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The SPCK and the American Revolution: The Limits of International Protestantism

Katherine Carté Engel

The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) occupied an unusual position in the British Atlantic as an internationally minded voluntary organization rooted in Anglicanism but also able to unite members of different Protestant groups. Its history during the American Revolution provides opportunity to examine the ideal of international Protestantism in the latter part of the eighteenth century. This investigation indicates that, despite many international ties and a strong sense of politically based international Protestant unity during the early decades of the century, members of the SPCK did not experience the Revolutionary crisis that ruptured the British Atlantic as a spiritual separation from their fellows in North America. International Protestant engagement within the SPCK was largely personal in nature, based on the experiences of a few individuals. Though the SPCK's regular publications create the impression of an organization leading an international Protestant community, an analysis of its membership reveals a profoundly English group. Thus, during the Revolution, the SPCK rallied to the British cause without a sense that an idealized Protestant union had been divided by fratricidal violence. This article builds on and supports the transnational perspective put forth by scholars in recent years and suggests that international Protestantism was varied and, in the case of the SPCK, politically limited.

The American Revolution was, among so many other things, a bloody and destructive war between two Protestant countries that highlighted the weakness of international Protestantism in the age of Revolution. In the first half of the eighteenth century, by way of contrast, ministers, missionaries, and lay people had attempted to draw the world's Protestants together into a single community. In the British Empire, revivalists, both within and outside the various established churches, worked to spread a new form of Protestant awakening and unity. Missionaries embarked on the task

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Katherine Carté Engel is an Associate Professor of History at Texas A&M University.

of converting non-Christians with new fervor. In one particularly striking effort, Scottish ministers in the mid-1740s began an international Concert of Prayer, and New England's Jonathan Edwards publicized the call, in hopes of bringing about the millennium. A preface to Edwards's "An Humble Attempt to promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer," declared that "the more extensive and incessant are these Prayers, ascending from the Circle of the Earth," the sooner Biblical prophesies would come to fruition. The image invoked here, of devoted Christians in every corner of the Protestant world joined together in "continual Watchfulness and Prayer," suggests belief in a shared Anglo-American Protestantism that transcended political boundaries, including the yet-to-be-created Anglo-American divide. Consciously emphasizing its far-flung nature, this idealized global Protestant community drew both vigor and meaning from its geographic reach.[1]

Grand hopes for a transatlantic, even universal, Protestant union were never realized. A much quieter moment can mark its failure: in the fall of 1775, as American troops besieged British forces in Boston at the onset of the American Revolution, a correspondent wrote to the London-based Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), an Anglican voluntary religious organization, about the brewing Atlantic squabble. He wanted the group to facilitate the prayers of Anglicans about what he evidently considered a religious crisis. His point was simple: he was "proposing to the Society to Publish and disperse Clause's to be inserted in the Prayers of Families & private person's Relative to the present Situation of Affairs in America." He "enclos[ed] Specimens" as suggestions. The writer, Mr. Watson, misjudged his audience. The SPCK was not interested in meddling in something it considered in the realm of politics. The assembled members who reviewed his request "agreed that the thanks of the Society be returned to Mr. Watson for his pious Designs; but that he be acquainted that the Society are of Opinion that they cannot with any Propriety be the first Movers in this Business."[2] In other words, the SPCK's leaders did not see the American Revolution as an opportunity that required their religious leadership because they did not see the growing imperial crisis as a religious matter. No record remains of precisely why Watson thought the "present Situation" demanded the prayers of devout Anglicans, but the SPCK's refusal to act on his request

[1]Jonathan Edwards, "An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth," (Boston: printed for D. Henchman, 1747), preface, 4–5. For the Concert of Prayer, see George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), 334–335.

[2]SPCK Minutes, vol. 27, October 3, 1775, Cambridge University Library (hereafter CUL). See also SPCK Letterbook A, 1770–1783, entry 29351, CUL.

nevertheless draws our attention to the nebulous and often ephemeral nature of transatlantic religious community in the latter part eighteenth century. The SPCK's commitment to international Protestantism could raise the hopes of a Mr. Watson, but it was not strong enough to compel the society's leaders into any action. Quite the contrary, in the moment of crisis, the SPCK acted to promote British interests against its fellow Protestants in North America. As the following will argue, the international and transatlantic ties built through the SPCK, one of the institutions most frequently cited as a source of early modern transnational religious community, had, by the latter part of the century, become largely rhetorical in nature.

It is beyond obvious to point out that ties of shared faith did not prevent the American Revolution from happening, and perhaps it is precisely because this fact is so evident that scholars have paid so little attention to how religious communities experienced the war, or to what impact the American Revolution had on ties built in the name of Protestantism.[3] This is a notable oversight. Historians of religion have developed a substantial body of scholarship pointing to the strength of transatlantic and international Protestant communities during the early modern era. Carla Gardina Pestana, for example, has argued that, despite significant diversity and institutional complexity, English "expansion [into the Atlantic world] established a broadly shared culture that united believers from different Protestant churches (and different ethnic and racial backgrounds) into a common Anglophone spiritual orientation."[4] A wave of scholars examining the early decades of the eighteenth century have elaborated the post-Puritan emphasis on a British Protestant empire in North America. Certainly, spreading and protecting Protestantism provided a rationale for colonization by both

[3]The historiography of religion and the American Revolution is vast, but tends to focus largely on the religious origins of the war within the colonies, see: Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); on the origins of the first amendment, see: Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1750–1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); or on the consequences of the US Constitution and the first amendment at the era's conclusion, see: Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989). For a recent general treatment, see Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). An important transatlantic counterpoint to a literature largely dominated by concern for the birth of the US political system is Susan Juster's *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). Individual denominations have been well studied also, including, for Anglicans, James B. Bell, *War of Religion: Dissenters, Anglicans, and the American Revolution* (New York: Palgrave, 2008); Rowan Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire, c. 1700–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Nancy L. Rhoden, *Revolutionary Anglicanism: the Colonial Church of England Clergy During the American Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

[4]Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 6.

Anglicans and dissenters from the established Church of England. British adventurers and philanthropists recruited German and French speaking Protestant refugees for colonial ventures, reflecting their belief that Protestants were superior settlers, more capable of building the kind of societies British leaders envisioned.[5] The mid-century revivals, in particular, have benefited from transatlantic and transnational reinterpretation. Frank Lambert has argued that "revivalists celebrated and publicized a movement they saw as sweeping across the world." Their writings shared "a growing sense of the awakening as . . . something global." A. G. Roeber has recently argued that "transoceanic" encounters pushed Protestants to redefine their conceptions of their spiritual fellowship in both ecclesiastical and spiritual terms, ultimately enabling the triumph of evangelical Protestantism.[6] The strength of these studies has been to demonstrate the interconnected nature of the Protestant world before the rise of the mission and abolition movements of the post-Revolutionary era.[7] Yet identifying international religious communities

[5]For North American inclusion in the politics of international Protestantism, see: Thomas S. Kidd, *The Protestant Interest: New England after Puritanism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004); and Mark Valeri, *Heavenly Merchandize: How Religion Shaped Commerce in Puritan America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 122–134. For the politics of religion and foreign policy in Britain, see: Tony Claydon, *Europe and the Making of England, 1660–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Steven C. A. Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism: Ideologies and the Making of English Foreign Policy, 1650–1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Andrew C. Thompson, *Britain, Hanover and the Protestant Interest, 1688–1756* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006); Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Tony Claydon and Ian McBride, eds., *Protestantism and National Identity, Britain and Ireland, c.1650–c.1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and R. Barry Levis, "The Failure of the Anglican-Prussian Ecumenical Effort of 1710–1714," *Church History* 47, no. 4 (December 1978), 381–399. For Continental Protestants in North America, see: Renate Wilson, *Pious Traders in Medicine: A German Pharmaceutical Network in Eighteenth-Century North America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); A. G. Roeber, *Palatines, Liberty, and Property: German Lutherans in Colonial British America* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

[6]Frank Lambert, *Inventing the "Great Awakening"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); 155; A. G. Roeber, "The Waters of Rebirth: The Eighteenth Century and Transoceanic Protestant Christianity," *Church History*, 79, no. 1 (2010), 40–76. See also: Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdman, 2001); W. R. Ward, *Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *The Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625–1760* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Susan O'Brien, "A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735–1755," *American Historical Review* 91 (October 1986): 811–832.

[7]For treatments of eighteenth-century religion that stress the transatlantic dimension broadly, see John W. Catron, "Evangelical Networks in the Greater Caribbean and the Origins of the Black Church," *Church History*, 79, no. 1 (2010), 77–114; Pestana, *Protestant Empire;* Daniella Kostroun and Lisa Vollendorf, eds., *Women, Religion, and the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Gisela Mettele, *Weltbürgertum oder Gottesreich: Die Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine als globale Gemeinschaft, 1727–1857* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009); Jonathan Strom, Hartmut Lehmann, and James Melton, eds., *Pietism in*

and sentiment at various moments across the century begs the question of how (or if) the cataclysm of war reverberated through their midst. The answer, I contend, is that such ties had largely withered before the war, complicating any simple narrative of a generally increasing global Protestantism from mid-eighteenth century revivals to the early nineteenth century.

The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, an influential eighteenth-century religious voluntary society, provides fruitful territory for an investigation of the shifting nature of international Protestantism. Voluntary societies, such as the SPCK, can be used to examine these questions because they had the potential to bridge political and sectarian boundaries. Unlike denominations—which grappled with and divided over complex questions of ecclesiology, of how (or whether) it was possible to make the invisible church visible, and of the Christian ideal of universality—voluntary societies were free to be as ecumenical or as exclusive as they wished. They could transcend or reinforce political boundaries depending on how they defined their purposes. Religious societies proliferated in eighteenth-century Britain among both Anglicans and Dissenters, and several had transatlantic and/or international presences. Although the SPCK was one of the first such groups, it was joined by: (most notably) the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), the Church of England's missionary wing; the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), a Scottish version of the SPCK which supported schools in Scotland and missionaries in North America; the Company for Propagation of the Gospel in New England and Parts Adjacent in America (also known as the New England Company, or NEC), a Dissenting group that supported missionaries in New England; the Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge Among the Poor (SPRKP), a Dissenting religious tract society quite similar in practice to the SPCK; and the Associates of Dr. Bray, an

Germany and North America, 1680–1820 (New York: Ashgate, 2009); Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evanglicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003); There is a significant body of scholarship examining nineteenth-century missionary and abolition projects. For an exemplary treatment of the latter, see Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). For works that reflect back to the eighteenth century in the context of later British missions, see: Andrew Porter, "Church History, History of Christianity, Religious History: Some Reflections on British Missionary Enterprise Since the Late Eighteenth Century," *Church History*, 71, no. 3, (2002), 555–584; Jeffrey Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise Since 1700* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Andrew F. Walls, "The Eighteenth-Century Protestant Missionary Awakening in Its European Context," in Brian Stanley, ed., *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 22–44; Daniel O'Connor, *Three Centuries of Mission: The United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel 1701–2000* (London: Continuum, 2000).

Anglican group that supported missionary work among enslaved Africans and the creation of parochial libraries to support parish clergy.[8]

Because these societies were a major mechanism for transatlantic communication among Protestants—particularly clergy—both within and between denominational groups, we can therefore discern from them something that investigations of individual denominations obscure: the varied cadences of investment in the Protestant community, that is, in the ideal of Protestant unity over a vast expanse of territory. Voluntary societies have received increased scholarly attention in recent years, as part of the effort to uncover globalizing trends within history. Examinations of missionary societies in particular have benefitted from this trend, but no consensus has emerged on the role missionary efforts or voluntary societies played in international Protestantism. Some scholars, such as Laura Stevens, have stressed the importance of these groups to a British cultural identity that eventually excluded colonists in North America, a position that is borne out by the current investigation. Others have disputed this argument because it seems to undermine the sincerity of the British missionary effort.[9] Yet neither of these approaches speaks directly to the place of transatlantic religious links in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic. By focusing on the dynamic nature of those ties, a more nuanced picture comes to light. The SPCK's relationship to international Protestantism can be traced in four stages: its early history as a leader in international Protestant causes; its sustained use of a broad language of Protestantism into the era of the Revolution; its development of an international leadership cadre with a deeply English membership; and the specific actions undertaken in North America during the American Revolution.

[8]For works on the SPG, SSPCK, NEC, and the Associates of Dr. Bray, particularly in with an Atlantic context, see: Travis Glasson, *Mastering Christianity: Missionary Anglicanism and Slavery in the Atlantic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Margaret Connell Szasz, *Scottish Highlanders and Native Americans* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007); Laura M. Stevens, *The Poor Indians*; Frederick V. Mills, Sr. "The Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge in British North America, 1730–1775," *Church History* 63, no. 1 (1994), 15–30; Donald E. Meek, "Scottish Highlanders, North American Indians, and the SSPCK: Some Cultural Perspectives," *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 23 (1989): 378–396; John C. Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy and Colonial Slavery: the American Correspondence of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1717–1777* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press; 1985); F. W. B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies, 1520–1799* (St. Leonards on Sea: Budd & Gillatt, 1963); William Kellaway, *The New England Company, 1649–1776: Missionary Society to the American Indians* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1962). For the Halle Pietists, see Renate Wilson, *Pious Traders in Medicine*.

[9]The literature on Protestantism as a unifying factor among Britons is vast. See Linda Colley's seminal *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992); for a historiographical treatment, see: J. D. C. Clark, "Protestantism, Nationalism, and National Identity: 1660–1832," *Historical Journal* 43, no. 1 (2000), 249–276; Ulrike Kirchberger engages this debate most directly (arguing against Laura Stevens) in *Konversion zur Moderne? Die Britische Indianermission in der atlantische Welt des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008). See also Travis Glasson, *Mastering Christianity.*

Together, these avenues of inquiry reveal that while members of the SPCK valued and represented international Protestantism in the British Atlantic, the connections they established nonetheless did not become the basis of a durable transnational Protestant fellowship into the era of the Revolution.

I. Building an International Society

The SPCK was organized in 1698 as part of the larger British movement for the reformation of manners, and it was part of the "religious society" movement linked to the rise of evangelicalism and pietism in the early eighteenth century.[10] This context, and its own activities, integrated it into a wider Protestant world. During its early decades, SPCK leaders built strong ties to Continental Protestant leaders, such as Philip Jakob Spener and August Hermann Francke. Its extended partnerships with the Halle Pietists in particular connected it to religious networks beyond the English-speaking world. It had an American, Henry Newman, as its Secretary, even as it also participated in the growth of a British, Protestant political identity developing during the same period.[11] The group was also theologically inclusive, even within Anglicanism. Its inner circle, through the era of the Revolution, included individuals active in Britain's growing evangelical movement as well

[10]The SPCK's archives are now housed at Cambridge University Library. For the period in question, they consist mainly of published materials, as well as the minute books of regular meetings. A very cursory catalogue of incoming letters was retained, but only a handful of actual letters remain. The analysis in this paper is based on the extant manuscript material and on printed sources. For works on the history of the SPCK, see Daniel L. Brunner, *Halle Pietists in England: Anthony William Boehm and The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1993); W. K. Lowther Clarke, *The Story of the SPCK* (London: SPCK, 1929); Craig Rose, "The Origins and Ideals of the SPCK 1699–1716," in John Walsh et al., *The Church of England c.1689–1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 172–190; Eamon Duffy, "The Society of [sic] Promoting Christian Knowledge and Europe: The Background to the Founding of the Christentumsgesellschaft," *Pietismus und Neuzeit* 7 (1981), 28–42; William A. and Phyllis W. Bultmann, "The Roots of Anglican Humanitarianism: A Study of Membership of the SPCK and the SPG, 1699–1720," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 33 (1964), 3–48. The larger history of the revival and evangelical movements is told in W. R. Ward, *Protestant Evangelical Awakening.* See also John Spurr, "The Church, the societies and the moral revolution of 1688," in Walsh et al., *The Church of England c. 1689–1833*, 127–142. Mentions of the SPCK in this context of the rise of international Protestantism appear in, for example, W. R. Ward, *Christianity under the Ancien Regime, 1648–1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 133–134; Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 67–83; Boyd Stanley Schlenther, "Religious Faith and Commercial Empire" in: P. J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: the Eighteenth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 128–150.

[11]For the American born Secretary to the SPCK, see Leonard W. Cowie, *Henry Newman: An American in London, 1708–1743* (London: SPCK, 1956).

as high church Anglicans.[12] In short, the SPCK embodied commitment to international Protestantism by providing an institutional venue to unite diverse Protestants within and beyond Britain in the cause of promoting their shared faith, despite the theological, ecclesiastical, or political boundaries that divided them.

The Society's ambitious goal was to raise the level of Christian devotion throughout the Protestant world. Explicitly dedicated to spreading "Christian Knowledge," it joined Protestants of many stripes while minimizing the various issues that usually divided them. It differed from its more well-known sister organization, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), whose official mission in the British empire (and its royal charter) both guaranteed it a field of action and placed it in an awkward position vis à vis those who resented Anglican authoritarianism.[13] The SPCK, on the other hand, was thoroughly voluntary and free to act both within and beyond Anglican circles. This distinction only increased across the course of the eighteenth century, as the SPG became a quasi-governmental body, with ongoing commitments to large numbers of missionaries and the ownership of a substantial sugar plantation in Barbados. The SPCK, in contrast, acted throughout the entire period wherever it chose, on British soil or elsewhere, and retained freedom to define its own mission.

From its inception, the SPCK had lofty goals: to "promote . . . the Interest of Religion, and the Good of Souls."[14] Its members believed that through their energetic labors they might invigorate Protestantism on a grand scale. To

[12]In its theological diversity, the SPCK reflected the wider Church of England of the era. As the evangelical movement continued to grow in Britain, members of evangelical religious activist communities and Anglican communities intertwined. Thomas Broughton, the SPCK's secretary between 1743 and his death in 1777, had strong ties to John Wesley and George Whitefield in the 1730s, though he subsequently distanced himself from that movement. Sir Roger Newdigate, who joined in 1761, was committed to High Church Anglicanism, while philanthropist John Thorton, who joined in 1746 at the age of 26, was connected to evangelical patroness Lady Huntingdon, John Newton, and poet William Cowper. Sir Harry Trelawney, who, like Newdigate was a baronet, joined in 1775, while a student Oxford. He then became a Presbyterian minister, then an Anglican minister, before finally converting to Catholicism in his old age. He seems to have flirted with Unitarianism in between. If he did become a Unitarian, he would have had company in the SPCK, where Thesophilus Lindsey was a member between 1764 and 1773, John Disney joined in 1769, and William Frend was a corresponding member before his eventual expulsion in 1789. Oxford DNB online and SPCK Annual Reports, CUL.

[13]The SPG's history during this period has been studied primarily for its role in the bishop controversy, and its efforts in North America have generally been depicted as a failure. See Bell, *A War of Religion* and Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*. For the most comprehensive recent treatment of the SPG, see Travis Glasson, "Missionaries, Slavery, and Race: The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World," Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2005.

[14]"A Letter from a Member of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in London to his friend in the Country, Newly chosen a Corresponding Member of that Society" (London: J. Downing, 1709), 4.

accomplish this, they supported the devotions of lay people and participated in correspondence among like-minded Christians, lay and ordained. In practice, the SPCK sought to achieve these ends through two broad initiatives. First, the organization became a dominant venue for publishing and distributing religious tracts and devotional materials. Members received packets of religious publications that they were to read and then to share with any who might need them. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the group distributed hundreds of thousands of tracts, pamphlets, prayer books, and Bibles for this purpose. Many of these publications emphasized the practical aspects of Anglican piety by railing against the scourges of sin and by providing encouragement for church attendance, proper prayer, and other devotional exercises. The oft-reprinted *The Whole Duty of Man*, for example, as well as Edmund Gibson's religious manuals, *Family Devotion*, *Sinfulness of Neglecting and Profaning the Lord's Day*, and *Excellent Use of Psalmody, with a Course of Singing Psalms*, all consistently appeared on the Society's catalogue and were therefore available to members inexpensively. In addition, the Society published tracts in Welsh and then in Manx, aiding efforts at religious reform and education among minorities in Britain. Second, the Society promoted the establishment of Charity Schools "for the Instruction of poor Children in the Knowledge and Practice of the Christian Religion, as professed and taught in the *Church of England*." This project fit the SPCK's mission, as its leaders believed they knew "how much the Promoting of Christian Knowledge, and a Conformity to the Precepts of the Gospel, depends upon a Right Education of Youth, especially such who through the Poverty or Ignorance of their Parents are in Danger of being abandoned to Ignorance, Idleness, and Vice[.]"[15] By supporting education, members hoped to reform what they inevitably viewed as the most sinful and irreligious segment of the population, the poor.

As the SPCK grew in the early decades of the eighteenth century, connections to Protestants beyond Britain became central to its work and gave it a presence in Continental Europe, India, and North America. Its activities drew attention from abroad, and the group's members became a focal point for religious activists both within England and on the Continent who wished to promote the cause of Protestant unity. The Society developed a particularly extensive relationship with Swiss reformers, including Jean Frederic Ostervald, and to religious leaders in the Savoy. Members of the SPCK valued this international position and publicized it explicitly.[16] Indeed,

[15]"A Letter from a Member," 16–17.

[16]Eamon Duffy, "*Correspondence Fraternelle:* The SPCK, the SPG, and the Churches of Switzerland in the War of the Spanish Succession," in *Reform and Reformation: England and the Continent, c. 1500–1750*, ed. D. Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 251–280; Sugiko Nishikawa, "The SPCK in Defence of Protestant Minorities in Early Eighteenth-century Europe," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 56 (2005), 730–748.

in a 1709 tract used to promote the organization, the SPCK's international activities were used to demonstrate the vigorousness and spiritual importance of its domestic projects. The group's success in publishing, the tract argued, "gives us great Reason to hope, that a diligent Pursuit of it will by degrees (through the Blessing of God) bring the Generality of the common People to a good Sense of the Importance of Religion, and a serious Concern for their everlasting Welfare." Such an outcome would be no mean feat, but "the Society are so fully convinced of the Reasonableness of such Hopes, that they have extended their Charity of this kind to other Parts; and have sent Packets of these little Books into *Ireland, New England, Holland, Switzerland*, and other Foreign Countries."[17]

Substantial projects grew out of these early efforts. Members corresponded with religious reformers in places like Muscovy, Sweden, Denmark, and Germany. These links were not mere publicity. As mentioned above, ties were especially deep between the SPCK and German Protestants. During the SPCK's earliest days, contacts between the Halle Pietists and the Society had been facilitated by Heinrich Ludolf, the secretary to Queen Anne's husband, Prince George of Denmark. Those links resulted in Francke's sending Anthony Wilhelm Boehm to London, a crucial event for the development of the SPCK-Halle cooperation that lasted for decades. Eventually, the SPCK supported missionaries, in partnership with the Halle Pietists, in Tranquebar (now Tharangambadi) on the southeastern coast of India, and in the newly founded North American colony of Georgia, where it assisted a substantial group of Salzburgers, Protestant refugees from Austria. These projects demonstrated the SPCK's desire to cooperate across denominational lines and to champion Protestants who suffered politically for their faith. A shared educational mission also united the SPCK and the Hallensians, and these projects provided evidence, the 1709 tract ultimately argued, "to convince us, that this is not only the Work of Men, but that the Hand of God is in it." Likewise, SPCK authors argued, the rapid growth of Francke's institutions at Halle, "grown so large as to become a sort of University," demonstrated God's favor for educational enterprises undertaken by the SPCK.[18]

The strong institutional and personal links between British, continental, and North American Protestants during the first third of the eighteenth century resulted in lasting efforts that remained vigorous throughout the century. Notably, however, new ventures linking the SPCK to Protestants in Europe

[17]"A Letter from a Member," 1709, 22.

[18]"A Letter from a Member," 1709, 19–20. For a full treatment of Halle-SPCK contacts during the first half of the century, see Brunner, *Halle Pietists in England.* For the SPCK-Halle partnership with regards to the Salzburgers, see Renate Wilson, "Halle and Ebenezer: Pietism, Agriculture, and Commerce in Colonial America" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1988).

or in the empire flagged by mid-century. Instead, the group's efforts focused on more local projects, such as the translation of the Bible into Manx and the support of clergy on the Scilly Islands. Nonetheless, the SPCK in these years should not be dismissed as moribund. By the third quarter of the eighteenth century, it was a well-established institution, with two generations of history behind it and significant missionary projects on two continents. It maintained a small but regular staff, and in 1777, its annual publication boasted of "upwards of Eight Hundred" corresponding and subscribing members. It continued to pour thousands of religious and devotional publications into the hands of the reading public.[19] Significantly, it continued to represent, in print, international Protestantism to its thousands of readers, and through this means it sustained the notion that Protestants in Britain were connected to—and leaders of—their fellow believers around the globe.

II. The SPCK in its Own Words

Despite its stability as an institution, as a voluntary society the SPCK had to solicit support from new audiences continually in order to survive. Deceased or lapsed members had to be replaced by new recruits. Exhausted funds had to be replenished. Enthusiasm had to be maintained. To do this, the Society followed the same formula as many of its peers. It held an annual sermon, in the case of the SPCK in conjunction with the "Yearly Meeting of the Children Educated in the Charity-Schools, in and about the Cities of *London* and *Westminster*," and then it published the sermon, preached by a leading Anglican, alongside a series of reports describing the group's members, accounts, and available publications. This lengthy document, which often ran to well over one hundred pages, began with a recital of the group's history and its ongoing business. The stated reason for continually renewing this history of its own founding and accomplishments was that "their Designs were not so generally known as they could wish, and consequently not so much encouraged as it was presumed they would be when further known." For its own success, then, the SPCK "communicate[d] to the World, from year to year, their Proceedings, and the State of their Affairs." The short history was updated and edited regularly, so that minor differences appear over time, though much the language remained consistent. This process of revision and reiteration makes the "Account" an important witness for how leaders viewed the Society's purpose. Similarly, the annual sermons offered

[19]"Account of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge," (London: J. and W. Oliver, 1777), 108.

opportunities for the organization to state its purpose to a wide audience. These texts presented the SPCK to the reading public as a leading body in an expansive and intentionally vague international Protestant fellowship in which geographic and theological differences were surmountable. Yet the writers of these promotional texts, annual reports, and sermons defined the Protestant world in very careful terms. These publications sustained a vision of international Protestantism through the era of the American Revolution, even as financial and personal ties had already begun to flag.[20]

Connections to and leadership among the international community of Protestants was central to the SPCK's vision of its work in the world, at least as presented in its publications. Through its "Account," the Society promoted the idea that it was internationally influential and that its activities furthered the cause of international Protestant unity, even if, by the 1760s, most of its newer projects were realized at home. To paraphrase Benedict Anderson's well-worn terminology, the "Account" created an "imagined" network of Protestant activists from around globe, and placed the SPCK at the central node. That community included corresponding members, "Persons in *Great-Britain* and *Ireland*, and other Protestant Countries," who were "chosen . . . on Purpose to acquaint [the Society] with the State of Religion in their Neighbourhood; to suggest such Methods of doing Good as occur to them; to distribute Bibles with such religious, as well as useful Books, as shall be approved of, and recommended by the Society."[21] Such phrases conjure an image of an eager fellowship of devoted laborers around the Protestant world, frequently submitting reports and providing ideas that the SPCK, in its wisdom, would endorse, modify, or reject.

The "Account" also emphasized the SPCK's international credentials and worldwide mission by comparing it to its much larger sister organization, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG). The SPCK's founding, several years before the SPG, as a "voluntary society" was retold, as was the subsequent spinning off of the SPG through the

[20]The "Account of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge" was published every year. Technically, the Annual Sermon and the "Account" were separate documents, though they were normally joined together and distributed. For this reason, they sometimes appear separately in bibliographic databases and library catalogues. For this survey, I used the "Account" for the years 1770–1790. Quotation, "Account of the Society," 1770, 4. Printing an annual report was a regular ritual engaged in by many organizations, and the various groups exchanged reports. The SPCK regularly received reports from the SPG, the Associates of Dr. Bray, The Society in Dublin for Promoting English Protestant Working Schools, and the Circulating Welsh Charity Schools, as well as a variety of hospitals. For a wider discussion of this genre, see Laura Stevens, *The Poor Indians*, 84–110, and Troy O. Bickham, *Savages within the Empire: Representations of American Indians in Eighteenth-century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 210–240.

[21]"Account of the Society," (London: John Rivington, 1783), 4.

granting of a royal charter for the purpose of "better carrying on of that Branch of their Designs which related to the *Plantations, Colonies*, and *Factories beyond the Seas, belonging to the Kingdom of England*." The SPCK thus predated and theoretically encompassed all that the SPG did. The 1770 "Account" then continued with a phrase later omitted: "from which time that excellent Work [of the SPG] has, by the Divine Blessing, been successfully conducted by that Corporation."[22] In 1783, it no longer seemed appropriate to reference the successes of the SPG in North America. Both "Accounts," however, then continued on to make the point that, as the SPG "being hitherto confin'd to the *British* Plantations in *America*," most of the SPCK's founding members had remained in the Society where they could labor to promote the cause of religion both within Britain and beyond the empire in the broader world. The brief comparison between the SPG and the SPCK therefore depicted the latter—despite its status as the private, unchartered, relatively less well funded, and overall less official—as the more extensive of the two organizations. Its activities unfolded not merely in England or the British Empire, but in "other Parts of the World." This history, renewed annually, asserted the importance of the SPCK through its international connections and thus promoted the idea that it was part of a fellowship championing the advance of true Protestantism. Projects far from home, in the East Indies or in Georgia, allowed the SPCK to claim it had a mission even more wide ranging than that of the SPG.

Claiming the widest possible field of action, the SPCK chose to elide any theological or ecclesiastical distinctions that might have limited its scope. By using the generic language of "religion" and "Protestants," as it did in the "Account of the Society" discussed above, the SPCK positioned itself at the center of a broad Protestant world in need of British leadership, even after the outbreak of fighting within the British Empire. Such terminology permitted the SPCK's readers a great deal of latitude to imagine for themselves just who was included in the SPCK, or even the Protestant, fold. An Anglican with evangelical sympathies might envision enthusiastic revival uniting Protestants across theological divisions and including, for example, Dissenters in New England. Another might assume that the outcome might be ecclesiastical unity of all (but also only) the Reformed nations in Europe. This pattern of flexible language that served to create the appearance of religious links between Britain and other Protestants appeared in the sermons preached at SPCK annual meetings as well. In 1776, Richard Kaye noted that the "pious and incessant Attention of this Society" had not "been confined to the native Subjects" of Britain, but rather "They have succoured

[22]"Account of the Society" (London: J. and W. Oliver, 1770), 4–5.

their reformed Brethren in various Instances of Distress."[23] If the Society's actions beyond Britain represented the pinnacle of its work, and the group's leadership Britain itself marked the heights that other Christian nations should aspire to reach. In particularly self-congratulatory language, Anthony Hamilton preached in 1778 that "Justice must be done to the general Spirit and Character of the Times we live in, and the Country we inhabit, distinguished far beyond all others in the Bounty and Magnificence of its charitable Institutions."[24] Edward Bentham decried the sins of the poor, but "trust[ed] that, with all their Faults, our Commonalty are better inclined, better tempered, and less selfish than the Populace of other Nations."[25] Kaye, after arguing that human action would help prepare the "Kingdom of this World [to] become the Kingdom of the Lord and his Christ," argued that this task, which was being facilitated by "the frequent Communication between the most distant Parts of the Earth," fell especially to the British, as that kingdom was "a Maritime and Commercial Nation, possessed of Territories throughout the Universe, and enlightened with the purest Rays of divine Truth."[26] These constructions of British superiority emphasized simultaneously connections between Britain and other nations *and* a hierarchy with Britain at its peak.

The bulk of the text of the "Account" during the Revolutionary era was composed of a chronological recital of the SPCK's activities, covering the period from 1698 to 1762. Here too, the SPCK gave meaning to the category of "Protestant," through the subjects it discussed, and, at the same time, both emphasized and delineated the geographic and political distinctions between itself and the recipients of its efforts to raise up and unify the Protestant world. The group's projects facilitated the benevolent homogenization of Anglicanism within Britain, and its intertwined presentation of these domestic projects among international efforts suggested that work among Protestants in Wales, in Europe, in North America, and in India were all essentially similar undertakings. Treatments of the Society's support for charity schools and workhouses thus appear alongside its

[23]Richard Kaye, "A Sermon Preached in the Parish Church of Christ-Church, London, on Thursday, May the 23rd, 1776, being the Time of the Yearly Meeting of the Children Educated in the Charity Schools, in and about the Cities of London and Westminster," (London: W. Oliver, 1776), 23.

[24]Anthony Hamilton, "A Sermon Preached in the Parish Church of Christ-Church, London, on Thursday, June the 3d, 1773, being the Time of the Yearly Meeting of the Children Educated in the Charity Schools, in and about the Cities of London and Westminster," (London: J. and W. Oliver, 1778), 9–10.

[25]Edward Bentham, "A Sermon Preached in the Parish Church of Christ-Church, London, on Thursday, April the 30th, 1772, being the Time of the Yearly Meeting of the Children Educated in the Charity Schools, in and about the Cities of London and Westminster," (London: J. and W. Oliver, 1772), 22.

[26]Kaye, "A Sermon Preached," 24–26.

international efforts, such as its work with the Danish and Germans to support missionaries in the East Indies and its efforts to rescue and support Protestant refugees from Salzburg, Austria. The record of this last endeavor remained largely unchanged through 1783, despite the fact that the Revolution had driven the Society's missionary to the Salzburgers of Ebenezer, Georgia into exile in Florida, and then, by the middle of the 1780s, back to London. More prominent in this history than the SPCK's work in North America, however, were lengthy discussions of the SPCK's project to bring a more standard, English Christianity to the rest of Britain. The SPCK labored both near and far to serve the needs of Protestants. As any reader would certainly conclude at the end of the account, no other category than "Protestant" would serve to describe the recipients of the SPCK's largesse. Lutherans were lined up next to Anglicans, Welsh next to English, North Americans next to English. Though the Scilly Islands were much closer than Georgia, Protestants in both places needed the services of the SPCK. Correspondents in Halle, Germany, were not within the political boundaries of the British Empire, but they shared in the same religious work. Through this ritual reiteration, the SPCK gave substance to a "Protestant," rather than Anglican or English identity, one that was purposefully global, connected, and vibrant, even as it was also ephemeral.

III. The SPCK's Members and Leaders during the Era of the Revolution

The SPCK's publications suggested the existence of a pan-Protestant community through the era of the Revolution, but the actual people who leant their names, money, and time to the SPCK during the same period offer a more complicated picture. Indeed, alongside broad internationalist rhetoric there existed two almost opposed versions of SPCK community. On the one hand, the Society's leadership represented the diversity of London's Protestant populations. On the other, its hundreds of members were overwhelmingly English with only a few dozen coming from other parts of Britain or of the empire. The divergent characteristics of the SPCK's membership and its leadership (which do not appear to have been in any conflict) point to the Revolutionary era as a moment of shifting Protestant identity, when internationalist aspirations wilted before nationalist sentiment.

The evidence for who joined the SPCK is found in its annual publications. Readers who were inspired by the vision of international Protestantism presented in the annual "Account of the Society" were thus given names upon which to hang this desirable image, in the form of the "List of Subscribing Members." This was followed by a very brief list of "Foreign

Members," and then a five-page list of "Ladies Annual Subscribers," the earliest of who dated from 1750. At more than twenty pages, the list of members was among the longest elements of the lengthy annual publication, and it appeared immediately following the sermon, recital of the society's history, and the brief "Form for recommending Members." An imagined reader, after having been edified by the sermon and enticed either by the proud possibility of recommending a new member or the hope that one might join such a group, could peruse the very concrete list of individuals who already had this honor. These men, the Subscribing Members, had been elected after having been recommended in formulaic language printed in the group's "Standing Orders" (published in 1741) and its annual "Account of the Society." The qualifications were political first, moral second. Recommenders certified that a candidate was "well affected to His Majesty King George, and his Government; and to the Church of *England* as by Law establish'd."[27] Members were also supposed to be "of a sober and religious Life and Conversation[,] and of an humble, peaceable, and charitable Disposition."

Although living in England was not a requirement of membership, it was the characteristic, after gender, most shared by those who joined. Subscribing members, hundreds of whom are listed by name in the annual "Account" lived throughout England, but only a handful came from elsewhere. In 1770, a few resided in Ireland or the Isle of Mann, and one came from Guernsey. Twenty hailed from Wales. Only four were from the western side of the Atlantic: the Attorney General of Jamaica, and one each from Maryland, North Carolina, and South Carolina (all Anglican clergy). All four were still members in 1776, all still listed in their original locations. Two more, both serving official posts, were in Bengal in the latter year. From the perspective of formal membership, therefore, the SPCK reinforced an English, rather than an Atlantic or a Protestant identity for the organization.[28]

The Englishness of the members is both striking and significant considering the group's tradition of international engagement, international leadership, and rhetoric of Protestant connections. Importantly, no formal mechanism from the Society's "Standing Orders" required such a narrow geographic definition, although the requirement of loyalty to King George might well have

[27]"The Standing Rules and Orders of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge," (London: 1741), 4–5.

[28]See the "Account of the Society" for 1770 and 1777; Bell, *A War of Religion*, 222–245. John Barnett, the minister listed in SPCK rolls as being in North Carolina in 1777, had actually deserted his posted in 1771, having been "charged with Crimes, too base to be mentioned." He served a parish in Virginia between 1771 and 1772. Presumably he was too busy to keep the SPCK up to date on his location, and the SPG, who had employed him in North Carolina, omitted to update its sister organizations records. John C. Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy and Colonial Slavery*, 331.

hindered those outside the British Empire. New members had to be recommended by two other members, but those who lived outside of the Bills of Mortality (which encompassed only London and its immediate environs) only needed to be recommended by one other member. These recommendations could be made on paper, using a form provided in the Annual Report. Structural limitations therefore existed, as it would have been difficult to join with no prior acquaintance of another member, but were hardly insurmountable for those who traveled through London, or knew others who did. Undoubtedly, many of its well-connected members had relatives or acquaintances who had traveled beyond the British Isles. Moreover, the organization was, by the outbreak of the American Revolution, three-quarters of a century old, long enough for the original members to have children and grandchildren who might well have moved beyond the narrow confines of their elders. Yet despite formal and structural flexibility, the SPCK never became an imperial organization, even in areas like Virginia, where the Church of England was established. At this most basic level, therefore, the SPCK did not provide even Anglicans in the British Atlantic with a format for correspondence and communication about shared issues.[29]

The category of Corresponding Members, reinforces the idea that the SPCK remained deeply English. In 1777 the number of members (for 1776) was listed as "upwards of Eight Hundred." Based on the rolls for that year, about eighty-five percent of total membership fell into the category of "Subscribing." According to somewhat vague language in each year's annual "Account" (it is unclear if the statement refers to the Society's early days or its present), the remaining "Corresponding" members were "such Persons in *Great Britain* and *Ireland*, and other Protestant Countries, as are chosen to correspond with the Society," and to generally further the Society's goals.[30]

[29]"Standing Rules"; "Account of the Society," 1770. The members were less unified in other ways. The Englishmen who joined the SPCK were often members of the clergy, including many bishops, but a not-insignificant number of other professions were represented as well. Merchants, bankers, physicians, and quite a few postal employees joined. Membership likely accorded both a degree of social standing and also reflected personal interest. Anthony Bacon, for example, a London merchant and iron manufacturer, joined in 1764. Born into a shipping family and raised by his maternal uncles in Maryland, he was deeply involved in Atlantic trade in tobacco and slaves. He served in the House of Commons during the American Revolution, and published several pamphlets on the American conflict. It is possible that Bacon's interest in the SPCK grew out of his experience in politics, or stemmed from relationships formed when he was in Maryland, where one of the Society's founders, Thomas Bray, had spent time. Either way, those explanations would not serve for Thomas Healde, a prominent doctor, lecturer, and author, who also joined. Higher up the social ladder, the evangelically inclined Lord Dartmouth, president of the Board of Trade during the Stamp Act crisis and step-brother of Prime Minister Lord North, was a member. Sir John Hawkins joined in 1775.

[30]"Account of the Society," 1770, 4.

Although, as noted above, such language created the impression that the SPCK was engaged in all areas of the Protestant world, in practice, this category too was also overwhelmingly English. Yet the SPCK limited neither category exclusively to residents of Britain, or even to Anglicans. Two notable exceptions demonstrate this point. In 1770, the first name entered in the catalogue of Subscribing Members was "Rev. Mr. Albinus, Minister of the Protestant Church at *Ravensen*, in the Dutchy of Lunenburgh," in Hanover, Germany. Later, in 1784, Philip Quaque, an African-born Anglican clergyman who spent a half century as a SPG missionary to Cape Coast, Ghana, was "Chosen a Corresponding Member by Balloting."[31] A final category of membership, ill-defined in the SPCK records, supports the conclusion that the organization was simultaneously international in outlook and deeply English. A short list of "Foreign Members" was appended to the principal list each year, presumably all "Corresponding" members. The names of these five or six individuals, all clergy in Continental European churches, adjacent to the general list of members connected and yet separated English and "other" Protestants.

If the membership of the SPCK reinforced an English, Anglican identity, rather than a more generalized Protestant one, the group's leadership creates the opposite impression, bolstering the SPCK as a locus of international Protestantism, albeit one led by England. Despite a large subscribing membership, the society was, and, according to historian David Brunner, always had been, the project of a few, self-selected individuals.[32] Middling clergy comprised the vast majority of the SPCK's most active members. Many of these were second-tier religious polemicists, like Robert Poole Finch and Thomas Broughton, who served as the Society's secretary from 1743 until his death in 1777, when he was succeeded by his son-in-law, George Gaskin.[33] Most were members of the clergy, such as Herbert Mayo, John Waring, Samuel Kettilby, Thomas Lyttelton, and Robert Markham, son of the archbishop of York.[34] A few wealthy laymen joined the group, including bankers and SPCK treasurers Henry Hoare and Robert Gosling, as well as Sir John Hawkins, Samuel Johnson's "unclubbable" friend and "other" biographer.[35] Although women appeared in the rolls as "Subscribers" (and not members), they did not, apparently, ever appear at meetings.

[31]This conclusion is based on an assessment of the SPCK minutes, including the acceptance of new members, between 1773 and 1787. For Quaque, see SPCK Minutes, November 2, 1784, CUL.

[32]Brunner, *Halle Pietists in England*, 25–27.

[33]Oxford DNB online.

[34]This list of names emerges from the SPCK Minutes, 1773–1787, CUL.

[35]J. L. Smith-Dampier, *Who's Who in Boswell?* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1935, reissued 1970), 156.

More surprising and notable for our purposes, however, is the presence in the SPCK's inner circle of a significant number of foreign clergy, men who served the congregations of German and French Protestants in London.[36] A few had roles in the Hanoverian court. These non-Anglicans were among the SPCK's most active leaders. John Adam Lampert was minister of the German Lutheran Congregation of the Savoy. Frederick William Pasche was "Reader of His Majesty's German Chapel at St. James." One of the longest standing and most active members of the SPCK was the Reverend Jacob Bourdillon, who was the pastor of the large Huguenot congregation at Spital Fields. John James Majendie, a second generation Huguenot minister, served the French church at the Savoy, underwent ordination in the Church of England, and then became preceptor and chaplain to French-speaking Queen Charlotte after her arrival in England in 1761. These were some of the SPCK's most active members. London's Germans were, quite naturally, particularly interested in the missions to Ebenezer, Georgia, and to India, as those missions were joint efforts also sponsored by the Halle Pietists, but that alone does not explain the deep and pervasive engagement in all the Society's affairs on the part of London's foreign Protestant clergy.[37]

The presence of these foreign Protestants at the center of the SPCK reflects the organization's international perspective, purpose, and history. Most immediately, working with the SPCK was clearly an international experience. The accents of the individuals around the table in Holborn must have been as varied as the liturgies of the churches they represented. The small community of men who made the SPCK a major part of their regular activities experienced it as an explicitly international effort. It linked religious activists who operated within the English context of the SPCK to those for whom international Protestantism was not simply an imagined community, but a personal experience in a transnational career. The presence of men such as Burgmann, Bourdillon, and Pasche also raises the question of why these foreign Protestants would choose to lead the SPCK. They could have simply joined, and then enjoyed seeing their names in print each summer when the annual list was published, as many of the group's hundreds of members probably did. It is possible, however, that the SPCK, with its internationalist history, self-presentation, and projects, may have

[36]For treatments that deal with foreign Protestants in England, see Panikos Panayi, *Germans in Britain since 1500* (London: Hambledon Press, 1996); Bernard Cottret, *The Huguenots in England: Immigration and Settlement, c. 1550 to 1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Tony Claydon, *Europe and the Making of England*; Andrew C. Thompson, *Britain, Hanover and the Protestant Interest*.

[37]See Oxford DNB online and SPCK annual "Accounts." See also Susanne Steinmetz, "The German Churches in London, 1669–1914," in Panikos Panayi, *Germans in Britain since 1500*, 49–72.

been more receptive to their efforts than some of the other voluntary societies in London. It thus provided a venue for their activism, and increased their personal connections and influence, without requiring they join the Anglican Church. Also, it is worth speculating that the SPCK's ongoing international profile, particularly as presented in its own publications, reflected the personal investment of its leaders in the causes of an earlier era: the ties between Protestant England and Hanover and the fate of the Huguenots. Yet by the time of the Anglo-American crisis, England's religious communities had begun to turn inward. International Protestantism as promoted by the SPCK's leaders excited less emotion (and loyalty) than did the growing political rift that eventually divided both individual denominations and the empire as a whole.

IV. SPCK Initiatives in the Atlantic World during the era of the American Revolution

In the era of the Revolution, the SPCK supported the idea of a generalized Protestant identity in two ways, through its self-presentation in its promotional materials and through its diverse leadership. But neither the broad construction of a "Protestant" community that existed in print nor the society's membership indicate what relationship members of the organization felt they had to fellow Protestants or even fellow Anglicans in North America. Moreover, no matter how significant these sources of Protestant cooperation may have been for individuals or even leaders, they did not become the basis for any conversation about how to understand, or withstand, the violent fissure that divided the empire. In the face of conflict, the international Protestantism rooted in the SPCK did not provide Anglo-American Protestants with an alternative community, or even means of communication, when their political ties were threatened. SPCK dealings with the North American and Caribbean colonies during the era of the Revolution suggest that the Society failed to translate its linguistic commitment to action around the Protestant world into substantive ties to Protestants living in those places, particularly in North America. The SPCK did not see the American Revolution as an event that threatened any transatlantic religious fellowship it might have built in the past. Quite the opposite, the SPCK's efforts during the Revolutionary period were militantly pro-British. This record reinforces the idea that the international religious activism promoted by the SPCK did not form the basis for significant transatlantic religious community, either within or beyond the British Empire.

One explanation for why the SPCK did not concern itself with building ties to America may have been that when the group's European leader imagined

North Americans, they focused primarily on potential Indian and African converts to Christianity rather than on the British and European Protestants who had settled there. Emphasizing the period before the Revolution, Laura Stevens has argued that the publications of the SPG and of the SSPCK used sympathy for Native Americans as a way to enhance Britons' image of themselves as sensitive Christians. Certainly, the pamphlets and books distributed by the SPCK support the idea that Britons imagined the New World as peopled by racial others. When the North American colonies did appear in SPCK works, it was in a form that emphasized the non-Christian populations, such as Africans and Native Americans, rather than the Euro-American colonists who were overwhelmingly, if perhaps only nominally, Protestant. Thomas Wilson's 1741 tract, *Knowledge and Practice of Christianity made Easy; or, an Instruction for the Indians*, for example, was readily available.[38] A pamphlet attributed to Society regular John Waring entitled "A Letter to an American Planter from his friend in London," also supports the idea that North America figured more prominently as a home to racial others rather than as the location of a substantial Protestant community. This tract encouraged the conversion of enslaved Africans by their masters, and it critiqued the religious zeal of those who did not undertake such activities.[39]

Like the broadly Protestant language that appeared in the SPCK's promotional tracts, Waring's "Letter" promoted the idea of British Protestant superiority, yet it did so by chastising colonists rather than bringing them into the fold. Waring derided the colonists for their failures as slaveholders and as Christians. The vast majority of the didactic epistle cautioned the reader that there could be no valid objection to Christianizing slaves. Slaveholders had shirked their religious duties, the "Letter" argued, through a lack of empathy. "Though our Bodies are distinguished by a Diversity of Colour from the *Negroes*; Doth this Diversity make any real Abatement to the Worth of their Souls?" This treatment made the slaveholding colonists

[38]Stevens, *Poor Indians*. The SPG often complained that slave owners were a prime impediment to their work spreading Christianity. For Wilson's tract in the context of SPG missionary work, and the larger context of SPG work among slaves, see Travis Glasson, "Missionaries, Slavery, and Race," chapter 3. In an exception that proves the rule, in 1773, Uzal Ogden, a future leader of the post-revolutionary Episcopal Church in New Jersey, visited London for his ordination. He presented the SPCK with fifty-seven copies of each of four tracts, including "An Address to the Youth of America," but that sophomoric effort did not pertain in any way specifically to the colonies, reinforcing rather than complicating the idea that America as such did not figure significantly in the SPCK imagination.

[39]Although it was originally printed by the Associates of Dr. Bray (where Waring was Secretary between 1754 and 1779) in 1770, it did not arrive at the SPCK offices until 1774, and it was not placed in the Society's catalogue until 1781, near the end of the era of the American Revolution. For a full discussion of this tract, see John C. Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy and Colonial Slavery*, 293–302.

both less than their Protestant brethren in England, because they were subject to scolding and admonition, and similar to their slaves. American colonists likely did not see either depiction as appealing. Near the end, Waring added a note of patriotic condemnation: "But how aggravated must the Guilt of Englishmen be in this Respect, who, through the Blessing of God, have the Light of the Gospel shining in Purity and Splendor among them. Our Rivals the *French* are, I am told, extremely attentive to the religious Instruction of their *Negroes*." Through the writer continued using the first person plural, the tone was one of rebuke: "As we are fond of copying their Follies, let us not be ashamed of imitating their virtues."[40] Waring's words evoked an image of British colonists as failures—failed in their efforts to be British and failed in their efforts to be Protestants. Texts such as these did little to promote the notion that Anglican colonists were participants in a shared process of spreading Protestantism to the Western hemisphere; quite the contrary, they were even impeding that task. The absence of North American colonists within the SPCK's internal discussions, and their marginalized position within its publications, suggests that the colonists occupied, at best, a subordinate role in this international Protestant community.

The SPCK's lack of interest in British colonists resulted in its leaders' ignorance about what was happening on the ground in North America.[41] As one might expect from a group that lacked deep or regular correspondence with co-religionists in America, the SPCK's efforts to supply books to SPG ministers were not wholly successful. SPCK leaders were ignorant of the accommodations and practical ecumenism that developed in such a diverse environment. In 1771, for example, Peter De la Roche, an SPG missionary to the German, French, and English speaking communities in Lunenberg, Nova Scotia, reported back to his superiors that he had a received a "large Parcel of french tracts upon controversy; & the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge sent me also some of the same." Unfortunately, they were "of no service at all; we have no Roman-catholics in this Settlement, two only excepted who come regularly to church, & who would probably cease coming if I were to give them these tracts to peruse."[42] The SPCK's limited presence in the colonies also meant that it received few reports about their mission to the Salzburg Lutherans in Ebenezer, Georgia, apart from periodic updates from the Society's missionary. Even these could be quite spare. In 1770, readers of the annual publication learned only that the new missionary at the Georgia post, Christopher Frederick Triebner, had arrived

[40]Waring, "Letter to an American Planter," 8, 20–21.

[41]I have found only one reference of someone from the colonies spontaneously contacting the SPCK during the era in question, and that is of a £100 legacy from a "Mr. Merritt" in Providence, Rhode Island, on November 5, 1774. SPCK Minutes, CUL.

[42]De la Roche to SPG, November 28, 1771, SPG American Material, Series B, item 174.

safely. His more extensive report had been lost at sea. The following year, readers learned that there were then 158 Salzburgers living in Ebenezer, alongside many other Germans. Pleading ill health that kept him from writing a more comprehensive report, Triebner reported merely "He has the Pleasure to observe, that some good Fruits of his Ministry have appeared in his Congregation, though there is not want of Tares among the Wheat." Only in 1772 did a longer account arrive. After the outbreak of the Revolution, correspondence became even more intermittent.[43] The limits of SPCK communication with Triebner suggest that even after decades of supplying missionaries and printed material to the colonies, the SPCK had not fostered deep ties even with those whom they supported.

The American Revolution did not so much damage an international community of Protestants supported by the SPCK as it demonstrated the largely rhetorical nature of the community that had existed in the years before the war. A brief exploration of a single individual illustrates this trend. Thomas Lyttelton joined the SPCK in 1778, and he almost immediately became an active member of the community's inner circle. At that time, he was listed as Curate of Limehouse, in London. Subsequently, he held the same post at St. Ann, in Middlesex, and then, in 1790, he moved to Wansted. He had also, in 1776, become a member of the Associates of Dr. Bray, and he soon was secretary of that organization.[44] Lyttelton's origins are obscure. He had been ordained by the Bishop of Chichester, and he received a bond as a missionary for Bermuda in 1767.[45] Education seems to have been near to his heart. While in Bermuda, he sought to revive the proposal first made by Bishop George Berkeley in 1724 to build a college there to train missionaries and educate Native Americans; however, he met inaction from the local government. Lyttelton's time in Bermuda was not harmonious, and he quarreled with his fellow ministers over fees for performing weddings and pew rentals. He left Bermuda during the early years of the Revolution, but he noted how difficult that conflict was for those on the island, as they were dependent on the mainland for supplies. "My daily prayer," he wrote to the Bishop of London in the summer of 1775, "is that the Americans would make due Submission, that the Royal favour may be extended to them, that peace may be restored, & all united in Love and Friendship, esteeming ourselves to be possess'd of one common

[43]SPCK "Account of the Society", 1770–1783; see also, Renate Wilson, "Halle and Ebenezer: Pietism, Agriculture, and Commerce in Colonial America."

[44]"Account of the Society," 1778, 1779; Associates of Dr. Bray (1785); and Clergy of the Church of England Database, http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/index.html. Record ID 135027.

[45]A. C. Hollis Hallett, *Chronicle of a Colonial Church: 1612–1826, Bermuda* (Bermuda: Juniperhill Press, 1993), 153–154; Edwin S. Gaustad, "George Berkeley and New World Community," *Church History* 48, no. 1, (March 1979), 5–17.

Interest."[46] Through his time there and his subsequent work, Lyttelton earned a reputation as a knowledgeable person on colonial subjects. Although he had been back in Britain for more than a decade, in 1788 the Bishop of London was still seeking Lyttelton's advice on West Indian affairs.[47]

The striking reality is that despite the expansive language of the SPCK's publications and the international character of its leadership, this little-remembered curate, with limited experience in the New World, in time became the backbone of the SPCK's relationship with North America. His actions intensified the idea that the Americas were religiously, racially, and politically separate from the SPCK's fellowship. He oversaw the two principal projects that linked members with the western Atlantic and kept that region before the attention of the SPCK. First, he repeatedly requested books be sent to Bermuda, Barbados, and once for Granada, for the poor inhabitants there. The funds generally came from "Mr. Belke's Charity," a bequest that had been left for just such a purpose. The requests began in 1780, and there were nine such requests from him over the next six years.[48] The only other such effort came from a Dr. Morice, who "in a Letter recommended the sending, some Books & Tracts for the religious Instruction of the poor Inhabitants of Reeling in New Foundland, where there is no Clergyman." But the provisioning of the libraries in the islands was largely a one-man job, and it illustrates that Lyttelton did not forget the education of West Indians, an effort he had labored for during his decade in Bermuda.

Sending books to the Caribbean was, however, dwarfed by Lyttelton's second undertaking for the SPCK, one that could hardly be said to have built transatlantic Protestant community: the distribution of over 47,000 copies of Thomas Broughton's *Christian Soldier* to men fighting in British uniforms in 1780 and 1781. The sermon, originally composed in 1737, reminded soldiers of the importance of Christian behavior and Christian models for their actions. In 1780, the short tract was admitted on the SPCK's catalog, and 10,000 copies were printed. It was repeatedly reprinted, in equally and more vast numbers. Lacking a formal mechanism to force each soldier to carry one, Lyttelton took on the task of contacting commanders of each Regiment in order to promote the distribution of the tract.[49] Because Lyttelton was solely responsible for much of the group's efforts in the Atlantic world, his

[46]Lyttelton to Terrick, June 27, 1775, Fulham Papers at Lambeth Palace Library, vol. 17, 39–41, Microfilm reel 9 World Microfilms, 1970–1978.

[47]Hallett, *Chronicle of a Colonial Church*, 316–317. Lyttelton to Bishop of London, Fulham Papers at Lambeth Palace Library, vol. 15, 78–79, Microfilm reel 8. For disputes with his fellows, see William Wilson Manross, *The Fulham Papers in the Lambeth Palace Library* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 244–45.

[48]SPCK Minutes, September 5, 1780; October 3, 1780; August 13, 1782; July 1, 1783; November 4, 1783; December 2, 1783; February 1, 1785; October 14, 1786, CUL.

[49]SPCK Minutes, 1780–81, passim. See especially tabulation at December 11, 1781, CUL.

personal experiences before joining the SPCK in 1778 had a strong influence on how the organization acted during the Revolution. He was, through his time in Bermuda, predisposed to attend to the education of people in the Islands. Yet he was also an Englishman who found the American Revolution a source of difficulty and personal inconvenience. Though he may have been concerned about the consequences of the war for the Anglican community supported by the British Empire when he became involved in the Society's primary effort regarding the war, Lyttelton helped reinforce the division between the colonists and the British rather than providing a bridge between them.

The fact that a single individual defined the parameters of Atlantic engagement for many others in the Society repeats itself with respect to the Society's connections to European Protestants. For example, many of the individuals whose names appeared in the short list of foreign members in the "Account" had, at one time, been present in London. Personal, transnational experience seems to have been prerequisite for inclusion in the SPCK's foreign membership list. Gustav Burgmann, for example, became a member in 1770. He attended meetings in the early 1770s, presumably while he held the post of Lutheran Minister at the Savoy. He was an active missionary trying to convert Jews to Christianity, which probably explains why he undertook the task of translating the "Address to the Jews" into Hebrew for the SPCK board. Three thousand copies were printed. By 1777 Burgmann appeared on the short list of foreign members of the SPCK; at that time he was a minister at "Muhlheim and Cologne on the Rhine."[50] Another foreign member, August Urlsperger, was the son of Samuel Urlsperger, one of the Halle pietists responsible for the refugees in Ebenezer, Georgia, earlier in the century. As an adult, he maintained the ties his father had built to the Society.[51] Likewise, Christian Lewis Gerling, who was also listed as a foreign member in 1777, had been "Chaplain of His Majesty's German Chapel at St. James" in 1774.[52] The main exception to this rule are those linked to the Pietist establishments at Halle, but even those ties, as Daniel Brunner has noted, were based on the personal presence of Anton Wilhelm Boehm in London at the turn of the eighteenth century.[53] International Protestantism, as maintained by the SPCK, was dependent on the actions a few individuals who had made great journeys. Though it was

[50]SPCK Minutes, November 2, 1773, CUL; "Account of the Society," 1777.

[51]1777 "Account of the Society," 1777; Urlsperger, "An Address to all Sincere Promoters of the Kingdom of God Resident in England Concerning the Establishment of an Association for Promoting, Vindicating, and Reviving Christianity in its Fundamental Purity in Knowledge and Practice," (n.p., 1780).

[52]SPCK Minutes, October 4, 1774, CUL.

[53]Brunner, *Halle Pietists in England*, 181.

continually elaborated in rhetoric, this was precarious ground upon which to build a global fellowship.

V. Conclusion

The American Revolution came as a call to British patriotism for members of the SPCK, a crisis of physical safety for many Anglican clergy in the colonies, and an ecclesiastical problem for American Episcopalians after the war. It was not, however, generally perceived as a moment of spiritual crisis within the British Atlantic world. Given the myriad networks and connections that tied the colonies to Britain and Protestants more generally to an ideal of international Protestantism in the early modern era, the apparently easy acceptance of war within the Protestant community is striking. This situation is at least partially explained by investigating what sorts of religious community were sustained by groups like the SPCK, societies that aspired to join Protestants across political, geographical, and denominational boundaries. The international Protestantism nurtured by the SPCK during this era was profoundly limited. It existed only as a narrow network of personal connections and as a rhetorical strategy, because the organization did not promote deep or substantive ties among Protestants, even within the British Atlantic. The heyday of international Protestant cooperation, in the early eighteenth century, had yielded lasting partnerships between the SPCK and the Halle Pietists and it bequeathed to the organization a diverse leadership. Yet these connections did not form the basis for a sustainable Atlantic or international religious community.

As years of political controversy led ultimately to the outbreak of violent rebellion, the colonists and British subjects at home came to see that they had nurtured very different ideas of their political relationships. Yet this realization should not be taken to mean that the international religious community fostered by the SPCK had never been more than a religious cloak for imperial (or anti-imperial) motives. Quite the contrary, Protestant communities possessed the same ambiguities as other kinds of networks linking the colonies and Great Britain, be they commercial, political, ethnic, or familial. Colonists were, and yet simultaneously were not, part of the community of Protestants as defined by the religious activists at the SPCK. That society's efforts to build international, trans-denominational networks had not resulted in the kinds of formal institutional structures or deep personal affections that would provide alternative lines of communication during the war years. After the outbreak of the war, these vague relationships were clarified quickly, and the SPCK worked to shore up British political and religious unity. In November 1776, members of the SPCK committee agreed to print and distribute 20,000 copies of a sermon by Robert Finch

intended to prepare for a general fast day occasioned by the American Declaration of Independence and, over the course of the war, several sermons regarding the conflict were either received or printed.[54] These documents stressed, above all else, obedience to King and loyalty to country. In this war between two Protestant countries, for all its inspiring rhetoric supporting apolitical religious fellowship, the SPCK was undisputedly British.

Two narratives must be reconciled to understand the low ebb of international Protestantism at the time of the Revolution. First, the SPCK championed and reiterated a rhetoric of broad Protestant identity. Its diverse leadership gave life to both this language and to a variety of ongoing projects within and beyond Britain. When the SPCK's correspondent, Mr. Watson, asked it to distribute prayers about the American war, he likely imagined an organization that reflected this profile. Then, too, it must also be remembered that the Society failed to emerge as a champion (futile as its efforts undoubtedly would have been when it came to stopping the war) for religious fellowship or even communication within the British Empire during the war years. Indeed, its membership and its outlook by the 1770s indicate that even after eighty years of work, it had not become (or did not remain) a meaningful presence around the empire. These conflicting images are relevant to scholars of Atlantic religion, as they indicate that transatlantic Protestantism was neither a unifying nor a substantive concept for many Anglicans, despite the geographic scope of their fellowship. While religious activists of many denominations issued calls for prayer and traded notes about their shared efforts, such links, when they went beyond a denomination, were largely personal rather than institutional. The concept of "Protestantism," at once a source of unity and of hierarchy, facilitated ambiguity rather than providing grounds for clarity. Transnational investment in global Protestant community was far from stable in the era of Revolution, and, in practice, did little to mediate or soften the political differences that cut through the Atlantic world.

[54]SPCK Minutes, November 26, 1776, CUL. Robert Pool Finch, "Seasonable Reflections Adapted to the Approaching Fast," (London: W. Oliver, 1776); George Campbell, "The Nature, Extent, and Importance of the Duty of Allegiance: A Sermon Preached at Aberdeen, December 12, 1776, being the Fast Day appointed by the King on account of the Rebellion in America," (Aberdeen: J. Chalmers and Co., 1777); Robert Pool Finch, "A Sermon Preached in the Church of St. Michael, Cornhill, on Wednesday, February 10, 1779, being the day appointed for a General Fast," (London: W. Oliver, 1779); William Hughes, "A Sermon Preached at one of the Parish Churches in Northampton, on Wednesday the 10th of February, 1779, being the day appointed by Royal Authority, for a Fast," (Northampton: Thomas Dicey, n.d.). For a broader discussion of the role of fast day sermons in the American Revolution, see: Paul Langford, "The English Clergy and the American Revolution," in *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late-Eighteenth Century*, Eckhart Hellmuth (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 275–308; Henry P. Ippel, "British Sermons and the American Revolution," *Journal of Religious History* 12 (1982), 191–205.