suggested that examining native preachers offers new ways to understand missionary interaction as well as the relationship between missions and empire. Indeed, one might expect that Philip Quaque's English experiences would produce a clear support for the British crown. But exactly what that meant to Quaque is not as clear. In *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, historian David Armitage argues that, from about the 1730s on, the British began a self-conscious process of fashioning a global imperial identity. Britons, Armitage claims, took great satisfaction in the fact that their empire was not an empire of conquest or force. Instead, it was an empire of liberty, and Armitage suggests that the British proudly characterized their growing empire as "Protestant, commercial, maritime, and free."⁴⁵ According to Britain's empire builders, these four characteristics – Protestantism, commercialism, maritime strength, and freedom – made the British empire the most distinctive and exceptional in human history. Indeed, historians of American foreign relations, led by figures like Walter LaFeber, have demonstrated that "empire" could be defined broadly, including not only territorial control but also much more subtle economic, cultural, and social influences.⁴⁶ Armitage's four characteristics

⁴⁵ David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8. See also Eliga H. Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 1-34. Linda Colley emphasizes Protestantism as the central component of the formation of British imperial identity. See Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). For the best study of Thomas Jefferson's "empire of liberty," see Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

⁴⁶ See Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press); Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999). For more on how Austrians appropriated American culture after World War Two, read Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonisation and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria After the Second World War*, trans. Diana M. Wolf (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

can thus serve as a framework to help conceptualize Quaake's relationship with the British empire, especially his relationship with missionary societies, slave traders, and military and political officials. This African missionary was certainly no "shock troop" for colonial invasion, but rather a complex human being who had an ambiguous, and sometimes exasperatingly complex, perspective on the connections between missionary evangelism and empire-building.⁴⁷

There is no doubt that Quaake was a Protestant imperialist. We have already witnessed the various ways in which he disparaged local indigenous beliefs and practices and sang the praises of English Protestantism. But the relationship between Quaake and the home institution that backed him (the SPG) was also a tremendously feeble one. In fact, presuming that missionaries were imperialists is to also assume that the relationships between these missionaries, the organizations that funded them, and the nation-state were clear and symbiotic. This was certainly not the case in seventeenth century Puritan New England, eighteenth century New York, or the Moravian Caribbean missions. Not surprisingly, it was also not the case with Quaake's mission in West Africa. The SPG was, after all, an independent entity. Parliament had approved its charter but had no official means of directing the institution, which relied mainly upon the benevolence of private fundraising. Neither did the SPG have an established line of communication with the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade, the group which oversaw most imperial matters. Although members of the Privy Council were aware of some of the SPG's activities, they never received an official report from that organization until they asked for one in 1788. By that time the SPG had already sent out over 300 missionaries since its inception in 1701.

The relationship between the SPG and Quaake was also erratic, unstable, and, at times, acrimonious. In spite of the time, effort, and money the SPG poured into Quaake's education and training in England, his supporters rarely corresponded with him. Quaake complained bitterly about

⁴⁷ Silverman, "Indians, Missionaries, and Religious Translation": 144.

this fact and noted that he has “not embraced that Kindness, nay, not so much as a Line from my Worthy Benefactors since my Residence on the Coast.” He even went so far as to imply that the SPG’s silence was a reflection of either Quaake’s African origin or the second-class status that an African mission had compared to the missions in the Americas. He protested that “Many Brethren in America I suppose often enjoy that secret Consolation, which doubtless must refresh them greatly, and prompt them on with more rigour, whereas I that is situated in a Bypath of Misprision, must of Consequence want that Assistance more than most Missionaries.”⁴⁸ Missionaries from all over the Atlantic world would often return thanks for letters from their home institutions, indicating how heartening it was to have a piece of news and a little encouragement from the metropole. Quaake would eventually receive more letters from the SPG, but the relationship between himself and his benefactors soured anyways. He still complained of their infrequent correspondence, blamed the SPG for placing him in the “lamentable Situation I now enjoy,” asked for raises that were not granted, and even had a request for his children to be educated by them rejected.⁴⁹ He might have also found out that, while the SPG paid his predecessor Thomas Thompson 70 pounds per year, Quaake only received 50 pounds from the SPG for his work.

The SPG was not entirely satisfied with Quaake either, and relations between the organization and its missionary got progressively worse from the moment of Quaake’s arrival in 1766. By the end of the 1780s, the SPG even accused him of “paying more attention to purposes of trade than of Religion,” a rash accusation that had little evidentiary basis.⁵⁰ There were two main reasons for the tension between Quaake and the SPG. The first was that, upon his arrival at the Cape Coast, it was apparent that Quaake did not retain any fluency in his native African tongue. This is

⁴⁸ Quaake to the SPG, 8 March 1772, in *Quaake Letters*.

⁴⁹ Quaake to the SPG, 15 April 1769, in *Quaake Letters*.

⁵⁰ Dr. Morice to the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade, February 1788, in *Quaake Letters*.

not surprising. The most formative years of his life were spent in English schools, learning English culture and language, with only one or two classmates at the time. The SPG was thus disappointed that, in some ways, their African missionary became *too* English during his acculturation in London. But there were practical concerns as well. The language barrier not only hampered basic communication but also hindered the dissemination of gospel truths. If Quaake could not speak the language, the SPG had forfeited the major benefit of investing so much money to train him in the first place. He, in effect, became like Thomas Thompson before him, who complained constantly about “the strange kind of Jargon” that he found among the various residents of West Africa.⁵¹ Thompson relied on an interpreter, a local African Frederick Aday, because the language barrier was, in Thompson’s words, “a Disadvantage, not to be compounded at any Rate.”⁵² Aday probably sensed opportunity when Quaake arrived, for he not only served as Quaake’s interpreter, he also aggressively set out to procure a consistent salary for his translational services, suggesting that he would “not spend his Breath any more in vain” if he did not get some sort of monetary compensation for his skills.⁵³ One time he even forced Quaake to cut a sermon short because he was tired. All of these incidents and reports placed the SPG in a fairly powerless position, and they did not mince words when they tersely urged Quaake “to endeavor to recover his own language.”⁵⁴

The SPG was also concerned about Philip Quaake leaving his mission post to journey to other regions of the African coast as an itinerant preacher. This was a dangerous proposition for Quaake, for even though the SPG was a missionary organization, most of the organization’s

⁵¹ Thompson, *An Account of Two Missionary Voyages*, 71.

⁵² Thompson, *An Account of Two Missionary Voyages*, 69.

⁵³ Quaake to the SPG, 15 April 1769, *Quaake Letters*.

⁵⁴ SPG Records, SPG Journal, Volume 18, 267. Mark Thompson has suggested to me that Quaake’s loss of language might have been a self-conscious way to fashion a new, English Christian identity. Although it made him less valuable as a missionary, he might have intentionally lost his language to make him more English than African.

“missionaries” were, by the 1770s, operating within well-established parishes in the American colonies. The church-based community was a central component of any Anglican endeavor, and simply wandering around the African coast would not please donors back in England.⁵⁵ He asked the SPG for permission to go up to Senegal in the spring of 1772, arguing that “I freely and gladly would embrace the Opportunity of being more Serviceable at Senegal to my fellow Creatures there, than I do here amongst my own Kindred.”⁵⁶ Quaake was trying to escape from the very place where he grew up, but when he was denied a chaplainship at Senegal, he had to give up. For four months in the winter of 1772/1773 Quaake was in Accra. He also spent eight months at Dixcove Fort from 1774 to 1775. He would later return briefly to a few of these places, but the evidence suggests that the SPG was uneasy about Quaake’s wanderings. Dixcove, for example, had a sizeable Dutch population, and it offered Quaake a chance to compare Dutch evangelical tactics with those of the Cape Coast. He concluded that the Dutch method of teaching native children, exposing them to Christian doctrine, attending hours of devotion, and other practices were “worthy of Imitation.”⁵⁷ Conversely, the Dutch were apparently impressed with Quaake, for they attended his services when he journeyed up there. A Dutch governor even sent him a letter of thanks with a small gratuity for his preaching.⁵⁸ When Quaake proudly reported this international/interdenominational exchange, the SPG simply recommended “that Mr. Quaake be directed for the future not to absent himself for so

⁵⁵ This very issue, in fact, led to a heated debate in the presses over the role and conduct of the SPG. Many American ministers believed that the preponderance of parishes in American towns and cities belied the fact that the SPG was trying to establish an Anglican bishop in the Americas. They protested that the SPG should be more focused on converting Native Americans and black slaves than in trying to establish Anglican authority in settlements where Christian religion had already flourished.

⁵⁶ Quaake to the SPG, 10 April 1772, in *Quaake Letters*.

⁵⁷ Quaake to the SPG, 17 March 1773, in *Quaake Letters*.

⁵⁸ Quaake to the SPG, 11 September 1779, *Quaake Letters*.

long from the Cape Coast without the Leave of the Society.”⁵⁹ Although the SPG tried to find a better position for him, Quaake would be stationed there until his death in 1816. In spite of the SPG’s warnings, he spent many of those years traversing the African coast anyways. The SPG expected Quaake to be a stationary, obedient, African-speaking preacher. He was none of those things. These mutual frustrations expose a systemic problem with the interpretation that Protestant missionaries were the foot soldiers for colonial invasion: religion and empire certainly could not be symbiotic if the agents within those relationships were constantly bickering.



“Dix Cove Fort, Gold Coast, 1727.” This image of Dixcove Fort, taken from William Smith’s *Thirty Different Drafts of Guinea* (London: s.n., 1727?) shows the south side of Dixcove Fort, where Philip Quaake spent several months as an itinerant preacher among the English, Dutch, and African people there. Image courtesy of the Mariners’ Museum, Newport News, Virginia. I would like to thank Claudia Jew of the Mariners’ Museum for helping me procure this image.

If Quaake was frustrated with the organization that nominally supported him, he became scornful towards the commercial dimensions of the British empire. The foundation of Britain’s commercial power in Africa was, of course, the transatlantic slave trade, and here is where Quaake

⁵⁹ SPG Records, SPG Journal, Volume 21, 31. The tension between itinerancy and parish-based preaching was palpable in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See Timothy D. Hall, *Contested Boundaries: Itinerancy and the Reshaping of the Colonial American Religious World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

was at his most anti-imperialistic.⁶⁰ One of the ironies of Quaque's position is that the African Committee – a group of slave-trading merchants with major political sway at Whitehall – actually paid half of his salary to serve as chaplain to their garrison. Quaque, an African by birth, was being paid by African slave traders to act as their collective spiritual compass. Another paradox was that Cudjo Cabosheer, Quaque's powerful uncle who sent him to England in the first place, was directly involved in the slave trade. Travis Glasson has recently found that Quaque's wife was a slave, and Quaque also purchased another old female slave in 1785, benefited from the labors of a "Chapel servant" living at Cape Coast Castle, and engaged in more than a few administrative duties that kept the wheels of the Gold Coast slave trade moving.⁶¹ Thus, when Quaque took on the slave trade, he was biting both the Anglican and African hands that fed him his entire life. Yet his letters contain compelling stories of slave uprisings, brutal attacks on native peoples, and beleaguered slave forts under siege. Interestingly, only a few times did Quaque argue against slavery on the basis of his own racial identification as an African. He understood that merchants would ignore his pleas because of his distinctive identity. Some prominent merchants even refused to attend divine services with him because they, according to Quaque, "would never come to Cape Coast to be Subservient to, and to sit under the Nose of a Black Boy to hear Him pointing or laying out their faults before them."⁶² Instead, Quaque began to attack slavery as wholly inconsistent with Christian principles, hoping to insulate his arguments – and himself – from race-based rebuttals.

⁶⁰ The most nuanced analysis of Quaque's anti-slavery position can be found in Glasson, "Missionaries, Methodists, and a Ghost": 41-50.

⁶¹ Glasson, "Missionaries, Methodists, and a Ghost": 43-46; and St. Clair, *The Door of No Return*, 219.

⁶² Undated letter from Quaque to the SPG, probably dated from October 20th, 1767 to the end of that year, in *Quaque Letters*. It is likely that Quaque's own kin, if not his immediate family, were directly or indirectly involved in the slave trade, though Quaque never mentioned this in his letters. For a compelling narrative of the experiences of two slave-trading African princes, see Randy J. Sparks, *The Two Princes of Calabar: An Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

Quaque envisioned a Christian empire where race would not matter, and he despised the “upstarts” who objected to his own preaching because of some “Distinction of Colours and Place of Nativity.” He clearly understood that his unique position as an African could obviously hamper and obfuscate his anti-slavery position. Instead, he extolled the values and unity of what he called “the Christian Race” and attacked the slave trade from the outside, arguing that it impeded the propagation of revealed religion and kept Africa in perpetual darkness.⁶³ He complained that the “cursed slave trade” was the only thing stopping a successful mission and regretted that “the stir of religion and its everlasting recompense is not so much in vogue as the vicious practice of purchasing flesh and blood like oxens in market places.”⁶⁴ By using Christian theology as a basis for anti-slavery, Quaque was hoping to distance his arguments from his own personal identity while simultaneously formulating anti-slavery rhetoric that was being used at the same time in England. Quaque thus passionately asserted that the expansion of the kingdom of God was being hindered by a desire for material wealth at the expense of countless African souls.

The African missionary further attacked the merchants by employing a rhetorical strategy that would be used by later abolitionists like Olaudah Equiano and Harriet Beecher Stowe: he contended that even the most pious of Christians could be transformed into savage beasts when they participated in the slave trade. He reported to the SPG that English slave traders forfeited their rights to even call themselves Christians because, “by their Behaviour they seem as if they have changed the good Seeds sown, by the stain which they now shamefully cast upon the Profession wherewith

⁶³ Quaque to the SPG, 6 February 1771, in *Quaque Letters*. The very concept of a “Christian Race” – rather than biological races – was central to early modern theological discourses on ethnological differences between people. See Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 54-78. Also, William Shenstone wrote an anti-slavery poem that used the same language (“What fate reserv’d me for this Christian race? O race more polish’d, more severe than they!”). See Granville Sharp, *An essay on slavery, proving from Scripture its inconsistency with humanity and religion; in answer to a late publication, entitled, “The African trade for Negro slaves shewn to be consistent with principles of humanity, and with the laws of revealed religion.”* (Burlington, N.J., 1773), 27.

⁶⁴ Quaque to Samuel Johnson, 5 April 1769, in Herbert and Carol Schneider, eds., *Samuel Johnson, President of King’s College: His Career and Writings* Vol. I (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), 429; Quaque to Samuel Johnson, dated November 26, 1767, in Schneider, eds., *Samuel Johnson, President of King’s College*, 425.

they were called; by Corruptions of Morals and the Inhuman Practice and the love of Mammon which they hold in great Esteem.”⁶⁵ As noted earlier, part of the problem was that Africa was often characterized as a zone of irreligion. Conventional moral and religious standards and behaviors that would be customary in England were much shakier on African ground, and once civilized Englishmen came to Africa, the threat of their degenerating into immoral and barbarous slave traders was heightened. Only two years after Quaque’s arrival he made this connection, reporting that “It is astonishing for a refined Mind to reflect upon some inhuman Actions which are done in the wildest or the most savagest Part of Africa.”⁶⁶ He was referring not only to what he perceived as savage local customs but also to the practice of slave kidnapping and trading. Quaque also noted that merchants and government agents often refused to come to holy services because they could not, in good conscience, do so on one day and then trade slaves the next. This became their usual excuse for not attending holy services. Like most missionaries before and after him, Quaque understood that the example of the English who lived nearest to indigenous peoples would be a major factor in the development of Christian missions. Yet, if they refused to attend divine service, there was little chance that Quaque could transform the religious sensibilities of the Africans he was trying to evangelize.

Quaque’s renunciation of the merchants and the slave trade they promulgated placed him at one end of an ideological divide within the eighteenth century British Atlantic. From the 1760s on, British intellectuals became ever more concerned about the morality of the slave trade and its standing as a national sin. The leaders of this movement were usually Methodists and black Atlantic writers – such as Olaudah Equiano – who had close connections with other evangelical characters throughout the Atlantic world. Indeed, one scholar has recently argued that Quaque’s London

⁶⁵ Undated letter from Quaque to the SPG, in *Quaque Letters*. See footnote 13.

⁶⁶ Quaque to the SPG, 5 September 1768, *Quaque Letters*.

education placed him at the center of Methodist evangelical activity, and as such his anti-slavery stance was informed just as much by transatlantic Methodist evangelism as it was by his own identity as an African.⁶⁷ But historians should be cautious of painting Anglicans universally as defenders of the slave trade and Methodists as its attackers. Some of the most staunch and conservative Anglicans certainly defended the slave trade, and their ownership of slaves in plantations and towns around the Atlantic world gave them a reason. At the same time, there were also Anglicans who were virulently anti-slavery *and* anti-Methodist. William Warburton, for example, was renowned for defending the Anglican Church against Methodism, but he was also decidedly opposed to the transatlantic slave trade. On the very same month that Quaque first arrived home to Africa, Warburton took the opportunity of an anniversary sermon to proclaim that it was deplorable to speak of Africans as property. In fact, Warburton argued, Africans were “endowed with all our Faculties, possessing all our qualities but that of colour.” Treating “our BRETHREN” with such unChristian brutality, Warburton implored, “shocks all the feelings of humanity, and the dictates of common sense.” The Anglican then concluded that, since Africans were fundamentally equal to their English brothers, “nothing is more certain in itself, and apparent to all, than that the infamous traffic for Slaves, directly infringes both divine and human law. *Nature* created Man, free: and Grace invites him to assert this freedom.”⁶⁸ Quaque’s anti-slavery stance might have certainly been influenced by Methodist evangelism, but it should be remembered that Methodists were not alone in beginning to critique the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade, for there were a handful of Anglicans who were beginning to do the very same thing.

⁶⁷ Glasson, “Missionaries, Methodists, and a Ghost.”

⁶⁸ William Warburton, *A Sermon Preached before the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts; At Their Anniversary Meeting in the Parish-Church of St. Mary-Le-Bow, on Friday February 21, 1766* (London: E. Owen, 1766), 25-26. Warburton’s attack on Methodism can be found in Warburton, *The Doctrine of Grace: Or, the Office and Operations of the Holy Spirit Vindicated From the Insults of Infidelity, and the Abuses of Fanaticism: ...in Three Books* (London: A. Millar, and J. and R. Tonson, 1763). Not surprisingly, Warburton’s attacks resulted in even more vitriolic responses from Methodist leaders that devastated Warburton’s popularity.

Ironically, the very man who started Quaque's career as an African missionary would position himself at the opposite end of the spectrum as a fierce defender of the transatlantic slave trade. In 1772 – the same year of Britain's famous *Somerset* case – former New Jersey and African missionary Thomas Thompson published a tract entitled *The African Trade for Negro Slaves, Shewn to be Consistent With Principles of Humanity, and With the Laws of Revealed Religion*.⁶⁹ A former slaveowner himself, Thompson relied on scripture, property rights, and a tired characterization of Africans as pagans to conclude that slave trading was “not contrary to the law of nature” and was “as vindicable as any species of trade whatever.”⁷⁰ While Thompson suggested that his motives were intellectual only, he dedicated the tract to none other than the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa, the joint stock company in charge of protecting and maintaining the African slave trade. Thompson thus provided a religious *defense* of the transatlantic slave trade, a trade which knit the British empire together, served as the commercial backbone of imperial power, and infuriated his African protégé.

Thompson's publication had a long-term consequence. It influenced one philanthropist to respond just a year later with *An Essay on Slavery*, which aggressively attacked the institution and declared that it was completely inconsistent with Christian principles. The author's name was Granville Sharp, and though Sharp had been fighting slavery in Britain for years – he had been quite active in the *Somerset* case that year – Thompson's pamphlet compelled him to publish one of his first attacks on the slave trade. In it, he described Thompson's conclusions as “totally false” and

⁶⁹ The case of James Somerset was a landmark case where a slave sued for his freedom in an English court. Although he won, and although the case was widely interpreted as declaring slavery illegal in England, the decision was actually not as sweeping as many contemporaries believed. For more on the case and its importance in transatlantic abolitionism, see Steven M. Wise, *Though the Heavens May Fall: The Landmark Trial That Led to the End of Human Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2005); and David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 469-522.

⁷⁰ Thomas Thompson, *The African Trade for Negro Slaves, Shewn to be Consistent With Principles of Humanity, and With the Laws of Revealed Religion* (Canterbury: Simmons and Kirkby, 1772), 15 and 12. Thompson probably had at least one slave, including Phoebe, a “wench” whom he baptized during his tenure in New Jersey. See Hodges, *Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North*, 70.

replete with poor argumentation.⁷¹ Instead, Sharp envisioned an empire that looked strikingly similar to the one that Quaque had proposed: an empire of universal Christian benevolence where religion, rather than race, was the true marker of humanity. Sharp asserted that “the glorious system of the gospel destroys all *narrow, national partiality*; and makes *us citizens of the world*, by obliging us to profess *universal benevolence*: but more especially are we bound, as Christians, to commiserate and assist to the utmost of our power all persons in *distress, or captivity*.”⁷² For both Quaque and Sharp, Christianity had less to do with one’s identity as an Englishman or African and more to do with one’s identity as a Christian brother in an expansive, global community of benevolent believers. Slavery was therefore inherently contrary to the very Christian principles upon which the British empire prided itself.⁷³

Although Quaque never published any anti-slavery tract, and although his mentor seems to have had the more audible voice in the struggle over Christianity and slavery, Quaque still influenced the anti-slavery debate to a significant degree. Alexander Falconbridge, who wrote a scathing critique of the transatlantic slave trade, actually spoke with Quaque when he was at the Cape Coast, and he incorporated the information that Quaque relayed into his published and private denunciations of the trade. A British Naval Officer called to testify about the horrors of slavery in the early 1790s also reported that he learned about the disruption that the trade caused from Philip Quaque personally.⁷⁴ While Quaque has never been as celebrated as the more popular Olaudah Equiano or Ottobah Cugoana, his impact on the slavery debate (though indirect) was certainly significant. In the

⁷¹ Sharp, *An Essay on Slavery*, 19.

⁷² Sharp, *An Essay on Slavery*, 22-23.

⁷³ Sharp would eventually become the leading figure in the British abolitionist movement, a movement that would culminate in the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. For more on the end of the British transatlantic slave trade, see Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

⁷⁴ Glasson, “Missionaries, Methodists, and a Ghost”: 48-49.

end, Quaque's assault on the transatlantic slave trade conveniently addresses Armitage's fourth characteristic of the British empire: Quaque would have argued that the British empire could never be "free" if it was an empire of slaves.

Philip Quaque thus embraced the theory of a Protestant empire but despised the commercial aspect of Britain's imperial growth. Yet his stance on a maritime empire in Africa was the most ambivalent aspect of his ideology. An eighteenth century maritime empire, of course, included the commercial strength and vast wealth that maritime commercialism accrued. It would have also included the naval resources, personnel, as well as a series of forts to function as the empire's skeletal system and protect imperial interests abroad. Quaque firmly believed that British military resources could and should be used to spread the gospel, not necessarily to bombard natives into submission, but to stop rival religions from competing with the British for the hearts and minds of Africans. The British Navy, in particular, could be tremendously helpful in both maintaining order and reminding English merchants and traders that even though they were in Africa they were still Christians. The presence of the British military, in other words, might help transform this African space into a sacred one. Quaque said so himself when he noted that he preached to virtually no one in 1770 until "the Time when His Majesty's Ship *Phoenix* and the *Hound* Sloop of War lay in Cape Coast Castle Road, which afforded Me an Opportunity on Sunday before Easter of Expatiating the little Talent I have by reading of Prayers."⁷⁵ Quaque actually welcomed a military empire, and he explained to the SPG how "far more Advantageous it would be could this Settlement be more immediately under His Majesty's Protection." As if he was not definitive enough, Quaque clarified by stating, "I mean a Military Establishment."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Quaque to the SPG, 12 April 1770, in *Quaque Letters*.

⁷⁶ Quaque to the SPG, 5 September 1769, in *Quaque Letters*.

At the same time, Quaake also recognized that the business of running a military empire could impede the progress of the gospel in West Africa. In the spring of 1777 a ship dubbed the *Weazle* docked, unloaded all the supplies necessary for the defense of the fort, distributed arrears to different servants, and put the region in such a state of commotion that the “hurry and confusion of Business together, have at present conspired to obliterate the thoughts of that incumbent Duty and Service in Public.”⁷⁷ When an African rebellion broke out over a decade later, Quaake refused to defend the slave fort at Annamaboe. He simply explained that bearing arms against other Africans would be “highly inconsistent and injurious to my Profession.”⁷⁸ He was booted out of Cape Coast Castle for expressing such convictions. If a military establishment could help Christianity gain a footing in Africa, it could just as easily distract Englishmen from their daily spiritual obligations and generate tensions with native Africans. Quaake was therefore torn between the evangelical advantages of having a military establishment in Africa and the spiritual costs associated with maintaining it.

For Quaake, the major problem with the British empire was that, in spite of its nominal identification as a Protestant kingdom, several governors in charge of Cape Coast Castle could not have cared less about religion. It was for this reason that Quaake had a tense relationship with the governors and garrison of the castle where he was stationed. He complained of the soldiers’ taking too many wives, their lack of public worship, and their participation in the slave trade. Quaake assumed that, if the governors of the Castle were more religiously devoted, the Anglicans could make real and meaningful changes in the African spiritual landscape. Instead, he charged that most of the governors were only concerned with “love of gain and Ambition,” rather than the souls of black

⁷⁷ Quaake to the SPG, 11 April 1777, in *Quaake Letters*.

⁷⁸ Quaake to the SPG, 21 July 1792, in *Quaake Letters*.

folk.⁷⁹ He was also personally insulted that the governors rarely invited him to dinner. He recalled that he experienced “very disrespectful treatment from the Officers of the Fort” and became increasingly concerned when he discovered that one of the governors was a “very rank Presbyterian born and bred.”⁸⁰ One governor kicked Quaake out of the castle when they required more space for other soldiers. Quaake accused another of making “a ridicule of religion, and a future state, as a trick and cheat, and that he never knew any one to chuse to go to heaven when he could live upon earth.”⁸¹ Quaake developed a vicious rivalry with another of the governors, who allegedly claimed that “Clergymen have no Business in these Parts, unless come to be starved.” Quaake retaliated by telling his superiors that “The present Governor would have no more to do with Prayers, while he can purchase Slaves at a cheap rate, unless upon Extraordinary days to shew Me off.”⁸² When this governor died from a horrible disease in 1770, Quaake admitted to his benefactors that “since now my Enemy is taken out of my way, I am therefore in great hopes of seeing better Days.”⁸³ There was no love lost between Quaake and the imperial governors who, according to the African missionary, put the slave trade before the truths of revealed religion.

To return to David Armitage’s concept of the British empire as “Protestant, commercial, maritime, and free,” it is clear that Quaake wanted the empire to be more Protestant than it really was, less commercial than it had been (especially with respect to the slave trade), more militarily aggressive if it resulted in better conditions under which to spread the gospel, and, of course, free – which meant no slaves. The problem was that Quaake was living on the west coast of Africa in the

⁷⁹ Quaake to the SPG, 19 August 1771, in *Quaake Letters*.

⁸⁰ SPG Records, SPG Journal, Volume 18, 266. Quaake to the SPG, 28 September 1766, in *Quaake Letters*.

⁸¹ SPG Records, SPG Journal, Volume 18, 337.

⁸² Undated letter from Quaake to the SPG, probably written in the fall of 1767, in *Quaake Letters*. See footnote 13.

⁸³ Quaake to the SPG, 27 September 1770, in *Quaake Letters*.

eighteenth century, when the British empire was, in Quaake's view, decadent, corrupt, and certainly not living up to its duty to propagate the gospel in foreign parts. Quaake was thus neither a champion of traditional indigenous rights nor a jingoistic follower of the British empire. Instead, he was a Christian African struggling with his own distinctive identity while simultaneously formulating, through his letters, a conception of empire founded upon an expansive and universal Christian brotherhood. Unfortunately for him, the British empire was not that empire.

Inside the courtyard of the notorious Cape Coast Castle is a small cemetery reserved for important English officials who governed at the Cape Coast. Placed next to tablets commemorating the legacy of English governors, military officials, and brokers, there is a tablet reserved for Philip Quaake which reads: "Philip Quarco, 1741-1816."⁸⁴ While Christian Africans have honored his memory as a testimony to the determination of Christian missionary work, his real legacy was much more ambiguous. Philip Quaake's story, unearthed by the dozens of letters he left behind, highlights the liminal space in which native missionaries operated, a space filled with complexity, ambiguity, and tension. As an African evangelizing other Africans, Quaake was a walking paradox: a literate, English speaking, well educated African preaching in a place where the very denial of African ability helped justify the slave trade that surrounded him.

Christian missions often became an exercise in futility, and for native missionaries like Quaake this was no different. Yet his relationship with Africans and his ideological conceptualization of the British empire expose the contradictions and uncertainties that characterized the use of native missionaries. In Quaake's view, the kingdom of God did not acknowledge the geopolitical or military boundaries drawn up by secular empires. Instead, the kingdom that indigenous missionaries envisioned was an inclusive one, an expansive one; an empire that cared not

⁸⁴ There is also a tablet that says "Rev Philip Quaake died 17 Oct 1816," at Christ Church Cathedral on the Cape Coast.

for material or national gain, but for the souls of indigenous peoples throughout the world. These high expectations, coupled with the minimal results, left many native evangelists disillusioned. As British historian Andrew Porter said for the nineteenth century, missionaries' "engagement with empire more often than not took the form of bitter experience," leaving their "relationship with empire as deeply ambiguous at best."⁸⁵ Examining native missionaries like Philip Quaque restores that ambiguity and demonstrates that the relationships between missionaries and their potential neophytes, and between religion and empire, were much more fragile and tenuous than we have previously acknowledged.

⁸⁵ Porter, *Religion Versus Empire?*, 12-13.