

A Letter of Thomas Coke



Thomas Coke (1747-1814) was ordained a priest in the Church of England in 1772, and later became John Wesley's right-hand man. It was Coke, along with Rev. James Creighton, who assisted John Wesley in ordaining preachers for America in 1784. Coke then traveled here to present Wesley's plan for the Methodists in the United States, leading to the founding of the Methodist Episcopal Church at the 1784 Christmas Conference in Baltimore. Coke became one of the first two bishops of the

American church, along with Francis Asbury. Though he made eight more visits to America, Coke never exercised the same level of episcopal authority as Asbury, and after 1805 remained in England, where he took a leading role in British Methodism, especially in promoting foreign missionary work.

This previously unpublished letter of Bishop Coke is addressed to early American itinerant William Watters (1751-1827), and is part of the Thomas E. Bond Collection at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Liverpool

Feb. 25, 1802

My Dear Brother,

The great Revival on the Continent rejoices me exceedingly – yea, more, I can truly say, than a revival in any other Country in the world. I have read to thousands, and shall read, God willing, to tens of thousands, the Accounts I have already received of the Progress of the work in Maryland, Delaware and Tennessee. I am glad to find that my two old venerable colleagues are able, by traveling separately, to preside at all the annual conferences. I frequently travel with them in Spirit, and never forget them and my other American Brethren any night whatever, while I am bowing my knees before the Throne. I am yours to command, and consider my solemn offer of myself to you at the General Conference before the last, to be as binding on me now, as when first made; and nothing shall keep me from a final residence with you, when I, God willing, meet you at your next General Conference, but such an interference of Divine Providence as does not at present exist, and such as shall convince the General Conference, that I ought to tear myself from you. Nothing less, I do assure you, shall prevail with me to leave you.

The work of God still goes on in a very blessed manner in Ireland. I lately returned from taking a tour of that country. There is nothing at present very remarkable in the work in Britain; but I am in hopes that I shall stir up my British Brethren to jealousy, by first reading

to them, and then printing, the delightful and animating Accounts I have received from several of my American Brethren. I am glad that Brother Cooper has published the Irish account. I intend soon to draw up and print another Account of the further Progress of the Work in Ireland.

I bless the Lord, I am happy, constantly happy in God: and I feel myself more than ever drawn towards my American brethren by the cords of love. Let me hear from you by some merchant-ship, directing to me at the New Chapel, City Road, London; whence all letters are safely sent to me, if I be not there.

I am glad to find by Brother Asbury, that you universally press upon your believing hearers the majesty of sanctification and entire devotedness to God; and that you guard them from seeking this as it were by the Deeds of the Law, and that you urge them to believe now on a present Saviour the absolute necessity of the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins – the Witness of the Spirit – the bright evidence of our interest in the Saviour's Blood. Lukewarm endeavors are not sufficient now to pull down the fortress of infidelity. They must be attacked by all the power of God; and, as his humble instruments, we must get at the hearts of the hearers. Blessed be the Lord, the wretched formalists are disappearing like the dew of the morning; and we can fight infidelity without a screen betwixt. Let us then, dear brethren, aim at being cities set upon a hill, at being the lights of the world, at being the salt of the earth; and poor earthen vessels as we are, weak things, and things that are not, victory itself shall be enlisted on our side, because Almighty God will be on our side. O, what a ravishing view the Lord sometimes favours me with, of your immense continent, filled with inhabitants, and filled with sons of God! The word of promise is on our side, ratified by the Blood of the Lamb. It therefore must be so, for God hath spoken it.

Pray for you[r] faithful Friend and Brother.

T. Coke

Do write to me once, if possible, before I see you. I enjoy excellent health thro' the blessing of God; and I do assure you, my brother, I have no other intention but to pass the remainder of my poor life with you, from the next General Conference, God willing.