Church History 84:2 (June 2015), 369–393.
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doi:10.1017/S0009640715000098

Slavery, Mission, and the Perils of Providence in Eighteenth-Century Christianity: The Writings of Whitefield and the Halle Pietists

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Centered on understudied manuscript sources located in the Archive of the Francke Foundations, this essay argues that defenses of slavery among eighteenth-century protestants developed from a longstanding tradition of providential thought and narration. This tradition of providential thought and narration was informed by protestants' transatlantic missionary efforts. Far from encouraging human passivity, faith in God's providential direction motivated protestants to wide-ranging evangelistic endeavors. By focusing on the correspondence and writings of George Whitefield, August Hermann Francke, Gotthilf August Francke, and several missionary Pietists in the colony of Georgia, the essay shows how eighteenth-century protestants confirmed God's providential oversight through the practice of retrospective reflection in their writings and publications. The providential pulse of these writings was integral to knitting together a transatlantic community of protestants in their evangelical zeal and encouraging them to new efforts. Whitefield and the Pietists continued to rely on this providential faith and narrative style as they interpreted their acceptance of slavery in terms of God's direction over the success of their missions, the decisions of temporal authorities, and the conversion of slaves to Christianity.

WHEN the famed Anglican itinerant George Whitefield arrived in the new colony of Georgia in 1738, he met and befriended a community of German-speaking Pietist Lutherans in Ebenezer, near Savannah.[1] These Pietists were part of a Lutheran renewal movement,

The author would like to thank Drs. Catherine Brekus and Vincent Evener and participants in the Religions in America Workshop at the University of Chicago for comments on prior drafts of this essay, as well as the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung for its generous support of research at the Archive of the Francke Foundations in Halle.

[1]In Ebenezer, Whitefield met the pastors Johann Martin Boltzius and Israel Christian Gronau, who arrived in Georgia in 1734 with a group of Protestant Salzburger refugees. They founded Ebenezer with the support of not only the Francke Foundations, but also the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Georgia Trustees. For an overview of the circumstances for the Salzburgers' emigration to Georgia, see George Fenwick Jones, "Introduction," *Henry*

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640715000098 Published online by Cambridge University Press

centered in a cluster of charitable institutions called the Francke Foundations, in Halle, Germany. The Foundations included an orphanage, school, hospital, and printing press. Through his friendship with the Ebenezer community, Whitefield began a correspondence with Gotthilf August Francke, the contemporary director of the Foundations. Francke—and his father, August Hermann Francke, before him—headed a global Pietist missionary effort that inspired Whitefield and other English evangelicals. Although Whitefield and the Pietists emerged from different protestant traditions, they shared a commitment to pursuing God's work through mission and charity. They were all, as Gotthilf Francke wrote, "laborers in the vineyard of Christ."[2] In time, however, their common, providentially-infused commitment to mission would also inform their common acceptance of slavery.

This essay argues that protestants' views on slavery in the early eighteenth century were embedded within a theological tradition of providential thought and narration, which was inextricably tied to the transatlantic missionary endeavors that defined the era. Recent scholarship on slavery and Christianity has focused on how religion was used to defend and promote slavery and racism and the economic order that undergirded them, but this scholarship has overlooked the providential meaning of slavery for eighteenth-century Christians.[3] Scholars of the eighteenth century and Christianity have, in turn, generally seen providential thought as promoting human passivity through its strong emphasis on God's direction.[4] In fact,

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Newman's Salzburger Letterbooks (Athens: University of Georgia, 1966), 1–9. On the Salzburg expulsion and its significance in Protestant evangelical history, see W. R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (New York: Cambridge University, 1992), 93–115. For a more recent study on the Salzburgers' religious situation before expulsion, see James Van Horn Melton, "Pietism, Print Culture, and Salzburg Protestantism on the Eve of Expulsion," in *Pietism in Germany and North America, 1680–1820*, eds. Jonathan Strom, Hartmut Lehmann, and Melton (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009), 229–249.

[2]The phrase comes from Gotthilf August Francke: "die in dem Weinberg des HERRN arbeiten." Gotthilf August Francke to George Whitefield, January 20, 1739, Missionsarchiv der Franckeschen Stiftungen [hereafter AFSt/M] 5A7: 27. See the parable of the vineyard in the book of Matthew, chapter 20. Despite initial concerns over Whitefield's relationship with the Moravians, Francke encouraged the Ebenezer ministers to form a close relationship with Whitefield. See Gotthilf August Francke to Israel Christian Gronau, January 27, 1741, AFSt/M 5A9: 22. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from German to English are the author's own.

[3]See historiographical discussion below. Examples of this characterization include: Frank Lambert, *'Pedlar in Divinity': George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737–1770* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1994), 204–205; Alan Gallay, *The Formation of a Planter Elite: Jonathan Bryan and the Southern Colonial Frontier* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1989), 53–54.

[4]This scholarly misconception is apparent, for example, in literature concerning the eighteenth-century development of and debate over smallpox inoculation. See Ernest B. Gilman, *Plague Writing in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2009), 247; Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University,

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providential thought and narration proved to be active and motivating forces behind the missionary endeavors of eighteenth-century protestantism, and the acceptance of slavery was construed within the same theology and language that shaped this missionary activity.

By focusing on writings that describe and defend both mission work and slavery in mid-eighteenth-century Georgia and the wider Atlantic world, this essay demonstrates how providential belief and narration actively shaped the missionary activities, social life, and economic decisions of eighteenth-century protestants. It is not enough to say religion was used to justify slavery and Christians' self-serving participation in plantation economies. A history of thought and a method of narration rested beneath this justification, and they represent substantial and troubling aspects of the story of the Christian acceptance of slavery. Providential thought could affirm and guide Christian action, and this affirming and guiding power contributed to the significant influence of providential thought in eighteenth-century Christian defenses of slavery.

Providence acquired the power to explain and guide religious, social, and economic action, including slave ownership, through a habit of retrospective thought and narration, which is found throughout eighteenth-century protestants' published and manuscript writings. Both Whitefield and the Pietists grounded their ministry, mission, and views on slavery in their understanding of God's providence, the workings of which they carefully sought to discern in their lives. This discernment depended on retrospection; in writing, Whitefield and the Pietists sought to recognize God's will, oversight, and care in past events, including both difficulties and successes. This habit of retrospective narration not only applied to past events, however, but also became critical to interpreting and acting in the present.

Retrospection was thus a narrative style that promoted human activity while ultimately denying human agency, offering consolation and assurance in God's

1953), 343; Maxine Van de Wetering, "A Reconsideration of the Inoculation Controversy," *The New England Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (March 1985): 46–67; 59, 66. Equally problematic is a tendency of scholarship to conflate providence and predestination, leading to the assumption that providentialism was limited to Calvinists or early English Puritans. This is partly due to the enduring legacy of Keith Thomas's work, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner, 1971); see, for example, Andrew Wear, "Puritan perceptions of illness in seventeenth century England," in *Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University, 1985), 55–99, particularly pages 59–60, where Wear writes, "It has to be remembered that this highly providentialist vision was relatively short-lived and limited mainly to Puritans, and many diaries were written by Puritan ministers who would naturally think in this way." Alexandra Walsham's monograph, *Providence in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University, 1999), offers a significant critique of Thomas.

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plan. Whitefield and the Pietists highlighted past evidence of God's faithfulness to their Christian mission and posited, based on this evidence, a future perspective of God's judgment on contemporary actions. In this way, they were able to forge and defend new endeavors, including both the construction of orphanages and the acceptance of slavery. Whitefield and the Pietists considered and described their endeavors providentially as God's work. They narrated each aspect of these endeavors—including both spiritual efforts to convert and economic efforts to raise money and achieve financial stability for a mission—as interrelated and depending, ultimately, on God's blessing. Like many of their evangelical contemporaries, Whitefield and the Pietists were convinced of God's direction and care over all areas of their life and work, and they used writing and publication to defend their efforts and decisions from critics and to share with others their conviction and evidence of God's providence in their actions.[5]

In eighteenth-century Georgia, both Whitefield and the Pietists eventually accepted the reintroduction of slavery, which had been outlawed in the young colony from 1735 to 1750. Although not without debate and

[5]On retrospective narration in Puritan literature, see W. Clark Gilpin's preface to John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress: From This World to That Which Is to Come* and *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (New York: Vintage, 2004), ix–xvi. On retrospection and narrative, see Richard A. Rosengarten, "The Recalcitrant *Distentio* of Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*," *Literature & Theology* 27, no. 2 (June 2013): 174–175, 178; Richard Rosengarten, *Henry Fielding and the Narration of Providence: Divine Design and the Incursions of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), xiv. On the development of eighteenth-century evangelical writing and print culture, see Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University, 2008), 43–46, 51–61, 67–80, 94–95, 131. Hindmarsh's study focuses on English evangelicals, but many of his themes are relevant for transatlantic German religious writing and printing. Pietist German periodicals like *Geistliches Magazin* published accounts and letters emphasizing God's work and revival from missions around the world—including both German- and English-language sources, such as George Whitefield—as well as German translations of popular English evangelical writings. For examples, see: "Einige gute Nachrichten aus dem Reiche Gottes: I. Von dem gegenwärtigen Zustande der Saltzburgischen Emigranten in der Americanischen Provintz Georgien," *Geistliches Magazin* 1:1 (1761): 160–175; "Fortsetzung guter Nachrichten aus dem Reiche GOttes, und zwar von den Anstalten zur Bekehrung der armen Negers, auf den Königlich-Dänischen Inselen St. Thomas, St. Croir, und St. Jean," *Geistliches Magazin* 1, no. 4 (1762): 410–430; "Vermischte Nachrichten, welche die Ausbreitung der evangelischen Kirche in den Americanischen Landen betreffen," *Geistliches Magazin* 2, no. 1 (1763): 91–112; "Leben und Ende Herrn Johann Janewey, Diener des Evangelii, aus dem Englischen übersetzt, *Geistliches Magazin* 2, no. 5 (1765): 567–590; "Vorläufige Anmerckungen über nachstehende, aus dem Englischen in das Teutsche übersetzte Nachricht, von den Indianischen Armen = Schulen," *Geistliches Magazin* 3, no. 2 (1766): 231–302; and "Auszug aus einem Schreiben des Hrn. George Davis, an den Hrn. George Withfield in London," *Geistliches Magazin* 4, no. 4 (1770): 442–444. For another popular Pietist publication, see Johann Samuel Carl, ed., *Geistliche Fama* (Berleburg: 1730–1744). Carl sometimes used the pseudonym "Christianus Democritus;" it is occasionally miscataloged under the name of Johann Konrad Dippel, who also used this pseudonym. I consulted *Geistliches Magazin* in the Archive of the Francke Foundations and *Geistliche Fama* at the Library Company of Philadelphia.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640715000098 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ultimately in different ways, their acceptance of slavery was made possible by their commitment to God's providential control and the retrospective habit of thought that accompanied this commitment; both this commitment and this habit had been defined and refined by their missionary endeavors. Despite the problems of slavery, which both Whitefield and the Pietists acknowledged, both forwarded a providential argument in its favor. For his part, Whitefield viewed slavery as a providentially-ordained means to provide economic stability to his mission and to convert Africans. While this conversion-based position was unsatisfactory to the Pietists, they eventually also accepted an argument grounded in providence: that Christians should accept that God worked in mysterious ways in spreading the Gospel, including through a providentially-appointed temporal government. If this government legalized slavery, they must obey, knowing that God's plan in the matter—however obscure in the present—would be apparent from a future perspective.

Following a brief overview of scholarship on Christianity and slavery in the eighteenth century, this essay argues, first, that transatlantic missionary movements depended on and were framed by their leaders in terms of God's providential direction. It analyzes the ways in which Whitefield was inspired by and appropriated the Pietist August Hermann Francke's famous account of the founding of his institutions and orphanage in Halle. After establishing the deep influence of providential faith and language in mission work, the next section analyzes under-studied letters in the Archive of the Francke Foundations in Halle[6] in order to demonstrate how, on the matter of slavery, Whitefield and the Pietists disagreed but their different views ultimately relied on a shared and strongly-held faith in God's providence and the narrative practice of retrospection that had grown vital to protestant missionary endeavors.

I. Eighteenth-Century Christianity and Slavery: Historical Treatments

Scholarship on Christianity and slavery in eighteenth-century America and the Atlantic world has struggled with how to acknowledge Christianity's potential for good, including, eventually, the well-known reform and abolition efforts of the nineteenth century, while also analyzing its complicity with the

[6]The only secondary study I have located that has used these sources is Karl Zehrer, "Die Beziehung zwischen dem hallischen Pietismus und dem frühen Methodismus," in *Pietismus und Neuzeit* 2 (1975): 43–56. Much of Zehrer's focus is on the relationship between Francke and John Wesley; the section on Whitefield is brief and explores some of the competitive nature that developed in Whitefield and Francke's discussion of their missionary endeavors.

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development and expansion of the slave trade and plantation economies in the American colonies. For some, the negative weight of the latter erases any recognition of the former. Stephen Stein argued that George Whitefield's defense of slavery should exclude him from consideration as an important forerunner of nineteenth-century humanitarian efforts.[7] Forrest Wood demonstrated the power of Christian conceptions of election and covenant in American history—ideas which eventually appealed to slaves themselves—and acknowledged that "the sense of obligation that accompanied the privilege of being chosen" could result in "humility, generosity, humanitarianism, compassion, and an open mind." Yet the overarching argument of Wood's book is that North American Christianity was (and is) beset by the "dark side" of this "favored-people doctrine," which contributes to the "arrogance, conceit, indifference, contempt, and closed minds" that create and buttress "institutional racism."[8]

More recent studies continue to wrestle with how to acknowledge the ways in which eighteenth-century Christianity and its missionaries were initially motivated by a scripturally-based "conception of human unity" while at the same time highlighting how these missionaries used their faith to differentiate themselves religiously and racially, often in service of their own economic interests. Christians relied on scriptural descriptions of kinship and lineage to support their understanding of human unity and the need for mission—and eventually Christian slaves would use the same hermeneutics to assert their right of resistance—but such scriptural passages could also be used, as Colin Kidd has shown, in a "more sinister capacity to encourage the importation of divinely authorised categories of blessed and cursed."[9] Conceiving of Christianity in scriptural terms of lineage also allowed, Rebecca Goetz has argued, white masters to limit Christianity to a "heritable characteristic" tied to whiteness.[10] Finally, as Travis Glasson has explained, "the belief in essential human unity," which initially motivated missionary organizations like the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), was strikingly weakened once the SPG became entangled in the economies and practice of slavery itself, in some cases contributing to the tightening of racially-based legal definitions and slave codes.[11]

[7]Stephen J. Stein, "George Whitefield on Slavery: Some New Evidence," *Church History* 42, no. 2 (June 1973): 256.

[8]Forrest Wood, *The Arrogance of Faith: Christianity and Race in America from the Colonial Era to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 211–212.

[9]Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (New York: Cambridge University, 2006), 21.

[10]Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University, 2012), 3, 10, 172.

[11]Glasson explicitly disputes the argument that the SPG was a forerunner of "Anglican humanitarianism." Travis Glasson, *Mastering Christianity: Missionary Anglicanism and Slavery*

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Studies of slavery in Georgia have generally highlighted the political and economic reasons for both its restriction (in 1735) and its eventual reintroduction (in 1751), while barely touching on religion—except where religion has been analyzed as a "tool" used for social and economic ends. Frank Lambert wrote that religion—specifically seen in the goals of evangelization and the economic survival of the orphanage Whitefield founded in 1740—offered convenient reasons for Whitefield to justify his acceptance of slavery; likewise, Alan Gallay argued that Whitefield used religion to defend and support the economic institution of slavery, paving the way for the nineteenth-century use of "religion as a form of social control," which would become "an essential element in the ideology of the southern master class."[12]

Scholarship on Christianity and slavery in the eighteenth century has emphasized how protestants became complicit in the great economic and social evil of their time and did so by disregarding their own ideal of human unity or by merely using religious language in order to justify ulterior motives. While not denying the social and economic motivations behind Christians' defense of slavery, this essay argues that their acceptance of slavery relied on a significant theological tradition of providential thought and retrospective narration. This tradition—the same that motivated their missionary efforts—was not disregarded nor simply used for social convenience; rather, mid-eighteenth-century protestants like Whitefield and the Pietists understood their acceptance of slavery as a demonstration of their trust in God's guidance over human affairs and narrated this acceptance with the same providential language they used to describe their mission.

II. Providential Conceptions of Mission: Whitefield's Reliance on the Pietists

In 1742, George Whitefield wrote Gotthilf August Francke and reported on recent Christian efforts in the colony of Georgia. Whitefield saw his missionary work in Georgia as part of a transatlantic movement to convert the world to Christianity, a movement in which Francke played a vital role as the director of the well-known charitable and educational Francke Foundations in Halle. Whitefield had met two Pietist missionaries from the

in the Atlantic World (New York: Oxford University, 2011), 4–6, 123–129, 200; Travis Glasson, "'Baptism doth not bestow Freedom': Missionary Anglicanism, Slavery, and the Yorke-Talbot Opinion, 1701–1730," *William and Mary Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (April 2010): 311–316.

[12] Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, 204–205; Gallay, *Formation of a Planter Elite,* 53–54.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640715000098 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Francke Foundations in the community of Ebenezer, Georgia, and he observed in their work—particularly in their orphanage, organization, and industry—an example for his own.

"Our Lord intends to do great things for Georgia yet," Whitefield effused to Francke, and with that "yet," Whitefield enunciated his belief in God's direction over his and his fellow missionaries' actions. Whitefield's phrase recognized both past efforts that remained unfulfilled and hope in the anticipated but unknowable future. Like many of his contemporaries, he believed in God's providence over human affairs and was convinced that this providence was currently directing a dramatic expansion of Christ's kingdom on earth, both through local charitable work and revivals and through more distant missions. Seeking to record this providential expansion, Whitefield longed to hear reports from Gotthilf Francke on the Pietists' missionary work in Halle and the American colonies, and Whitefield, in turn, wanted to share news of his revival work in the colonies, England, and Scotland:

> I suppose you have heard of the work of God in Scotland. Indeed the word has run & been glorified[13] & Jesus has gotten himself the victory in many hearts. In England also He is pleased to bless me. Here are many close Followers of the bleeding Lamb.[14] And tho' there is difference of opinion between me, Mr. Wesley, & the Moravian Brethren, yet Jesus pities us & blesses us all. I long for that time when the Watchmen shall all see Eye to Eye,[15] when the Leopard shall lie down with the Kid, the Lion eat straw like the Ox[16] & people learn war no more[17]—Hasten that time O Glorious Emanuel, & let thy kingdom come![18]

In his scripturally-laden description, Whitefield acknowledged differences among missionaries, but he saw them all as contributing to a single end: the new Jerusalem prophesied in the Book of Isaiah.[19] In recording the cumulative and far-reaching efforts of himself and his contemporaries, Whitefield found evidence of God's providential oversight over missionary endeavors and hope for the prophesied peace, unity, and salvation.

The Pietists Whitefield met in Ebenezer, in fact, reinforced a longstanding influence of Pietism on Whitefield's missionary endeavors. In his 1742 letter to Francke, Whitefield excitedly recalled the effect of Francke's father's

[13]Cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:1.

[14]A reference to a Charles Wesley hymn. See Charles Wesley, "CCXLI. Invitation to our Absent Friends," in *Hymns and Sacred Poems in Two Volumes*, vol. 2 (Bristol: Farley, 1749), 326–327.

[15]Cf. Isaiah 52:8.

[16]Cf. Isaiah 11:6–7.

[17]Cf. Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3.

[18]Cf. Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2.

[19]George Whitefield to Gotthilf August Francke, November 23, 1742, Hauptarchiv der Franckeschen Stiftungen [hereafter AFSt/H] C 532: 2.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640715000098 Published online by Cambridge University Press

famous account of his orphanage in Halle. August Francke's account of his charitable efforts in Halle, *Segensvolle Fußstapfen des noch lebenden und waltenden liebreichen und getreuen Gottes* (*The blessed footsteps of God, who is faithful and rich in love, who still lives and reigns*), first appeared in 1701. It was very popular, quickly translated into English, and published in 1705 under the title *Pietas Hallensis: Or a publick Demonstration of a Divine Being yet in the World.* By 1706, Francke's account began appearing in English under what would become its more popular title: *An Abstract of the Marvellous Footsteps of Divine Providence*.[20] It was read by evangelicals in both Old and New England, with the puritan Cotton Mather reporting: "All the World has read the amazing Story."[21] For Whitefield and others who were involved in the early Methodist movement in England and missionary efforts in Georgia—including the brothers John and Charles Wesley—the story of the Francke Foundations spurred their own desire to found an orphanage in colonial Georgia. As Harry Stout writes, for Charles Wesley "such an institution would serve the cause of both charity and piety. It would be a place that redeemed young orphans in body and soul."[22]

Whitefield wrote Gotthilf Francke that the memory of his father "is still precious to me. His account of the Orphan house hath, under God, been a great support & encouragement to me in a like Undertaking." August Francke's account shaped Whitefield's excitement for his work and the connection he felt to the transatlantic evangelical community. Whitefield

[20]I consulted the third edition of the German text, August Hermann Francke, *Segensvolle Fußstapfen des noch lebenden und waltenden liebreichen und getreuen Gottes* (Halle: in Verlegung des Wäysen-Hauses, 1709), at the Archive of the Francke Foundations in Halle. The first English translation I have found is: *Pietas Hallensis: Or a publick Demonstration of a Divine Being yet in the World* (London: J. Downing, 1705). Francke's account was likely translated into English by Anton Böhme, who was the Lutheran court chaplain in London at this time and who translated many Pietist writings into English. By 1706, Francke's account began appearing with its new title: *An Abstract of the Marvellous Footsteps of Divine Providence. In the Building of a very large Hospital, or rather, a Spacious College, For Charitable and Excellent Use in the Maintaining of many Orphans and other Poor People therein* (London: Downing, 1706). On Böhme, see Arno Sames, *Anton Wilhelm Böhme (1673–1722): Studien zum Ökumenischen Denken und Handeln eines Halleschen Pietisten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 19–22. On Böhme's translation work and the transmission of Halle Pietist texts into English, see Peter James Yoder, "Rendered 'Odious' as Pietists: Anton Wilhelm Böhme's Conception of Pietism and the Possibilities of Prototype Theory," in *The Pietist Impulse in Christianity*, eds. Christian T. Collins-Winn et al. (Eugene, Oreg.: Pickwick, 2011): 17–28.

[21]Cotton Mather, *Nuncia Bona e Terra Longinqua. A Brief Account of some Good & Great Things a doing For the Kingdom of God, in the midst of Europe* (Boston: B. Green for Samuel Gerrish, 1715), 2–9.

[22]Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 62. See also A. G. Roeber, "'The Origin of Whatever Is Not English among Us': The Dutch-speaking and the German-speaking Peoples of Colonial British America," in *Strangers within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire*, eds. Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1991), 247.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640715000098 Published online by Cambridge University Press

wrote Gotthilf Francke, "For tho' I never saw You in the flesh, yet I love You in the bowels of Jesus Xt, & wish You much prosperity in the work of the Lord."[23] Whitefield described a spiritual connection of common, evangelical purpose that surpassed any personal meeting.

In his letter to Francke, Whitefield enclosed the 1742 account he wrote of his own orphanage, Bethesda, founded south of Savannah in 1740. This account was a defense of Whitefield's fundraising for Bethesda. Crucial to his defense were letters and accounts that emphasized the expansive and providentially-directed nature of the contemporary revivals and Bethesda's place within these revivals. Whitefield included a letter from Benjamin Colman, a New England Congregationalist minister, which made this case by suggesting a parallel between Bethesda and Francke's orphanage in Halle. Whitefield seconded Colman's parallel with his own description of the Francke Foundations, and then transcribed large sections of Francke's account. Indeed, Whitefield filled the remainder of his Bethesda account—pages 26 through 82—with text directly taken from Francke's account.[24]

Francke's account had enormous influence in encouraging missionary activities like Bethesda, even though Francke repeatedly denied any human agency or direction in the foundation of his charitable institutions. This denial, however, gave the account its significance and adaptability for other missionary endeavors. Whitefield found in Francke's account and its retrospective attribution of all success to God a basis for his own efforts. Throughout the portion excerpted from Francke, Whitefield printed manicules—or pointing fingers—in the margins, in order to direct readers to passages especially relevant to Whitefield's situation. In the end, there were several manicules per page, and almost all pointed to passages praising God's direction. Whitefield was convinced that "God can help us in *Georgia*, as well as he helped Professor *Franck* in *Germany*." Indeed, "Professor Franck met with unspeakably more Contempt and Calumny, whilst he was building the Orphan-House in *Germany*."

Through the lens of Francke's retrospective account of his providentially-inspired successes, Whitefield could both perceive and present Bethesda's

[23]George Whitefield to Gotthilf August Francke, November 23, 1742, AFSt/H C 532: 2.

[24]Bethesda had quickly become an important part of Whitefield's itinerancy and fundraising and thus also the subject of scrutiny and critique. George Whitefield, *A continuation of the account of the Orphan-House in Georgia, from January 1740/1 to June 1742* (Edinburgh: Lumisden and Robertson, 1742), 3, 19–20; for the Habersham letters, see especially pages 8–14; for Colman, see page 17. I consulted the edition at the Library Company of Philadelphia. See also Frank Lambert, *James Habersham: Loyalty, Politics, and Commerce in Colonial Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2005), 53–54; Harold E. Davis, *The Fledgling Province: Social and Cultural Life in Colonial Georgia, 1733–1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1976), 220; Edward J. Cashin, *Beloved Bethesda*: *A History of George Whitefield's Home for Boys, 1740–2000* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University, 2001), 1; Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, 207.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640715000098 Published online by Cambridge University Press

present troubles as a sign of God's providential direction over his work. August Francke's account detailed his early struggles, many of which involved finances and accusations of wrongdoing, struggles with which Whitefield strongly identified. With Francke in mind, Whitefield proclaimed that he would not be ashamed of his fundraising efforts on Bethesda's behalf. The need to provide funding for Bethesda actually spurred Whitefield's itinerancy: fundraising was "one great Means in [God's] Hand of bringing me out to preach the everlasting Gospel in so many places, and to many Thousands of poor perishing Souls, who I doubt not (be it spoken with all Humility) will evidence my Commission thereto, by being my Joy and Crown of Rejoycing in the last Day."[25] Humble or not, Whitefield—like Francke—saw and narrated God's direction in his missionary work, both that already accomplished and that planned.

Whitefield highlighted passages from Francke that emphasized, through retrospective voice, God's past and continuing providence. For Francke, the account represented a "Duty" to both the present and future: narrating the Francke Foundations' amazing story would, per Hebrews 10:24, inspire others to grow in "Christian Charity." According to Francke, his contemporaries suffered from "ungrateful Unbelief" and often failed to perceive God's providence; publications like Francke's were God's merciful means to provide a "present Narrative for a Memorial to After-ages, that they may magnify his Name." Although focused on the future, Francke nonetheless hoped that his contemporaries might recognize God's support and "Bounty" in the past and present and have faith that God "was ready to do still greater Things" in the future, "if we could but believe."[26]

In fending off his contemporary critics, Whitefield relied on Francke's retrospective narration of his activities and efforts to discern God's providence, even in describing economic and physical setbacks. In Francke's account, when the Halle orphanage faced financial troubles or sickness, he trusted God, and "the Lord provided," whether through a donation, an apothecary, or a physician. While attributing all to God, this retrospective attentiveness to God's continuous guidance also motivated and defended human action in the present with trust in the future. The account's capacity to spur action and to narrate setbacks explains, in fact, its citation and afterlife in later transatlantic missionary endeavors. For Francke himself, if people disagreed with his efforts, he referred them not only to past

[25]Whitefield, *A continuation of the account of the Orphan-House in Georgia*, 18–20, 26–82. On the orphanage and its financial troubles, see Lambert, *James Habersham*, 46–56.

[26]Quoted in Whitefield, *A continuation of the account of the Orphan-House in Georgia*, 29–30, 36.

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providences but also to the future, writing: "I never as yet have miss'd my Aim, when I have undertaken any Thing in Dependence upon the Lord." Francke waited on "the Day . . . wherein the Lord will make manifest the Counsels of the Hearts." Francke's comment is a reference to 1 Corinthians 4:5, in which the apostle Paul worries not about human judges but waits on the future, when Christ will come, peer into the deepest motivations behind human actions, and judge all that is past. In response to critics, Francke, citing the proto-missionary Paul, insisted that he did not presume to know God's plan or judgment but strove to undertake God's work by pursuing it with humility.[27]

Whitefield found in Francke's faith and retrospective narrative a model for defending and encouraging mission based on God's providence, both past and future. From the first pages of his defense of Bethesda, Whitefield followed Francke's model, retrospectively accentuating his powerlessness as he explained how his motives in founding the orphan house were focused on "the Salvation of Souls" and that "God put it into my Heart to build this House." Further, Whitefield attributed all of the orphanage's success—both spiritual and economic—to God. In response to his critics, Whitefield emphasized not only this past and present humility but also a future perspective. Regardless of their suspicions, Whitefield asked his enemies "at least to pray" that he go about his work in resignation and with an eye to God's will. With these prayers, Whitefield was convinced, "they will see happy Issue of this Work and future Ages have reason to bless God, for ever putting it into my Heart to build an Orphan-House in *Georgia*." Following Francke, Whitefield defended his motives and the rightness of his work by arguing that his critics would someday see the fruits of his labor and God's ultimate direction, regardless of any presently perceived setback.[28]

Through retrospection, Whitefield and Francke anticipated the future resolution of difficulties in their evangelical endeavors. Whitefield exemplified this attitude in his 1742 expression of optimism to Gotthilf Francke: "our Lord intends to do great things for Georgia yet."[29] Whitefield's hope in the future, his faith that God's blessing would yet further and confirm contemporary missionary zeal, and his willingness to live in delayed certainty demonstrate the deep permeation and resonance of providential, retrospective narration in eighteenth-century protestantism.

[27]Ibid., 42, 45, 54, 58, 63, 77.
[28]Ibid., 3–5, 20.
[29]George Whitefield to Gotthilf August Francke, November 23, 1742, AFSt/H C 532: 2.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640715000098 Published online by Cambridge University Press

III. Providential Defenses of Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Georgia

Despite Whitefield's efforts and confidence in God's mercy, Georgia struggled economically. By the 1740s many in Georgia became convinced that the economic survival of the colony required slavery. In the colony-wide debates over the introduction of slavery, Whitefield and the Pietist pastors in Ebenezer came to sharp disagreement. Scholars have emphasized the different economic circumstances faced by Whitefield and the Pietists. Bethesda was in constant financial straits, and Whitefield's plantation-owning benefactors in South Carolina were key proponents of slavery. Meanwhile, the Pietists in Ebenezer achieved moderate success without slaves and actually feared economic repercussions from the introduction of slavery—such as less land and employment for white settlers, who would be edged out by the larger plantations and unpaid labor that came with slavery.[30]

In explaining the acceptance of slavery among evangelical Christians in Georgia, scholars have privileged these economic contexts and motivations and overlooked the importance of providential thought. Alan Gallay has argued that evangelicals like Whitefield and the Bryans used religion—meaning particularly the hope of slave conversion and future salvation—to "rationalize" the brutality of an institution that they made little real effort to reform or change.[31] Such an argument misses the significance of Whitefield's providential language and suggests that slavery was primarily an economic and not a moral issue for Whitefield—and that religion served only as a convenient justification. In fact, the economics of slavery were

[30]Whitefield's active support for the introduction of slavery into colonial Georgia has been described by scholars including Arnold Dallimore, Frank Lambert, and Alan Gallay, among others, who have shown how slavery helped Whitefield to provide Bethesda with some financial stability. Historians have also highlighted Whitefield's complex and, indeed, paradoxical relationship to slaveholding. Scholars have explained Whitefield's economic reasoning, his Atlantic and Georgian context—including the larger push for slavery among the colony's Malcontents—and his conviction that slavery, when pursued by Christian masters, could function as a form of Christian mission to the African slave. The historian Betty Wood has well documented Boltzius's resistance to slavery, which was based, in part, on the Ebenezer community's support for the Georgia Trustees and their economic and security policies and, in part, on the community's early experience with slavery in 1734, before its prohibition. See Lambert, *Pedlar In Divinity*, 204–210; Lambert, *James Habersham*, 46–49, 54, 78–79; Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia: 1730–1775* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1984), 59–73; Gallay, *Formation of a Planter Elite*, 41–42, 49–51; Davis, *The Fledgling Province*, 126–127; Cashin, *Beloved Bethesda*, 60–62; A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival* (Westchester, Ill.: Cornerstone Books, 1970), 207–208, 219, 367–368, 521. For Boltzius's concerns over slavery's effect on white wage labor, see his journal entry from July 17, 1750. Available in English translation in Samuel Urlsperger, *Detailed Reports on the Salzburger Emigrants Who Settled in America,* vol. 13–14: 1749–1750, trans. George Fenwick Jones and David Roth (Athens: University of Georgia, 1990), 95.

[31]Gallay, *Formation of a Planter Elite*, 50, 53–54.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640715000098 Published online by Cambridge University Press

understood within the belief in God's providential oversight and the accompanying retrospective narration that had proven central components of eighteenth-century protestant mission.[32]

In debating slavery, both Whitefield and the Pietist pastors relied on the same commitment to God's providential guidance, albeit in different ways. Based on his past experience and faith in God's guidance over his life and mission, Whitefield promoted slavery, seeing it as a means given by God to promote the flourishing of evangelical religion in Georgia: slave labor would provide economic support for Whitefield's missionary efforts at Bethesda, and the importation of slaves itself represented an opportunity to convert Africans to Christianity. The Pietists also eventually accepted slavery; although they had anxieties regarding its introduction and had trouble perceiving God's direction in the present, they also relied on a tradition of providential thought. They insisted that God worked through temporal authorities and had a plan for slavery that would, eventually, become clear in retrospect.

Despite their differences of opinion on slavery, the common dependence on providence—albeit distinctly interpreted—actually allowed Whitefield and the Pietists to remain united in their missionary efforts. In nineteenth-century slavery debates, as Mark Noll has argued, Christians developed different interpretations of the same scripture, which irreparably damaged the once-shared hermeneutical practices of evangelical protestants in the early American Republic.[33] In eighteenth-century slavery debates, however, providential thought and narration allowed protestants to emphasize or accent different interpretations of the past and hopes for the future while remaining firmly committed to a common idea and language of God's direction and Christian mission. This commitment brought them together, and it was, importantly, in their united efforts that they saw confirmation of the great and widespread outworking of God's grace.

Whitefield outlined the advantages of slavery in providential language as early as the 1742 published defense of Bethesda. He argued that "a limited use of Negroes" would make Georgia "as flourishing a Colony as *South-Carolina*." In line with the providential style of narration that shaped the rest of the tract, Whitefield promoted this change "with the greatest Caution and Circumspection," relying not on man but on God, who, "having helped me and mine so often, encourages me to trust him again."[34] If Georgia was meant to have slaves, Whitefield believed, God would provide.

[32]Ibid., 53–54; Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, 207.

[33]Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University, 2002), 386, 396.

[34]Whitefield to Gotthilf August Francke, November 23, 1742, AFSt/H C 532: 18.

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Whitefield was not alone among Anglican missionaries in his acceptance of slavery as a part of colonial life and evangelization. The SPG had been sending Anglican missionaries to North America since the beginning of the eighteenth century, with the goals of shoring up the loose organization of the Church of England in the American colonies and converting Africans and Native Americans to Christianity. Many of these missionaries, however, were overwhelmed by the work among dispersed communities of English people and claimed to have little time to visit and catechize Africans and Native Americans. Catechizing slaves also depended on the masters' cooperation; masters were often reluctant to allow slaves time off for instruction or opportunities to gather in large groups.[35]

In order to gain the cooperation of masters, SPG missionaries became increasingly aligned with the planters' interests. Some missionaries became slave owners themselves and the SPG eventually owned and operated a plantation in Barbados. As Travis Glasson has argued, by 1740 this "tightening relationship with slavery had begun to have serious effects on its missionary program," as the SPG "and its supporters had become enamored with the power and profits that slaveholding promised."[36] While SPG missionaries did not entirely give up working with slaves and attempting to reform slaveholding, their efforts further decreased in the wake of the religious revivals known as the Great Awakening. According to Glasson, the revivals of this period inadvertently strengthened ties between the SPG and slavery. In responding to the social disorder caused by revivalists—including

[35]For an early example of frustrations in efforts at slave conversion due to masters' reluctance, see Gilbert Jones to the Secretary, November 6, 1716, Letter Books, American material, Papers of the United Society Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts [hereafter cited SPG Letters], vol. B4, 75. I viewed this correspondence on the USPG microfilm collections available at the Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House, Oxford. The missionaries' explanations of their difficulties in pursuing slave conversion can be found particularly in their reports from 1725, when they responded to a letter from SPG secretary David Humphreys, who was troubled by reports that "proper care hath not been taken to instruct in the Christian Religion and baptize the Negroes in the Plantations in America," and who exhorted the missionaries to do better. David Humphreys to all the Missionaries, July 30, 1725, SPG Letters, vol. A19, 113. Exemplary responses to Humphreys's letter include Mr. [Brian] Hunt to the Secretary, November 5, 1725, SPG Letters, vol. A19, 80; Mr. [Richard] Ludlam to the Secretary, December 1, 1725, SPG Letters, vol. A19, 82; Mr. [John] Bartow to the Secretary, November 5, 1725, SPG Letters, vol. A19, 184; Mr. [William] Vesey to the Secretary, November 18, 1725, vol. A19, 185; Mr. [Robert] Jenney to the Secretary, November 19, 1725, SPG Letters, vol. A19, 187. There are some occasional examples of slave instruction and baptism in the SPG reports from the 1720s. See, for example, Francis Varnod to the Secretary, January 13, 1723/4, SPG Letters, vol. A18, 69–75, which describes the efforts of Alexander Skeen and "Mrs. Hague his Sister" to instruct their slaves in South Carolina; cf. the Clergy in South Carolina to the Secretary, March 10, 1723/4, SPG Letters, vol. B5, 141.

[36]Glasson *Mastering Christianity*, 5–11, 123–124, 129; on Barbados see especially 129, 141–170.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640715000098 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Whitefield—Anglican missionaries reiterated their commitment to upholding the social order and their alliance with plantation owners.[37]

Whitefield and the SPG had their differences when it came to revival, but both depended on the economic support made possible by slavery, and Whitefield's writings demonstrate how this economic support was understood within God's providence.[38] Bethesda's success as a missionary enterprise depended on its financial stability; and both the mission and its finances, Whitefield wrote, ultimately relied on God. Whitefield knew through Francke's example that accounting for Bethesda's finances would help demonstrate God's direction over Whitefield's work and would, in turn, attract and reassure supporters. Whitefield's providential understanding of missionary economics is evident even in his correspondence from before the slavery debates. In 1740 Whitefield wrote Henry Newman, a Pietist representative in London, who forwarded Whitefield's letter to Gotthilf Francke in Halle. Whitefield described God's blessing on the Ebenezer Pietists, evidenced not only in their spiritual achievements but also in their economic flourishing. He ended with reference to Psalm 16:6: "Surely God

[37]Ibid., 6. Whitefield was a chief example of the disruption revivalists caused to existing norms. The Pietists in Halle and the SPG both expressed anxieties over Whitefield's habit of preaching outdoors and in pulpits assigned to others. See Gotthilf August Francke to Johann Martin Boltzius and Israel Christian Gronau, June 4, 1739, AFSt/M 5 A 7: 47. For an excellent, although later, example of the distaste with which SPG missionaries regarded Whitefield, see Thomas Bradbury Chandler's report to the SPG, in which he described refusing to allow Whitefield the use of his pulpit in Elizabeth Town, New Jersey: "Mr: Chandler knowing the very exceptionable point of Light in which Mr: Whitefield formerly stood with his Superiours at home, thro' his undutiful & schismatical Behaviour, & having no Evidence of his Reformation, much less of having made any due Submission to the Governors of the Church, & obtained the Bishop of London's Licence, could not think the Example of the Clergy in Philadelphia, who had given Mr: Whitefield the free use of their Churches, sufficient to justify a Conduct, in his Opinion, so inconsistent with the Rules of Ecclesiastical Polity." Thomas Bradbury Chandler to the Secretary, July 5, 1764, presented at the General Meeting, December 21, 1764. In Minutes of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1762–1764, ff. 301r-313r, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 1124/2.

[38]Despite Whitefield's support of slavery and his agreement with the SPG on the benefits of Christianization in creating better slaves, Glasson situates Whitefield on the opposite side of the SPG's entanglement with the status quo. Glasson points to a letter that Whitefield published in 1740 in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, which was critical of masters' cruel behavior toward slaves. Whitefield's letter sparked a debate with Alexander Garden, a leading Anglican clergyman in Charleston, South Carolina, whose argument that slavery was a "benevolent institution" became characteristic of "later defenses of slaveholding." While Glasson acknowledges that Whitefield was not against slavery, he nonetheless vaguely groups Whitefield with "the forces unleashed by evangelicalism," which masters feared would lead to social disorder. Glasson, *Mastering Christianity*, 123, 127. On Whitefield's early critique of slave-owners' practices see: "A Letter to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South-Carolina," *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, no. 592, April 17, 1740; Gallay, *Formation of a Planter Elite*, 36–39; Thomas S. Kidd, "Letter to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina" (1740), January 18, 2012, *Encyclopedia Virginia*, http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/_Letter_to_the_Inhabitants_of_Maryland_Virginia_North_and_South_Carolina_1740#start_entry.

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has answered their Prayer, has cast their Lot at lenght [*sic*] in a fair Ground, and given them a goodly heritage." Whitefield sought the same providential blessing in the economic success of his own missionary and institutional efforts, and promoted, like the Ebenezer community, cottage industry. He reported that he hired spinners and a weaver for Bethesda, who had produced "above a hundred yards of home-spun cloth." For materials, they used cotton harvested by the Bethesda orphans. As Whitefield explained, "Picking Cotton is excellent employment for my little orphans." Whitefield understood that missionary success relied on economic success, and both—in language Whitefield had adopted from Francke's account and from Psalm 16—depended ultimately on God's providential oversight.[39]

Whitefield's followers in Georgia and South Carolina embraced his faith in God's providence and corresponding commitment to mission and promoted Bethesda's economic success on behalf of this faith and commitment. In March of 1747, the brothers Hugh and Jonathan Bryan purchased a plantation and slaves for Whitefield in South Carolina, where slavery was legal. Whitefield wrote that God inspired his friends to this purchase, which would provide financial support for Bethesda's mission, and he named his new plantation "Providence." Meanwhile, James Habersham, the superintendent of Bethesda from 1740 to 1743, recognized that the orphanage's flourishing depended on Georgia's success and accordingly created an economic plan for the colony. This plan influenced the trustees' 1749 decision to legalize slavery.[40]

In promoting slavery, Whitefield and his supporters used the powerful providential and retrospective language that provided such critical motivation to eighteenth-century Christian mission and revivalism in the Atlantic world. Whitefield and his supporters were firmly convinced that the slave trade could benefit Christian mission by contributing to the economic success of Bethesda. They also believed, as discussed below, that the introduction of slavery offered opportunities for the conversion of Africans and the growth of Christianity. Expanding the picture beyond Whitefield, however, demonstrates that there was disagreement on this issue among eighteenth-century protestants and reveals the different ways in which protestants relied

[39]George Whitefield to Henry Newman, June 20, 1740, AFSt/M 1E4: 76; this letter was apparently a copy. The location of the original manuscript is unclear. A German translation was made (George Whitefield to Henry Newman, June 20, 1740, AFSt/M 5A9: 4), which was apparently forwarded to Francke. For Francke's reference to the letter, see Gotthilf August Francke to Johann Martin Boltzius and Israel Christian Gronau, January 25, 1741, AFSt/M 5A9: 17. For more on cotton production at Bethesda, see Lambert, *James Habersham*, 48–49.

[40]Gallay, *Formation of a Planter Elite*, 41–54; Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 219; Lambert, *James Habersham*, 1–4, 74–79.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640715000098 Published online by Cambridge University Press

on providential thought and its corresponding retrospective language in debating slavery.

Whitefield's friends and contemporaries, the Pietists in Ebenezer and Halle, illuminate both the diversity among Christian attitudes toward slavery at the time and the common commitment to providential faith and language. Instead of emphasizing a future perspective that would reveal the benefits of the slave trade to Christian mission, the Pietists were skeptical of slave conversion. They focused, rather, on the importance of obedience to providentially-appointed governing authorities and a future perspective that would reveal God's wisdom over the issue of slavery, even if they encountered it with anxiety in the present.

In September 1747 Hermann Heinrich Lemke, the assistant minister in Ebenezer, wrote Gotthilf Francke concerning community disagreements over slavery. Ebenezer's loyal support of the trustees' policy to exclude slavery had opened the community to criticism from the colony's slavery proponents, affecting even the longstanding friendship between the head pastor of Ebenezer, Johann Martin Boltzius, and Whitefield. Boltzius opposed slavery for economic and moral reasons, and his economic evidence—Ebenezer's success—particularly aggravated those slavery advocates who were convinced that white settlers could not succeed agriculturally in Georgia's heat. By the late 1740s, slavery proponents tried to undermine Boltzius's authority by accusing him of exercising "spiritual tyranny" over Ebenezer and pointing to Ebenezer settlers who wanted slaves. Lemke's 1747 letter addressed this development.[41]

[41]Hermann Heinrich Lemke to Gotthilf August Francke, September 10, 1747, AFSt/M 5A11: 73. For Boltzius's account of this unrest, see Johann Martin Boltzius to Gotthilf August Francke, September 7, 1747, AFSt/M 5A11: 72; and Johann Martin Boltzius to Gotthilf August Francke, January 4, 1748, AFSt/M 5A11: 77; for an English summary of the events, see B. Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, 65–72. Boltzius's journals from 1749–1750 reflect the strained relationship between himself and Whitefield. See entries from April 23 and August 11, 1749, and September 19, 1750, in Urlsperger, *Detailed Reports*, 42, 94, 146–147. See also Cashin, *Beloved Bethesda*, 61–62; Lambert, *James Habersham*, 78; Julie Anne Sweet, *William Stephens: Georgia's Forgotten Founder* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University, 2010), 150–151. Ebenezer's economic success was not entirely due to its inhabitants' industry. Unlike other communities in colonial Georgia, Ebenezer received immense advantages in support from the Georgia Trustees, the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge and the Francke Foundations. For example, the trustees provided immigrants to Ebenezer with supplies, including cattle, construction materials, and food, for three years after their arrival. The trustees further paid for the salary and provisions for a medical doctor. In addition, the SPCK paid the salaries of the ministers, while the Francke Foundations provided a pool of trained ministers and doctors along with more material goods, such as medicines, linens, books, and other donations forwarded from interested benefactors. Historian Renate Wilson estimated the yearly monetary value of this support and these donations at 1,000 pounds sterling. Renate Wilson, *Halle and Ebenezer: Pietism, Agriculture and Commerce in Colonial Georgia* (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 1988), 45–51. On supplies provided by the trustees during the first years of settlement: Friedrich Michael Ziegenhagen to James Vernon, February 22, 1737, AFSt/M 5A3: 41; on the trustees'

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Lemke described the controversy over slavery within Ebenezer by foreshadowing its providential resolution and highlighting a scriptural parallel that illuminated the Pietists' attitude of obedience to God-appointed temporal authorities. He explained first that many inhabitants were tempted to own slaves, but the ministers feared slavery would destroy the community, bringing "great and manifold" misery. The community's surgeon, Johann Ludwig Meyer, convened the householders, however, and "the affair attained a good outcome that, through divine governance, no one desired such black slaves any longer." Lemke emphasized the role of the layman Meyer in settling the community's dispute in order to stress that the stance on slavery within Ebenezer was not dictated by the ministers but shaped by a lay civic leader. In reporting the account to Francke, nonetheless, Lemke explained the situation and its resolution not by detailing Meyer's words or argument but by referring to a scriptural parallel: the biblical story from 1 Samuel 8, in which the Israelites asked Samuel to appoint a king, so that they might be like other nations. Samuel discouraged the Israelites—explaining the rights a king would have over them—but they persisted. Lemke saw the community's temptation for slaves stemming from a worldly desire to be like slave-holding neighbors in South Carolina. Like the Israelites, community members had not fully grasped the long-term consequences of their worldly desire: they would be beholden to the new political system they had prayed to God to create. Unlike the Israelites, however, the Ebenezer community was convinced, for a time, by warnings of the repercussions for worldly desire.[42]

Before it was legalized, the Ebenezer ministers promoted a providential interpretation of slavery as a symptom of human lust, to which community members would become servants, and which would bring God's future wrath. Were slavery introduced, Lemke wrote, "the judgment of God must be brought upon the land, and many perish in body and soul." Even if this disaster were temporarily averted, the community would always be in danger

financial support of a medical doctor for Ebenezer: Harman Verelst to Friedrich Michael Ziegenhagen, March 10, 1737, AFSt/M 5A5: 14, and Gotthilf August Francke to Johann Martin Boltzius and Israel Christian Gronau, January 19, 1739, AFSt/M 5A5: 24; on the Francke Foundations' shipments of linen, books, and medicine: Johann Martin Boltzius and Israel Christian Gronau to Gotthilf August Francke, August 1743, AFSt/M 5A11: 3, Johann Martin Boltzius to Friedrich Michael Ziegenhagen, July 9, 1746, AFSt/M 5A11: 54a, and Gotthilf August Francke to Christian Ernst Thilo, July 17, 1748, AFSt/M 5A11: 84.

[42]Lemke to Francke, September 10, 1747, AFSt/M 5A11: 73. Although I was unable to find a record of Meyer's first name, the historian Renate Wilson referred to him as Johann Ludwig Mayer. See Renate Wilson, *Pious Traders in Medicine: A German Pharmaceutical Network in Eighteenth-Century North America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2000), 170–171.

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of disregarding its spiritual health for "the love of the world, the lust of the flesh, and harmful concern for the stomach." The leaders tried to convince parishioners, but the success of these efforts, Lemke emphasized, ultimately depended on God: "we . . . can go nowhere but to God, who wants to help. Let him preserve those among us who belong to him, and protect them from evil." Lemke recognized God's providential power but, unlike Whitefield, did not find within that power the inevitability of slavery. He saw instead an evil to be avoided with God's help.[43]

When the trustees legalized slavery in 1749, Boltzius struggled to contemplate God's providence in the appearance of slaves in Georgia and in Ebenezer, and he deferred to the trustees' authority. Boltzius would not prevent community members from acquiring slaves,[44] but his journal suggests he remained unconvinced of both the economic necessity and the morality of slavery. Boltzius continued to argue that with a better work ethic more people in Georgia "would succeed without the help of Negro servants." He worried about settlers borrowing money to buy slaves, thus becoming "slaves of their slaves and of the merchants, and also lazy people." Furthermore, Boltzius questioned slavery's effect on white settlers who relied on wage labor, which slaves might overtake. As far as moral concerns, Boltzius recorded the opinions of the Council in Savannah:

> I was assured that they were eternal slaves in their own land and that they [African slaves] lived under great tyranny and difficult circumstances and were legally bought and sold. Therefore Christians should feel no more scruples in buying them or possessing them than the Patriarchs and even Philemon himself in the New Testament, to whom St. Paul sent back the servant Onesimus and demanded not his emancipation but just good treatment. They also have an opportunity to come to a recognition of Christ.[45]

Despite his dutiful recording of these arguments, Boltzius's other writings suggested that he remained unconvinced that Christians could in good conscience own slaves. In one journal entry from the same period, he cited reports from Pietist missionaries in Tranquebar, on the eastern coast of India, describing how their antislavery stance advanced their relationship with the local population and furthered their missionary success.[46]

Boltzius was not alone among evangelical Christians in expressing his skepticism over defenses of slavery, even within the context of supporting temporal authorities. In 1730, the SPG published a tract on its missionary

[43]Lemke to Francke, September 10, 1747, AFSt/M 5A11: 73; see Philippians 3:19.
[44]See entries from February 1 and August 8, 1750 in Urlsperger, *Detailed Reports*, 18, 112–113.
[45]See entries from February 1, July 17, and April 19, 1750 in ibid., 18, 95, 55.
[46]See entries from August 8 and August 23, 1750 in ibid., 112–113, 121.

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work among slaves that contained an address and two letters by Bishop Edmund Gibson of London. The tract was intended to expand missionaries' access to slaves and to advance evangelization by convincing readers—presumably white—that they were "an Instrument under God," working to "see the Gospel propagated," to promote "charitable *Endeavours* for the salvation of our Fellow-Creatures," and to "find a very plentiful Reward from the Hands of God." The sections written by the Bishop offered reassurances to masters, who, fearing a connection between baptism and civil freedom, limited missionaries' access to slaves. While the bishop, in the interest of evangelization, reiterated that baptism did not necessitate or entail emancipation, the tract's editor, SPG Secretary David Humphreys, nonetheless concluded the publication by exhorting slave owners to consider seriously whether they, as Christians, would be able to justify either their actions or the common arguments on behalf of slavery when placed in a future position of retrospection:

> Let the hardiest *Slave-holder* look forward to that tremendous Day, when he must give an Account to God of his Stewardship, and let him, seriously, consider, whether, at such a Time, he thinks he shall be able to satisfy himself [justify himself before God] that any Act of buying and selling, or the Fate of War, or the Birth of Children in his House, Plantations or Territories, or any other Circumstances whatever, can give him such an *absolute Property* in the Persons of Men, as will justify *his retaining them as Slaves, and treating them as Beasts?*[47]

Both the SPG message for missionizing slaves and Humphreys's foreboding contrapuntal on the morality of Christian slaveholding relied on tensely yet concurrently held providential understandings of God's oversight, the need to work within an existing social order, humans' missionary work on God's behalf, and a future state of retrospectively based judgment and reward.

Unlike Boltzius and Humphreys, Whitefield perceived only positive signs of God's approval and direction—both in the future and in the immediate context—in his elation over the legalization of slavery in Georgia. In a May 1752 letter to Gotthilf Francke, Whitefield tried to describe his delight in terms with which Francke would agree: God's providence. Whitefield pointed to the missionary potential among the imported Africans. He assured Francke that "the father of earth and heaven" provided slaves and that even Boltzius understood slaves

[47]David Humphreys, *An Account of the Endeavours used by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts to Instruct the Negroe Slaves in New York. Together with two of Bp. Gibson's Letters on that Subject. Being an Extract from Dr. Humphrey's Historical Account of the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, from its Foundation to the Year 1728* (London, 1730), 17–20, 26–27, 35, 41–43. I consulted the copy available at the Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House, Oxford. See also Glasson, "Baptism"; Goetz, *Baptism of Early Virginia*.

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were needed for the cultivation of Georgia. Whitefield hoped "that many negro children will be brought up for the sake of Christ," telling Francke that there is "no need to despair with Christ as your leader."[48] Francke responded unusually quickly—a mere two months later—and he also appealed to providence on the slavery issue, writing, "let us entrust the care to God." He maintained, however, that "if it were for us to decide, we would wish that they [slaves] were not introduced in Georgia." Based on the Ebenezer ministers' reports, Francke was pessimistic about slave conversion; he feared that the slaves would be corrupted "because of the sins of those who are accustomed to treat them [slaves] in a non-Christian manner." Instead of growing the church, Francke feared, slaves' children would be tempted to sins "which provoke divine wrath."[49]

Whitefield tried to convince Boltzius of the possibilities of slave conversion, and before the formal legalization of slavery Boltzius participated in meetings to ensure the new code promoted the spiritual care of slaves. Boltzius was unconvinced, however, that slave conversion was a reason to introduce slavery into Georgia. Some have suggested that Boltzius's skepticism over the introduction of slavery was due to racism. He would have preferred that the colony be settled by "white protestant people," but whether his pessimism regarding slave conversion was due to racial attitudes or local concerns for the economy and security of his particular community is hard to tease apart.[50] Rebecca Goetz has argued that, in colonial Virginia, Christianity was used to create hereditary notions of race that implied the impossibility of true conversion by Indians or Africans, an attitude that developed, in part, from legal efforts to assure planters that baptism would not make slaves free. These efforts came about because missionaries could not otherwise convince slave owners to grant access; unfortunately these arguments, according to Goetz, also implied the diminished "spiritual capacities" of Africans to become true Christians.[51] The question of how race affected conversion would eventually shape discussions of slavery in

[48]George Whitefield to Gotthilf August Francke, May 19, 1752, AFSt/H C 532: 6. Note that the original letter is in Latin. I am grateful to Vincent Evener for his assistance in translation. Zehrer also offers a partial translation into German. Zehrer, "Die Beziehung zwischen," 53.

[49]Gotthilf August Francke to George Whitefield, July 19, 1752, AFSt/H C 532: 7. As with the previous letter, the original is in Latin, and I again relied on translation assistance from Vincent Evener. Zehrer provides a partial translation into German. Zehrer, "Die Beziehung zwischen," 53.

[50]See entries from April 23, 1749 and September 19, 1750 in Urlsperger, *Detailed Reports*, 42, 146–147; on Boltzius's racism, see B. Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, 72–73.

[51]Goetz, *Baptism of Early Virginia,* 6–10. While Goetz's book is provocative, it must be pointed out that she is mistaken when she claims that within Christianity there was a "traditional link between baptism and freedom" (6), which was severed in Anglo-Virginia. Throughout Christian history, the connection between baptism and political or civil freedom has been denied and disputed. For another excellent study of Christian mission, slavery, and baptism in the American colonies, see Glasson, "Baptism."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640715000098 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Georgia, including, perhaps, between Francke and Boltzius's successor, Christian Rabenhorst.[52]

For Boltzius, however, the immediate focus remained whether slaves' conversions were fulfilling, or could fulfill, slavery proponents' providential expectations of missionary potential. In 1756, Boltzius reported on the 42 slaves who were living in Ebenezer, five of whom were children "born and baptized here." He explained that "they are better maintained in work, food, and clothing than in many other places, and are not allowed to work on Sundays for their food and clothes." Nonetheless, Boltzius bemoaned the slaves' spiritual state: "one unfortunately doesn't take time to bring them to the knowledge of the Christian religion." Six years after the introduction of slavery, Boltzius still discussed it with bitterness. "I find it terrifying," he wrote, "that these poor people—the same as cattle—remain in eternal slavery only to serve Christians with their work and in the end should be damned in the service of Christians. When one speaks publicly and privately on the topic and also acts with his office in the service of the negroes, it falls on deaf ears."[53]

Regardless of the Pietists' negative assessment of slavery and pessimism over conversion, in the end they referred the matter to providence, citing God's oversight and their hope for a future, retrospective perspective. While Boltzius continued to raise objections to slavery after its introduction, he also tried to understand it in terms of God's providence and care over missionary efforts. Boltzius tried to stop speaking against slavery—because, as he wrote, "God's hand could be involved in this matter"—and to illustrate concrete examples of God's direction over the Ebenezer community.[54] The community faced, for example, an ever-decreasing number of white servants and also lost to epidemics promising children, many on the verge of becoming valuable laborers. In 1750 an epidemic variously identified as Rothe Friesel, scarlet fever, and measles killed 13 children—or

[52]Rabenhorst wrote Francke in 1763, describing how he tried through example and by speaking to his slaves to bring them to Christianity, but he saw "no means and way to save them." He was pleased with their labor and esteemed their "truth and diligence" above white servants, but "they are and remain heathen, who, in order to please me well, convey the name of God in the mouth but do not desire him from the heart." Rabenhorst acquired slaves both through marriage and through management of the pastor's plantation in Ebenezer. Christian Rabenhorst to Gotthilf August Francke, February 21, 1763, AFSt/M 5B2: 65. It is unclear, however, if in using "heathen," Rabenhorst meant to indicate race or rather non-Christian, as was typical in early modern discussions of religion.

[53]Johann Martin Boltzius, "Nachrichten aus Amerika für Sr. Hochwürden Herrn D. und Prof. Francken," December 1756, Francke-Nachlaß der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz 32/10: 10. I viewed this item on microfilm at the Archive of the Francke Foundations in Halle. On slaves' use of Sundays for work and socialization, see Glasson, *Mastering Christianity*, 157–158.

[54]See, for example, entry from July 17, 1750 in Urlsperger, *Detailed Reports*, 93, 95.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640715000098 Published online by Cambridge University Press

approximately 5% of Ebenezer's population.[55] Boltzius considered that perhaps God's hand was involved—both in bringing the epidemic as a judgment and sending slaves as much-needed labor at a time of population decline. He wrote: "I do not feel that I can object when people wish to introduce Negroes into our community; in this as in all things I trust in God, who will show us in good time whether or not this practice is of any advantage [*nützlich*] to our people here."[56] Boltzius echoed here the same providential appeals he often made when epidemic and death threatened his fragile mission: he located consolation in hope of future clarity ("On judgment day we will know clearly") or in the reflection on past experiences, when God had shown mercy and aid ("the Lord always helps us up again.")[57]

In his 1752 letter to Whitefield, Gotthilf Francke came to terms with the legalization of slavery by relying on the providential thought and narration that had guided first his father's and now his own missionary enterprise. He wrote:

> Because this affair belongs to the will of the civil magistrate, we leave it to them, trusting that God is able, according to his most high wisdom, not only to turn away what we fear, but indeed to turn that which was going to be harmful to his kingdom into the growth of it. We must ask for this from him with constant prayers, and diligently move forward every work, which must be done with zeal, to where his counsel leads in all things which happen by his command or permission.[58]

Francke rejected Whitefield's conviction that slavery would grow the church, but Francke did accept the authority of Georgia's government as given by God. Like Boltzius, he expressed doubts and disappointment, but he also made peace with the contemporary political situation. Like his father—and Whitefield—Francke found in God's providence consolation for doubts,

[55]The first transport to Ebenezer included approximately 50 immigrants. Wilson, *Halle and Ebenezer*, 86; Russell Kleckley, ed. and trans., *The Letters of Johann Martin Boltzius: Lutheran Pastor in Ebenezer, Georgia*, in collaboration with Jürgen Gröschl (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2009), 35n79. The first transport was supplemented by transports in 1735, 1737, and 1741, bringing the population to 249 adults and children by the end of 1742. This number did not significantly change until the early 1750s, when new transports of immigrants and increasing childhood survival rates finally brought the population to approximately 650 people by 1754. Although small, this number nonetheless represented, according to Wilson, 12 percent of the population of the entire colony of Georgia at this time (Wilson, 99–100). See especially Boltzius's journal entries from January 28; October 12, 21; November 3, 6, 9, 17, 18, 24, 26, 28; December 6, 8, 9, 13, 1750, in Urlsperger, *Detailed Reports*, 161–207. For the translator's explanation of the Rothe Friesel, see his comments on v-vi, and 226n24.

[56]See entry from July 17, 1750, Urlsperger, *Detailed Reports*, 93.

[57]See entries from February 15 and December 23, 1750 in ibid., 27, 212.

[58]Gotthilf August Francke to George Whitefield, July 19, 1752, AFSt/H C 532: 7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640715000098 Published online by Cambridge University Press

prescription for action, and hope for God's future resolution and continuing direction in missionary endeavors.

IV. Conclusion

Providential thought and retrospective narration were crucial components of both Christian missionary efforts and the Christian acceptance of slavery in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. The Christian tradition of understanding God's direction over human activity was a main feature of eighteenth-century protestant mission, in which protestants from a variety of backgrounds found common ground in perceiving and describing God's providence as a spur to Christian action on behalf of others. This tradition is exemplified in the charitable work and writings of August Hermann Francke in Halle and in the writings and missionary endeavors of the many protestants he influenced, including Pietist missionaries in America and the Anglican revivalist George Whitefield.

The Christian acceptance of slavery in colonial Georgia depended on the providential thought and language that was developed in Christian missionary efforts and writings. In the end, a strong commitment to God's providence and the accompanying practice of retrospective narration allowed Christians to accept an abhorrent system of labor, whether because they saw it as a God-devised means of evangelism or as a system created by a divinely-appointed temporal government that Christians must obey. Some, like Whitefield, perceived with certainty God's direction over slavery by retrospectively discerning the institution from a future point, in which Africans' bondage provided the necessary finances for mission work and, further, allowed for their evangelization and eventual salvation. Others, like the Pietists, waited with anxiety on that forthcoming "yet"—positing a future perspective in which they might glimpse God's oversight and care in retrospect. Recognizing the common theological basis and narration behind mission and slavery reveals the potency of Christian arguments on behalf of slavery. Economic and social considerations certainly influenced eighteenth-century protestants' decisions to own slaves, but so did an entrenched—and often spiritually motivating—habit of providential thought.

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