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A Mission to Reform Manners:

Religion, Secularization, and Empire in Early Modern England

A dissertation in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

Naomi Johanna Taback

2013

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Mission to Reform Manners:  
Religion, Secularization, and Empire in Early Modern England

by

Naomi Johanna Taback

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Margaret Jacob, Chair

This dissertation looks at three voluntary societies formed in London shortly after the revolution of 1688. These societies, with overlapping membership, shared a broad vision for the improvement of manners and morals throughout the burgeoning British Empire. The Society for Reformation of Manners, founded in 1691, called for the enforcement of the civil laws against prostitution, swearing, drunkenness, gambling, and other moral crimes. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, founded in 1698, established schools and distributed books—forming some of the first public lending libraries—throughout England and its colonies. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, founded in 1701, sent missionaries abroad to convert, educate and civilize the European settlers, African slaves, and American Indians.

I show that in response to the uncertainties of the post-revolutionary period and the establishment of religious toleration in 1689, religiously motivated reformers advanced new ideas about the nature of society. They looked to shared manners, habits, customs and mores—rather than shared religious beliefs and practices—as the binding agents of society. Reformers described the benefits good manners brought individuals and communities; good manners, they said, were essential to a stable, commercial, tolerant society. Thus I show that some of the most religious people in this period spoke in secular terms. As the ideas and practices of religious toleration became more firmly rooted in English society, people turned to manners as the glue that held the community—or nation—together. This is the birth of a particular strand of social thinking.

This dissertation then follows the process by which ideas of religious diversity were transformed in the context of the colonies. The societies hoped to encourage better—and more uniform—manners and habits on both sides of the Atlantic, bringing all peoples of the empire under a common cultural denominator. In doing so, they created a new imperial ideology. An explication of the writings of these reformers, then, offers new insights into the making of secular culture in the Atlantic World and the origins of the Enlightenment in England.

The dissertation of Naomi Johanna Taback is approved.

Felicity Nussbaum

Lynn Hunt

Margaret Jacob, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

For my parents

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This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Gene Taback and Gail Perlow Taback, who first instilled in me a love of ideas. My sister Daria has been a true friend and constant source of inspiration. I owe special thanks to Jake, who has remained my comrade through it all.

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## **Introduction**

This dissertation offers an intellectual history of social and moral reform in England and its colonies in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It looks at three voluntary associations formed in London shortly after the revolution of 1688. These organizations, with overlapping membership, shared a broad vision for the improvement of manners and morals throughout the burgeoning British Empire. Collectively, they set out to police the streets, modernize the prison system, create schools and libraries, and send missionaries to convert, educate and civilize the European settlers, African slaves, and American Indians across the Atlantic.

I argue that in response to the uncertainties of the post-revolutionary period and the establishment of religious toleration in 1689, religiously motivated reformers advanced new ideas about the nature of society. They were moderate Anglicans—and sometimes Puritan allies—who remained committed to the principles of religious toleration, but feared its consequences. When the public was broadened to include people with a range of religious views, anxieties arose over what would hold the community together. While seeking greater religious toleration, ironically they found social cohesiveness in something secular. They looked to shared manners, habits, customs and mores—rather than shared religious beliefs and practices—as the binding agents of society. Reformers described the benefits good manners brought individuals and communities as bodily, commercial, and social; good manners, they said, were essential to a stable, progressive, tolerant society. Thus I show that some of the most religious people in this period spoke in secular terms. As the ideas and practices of religious toleration became more firmly rooted in English society, people turned to manners as the glue that held the community—or nation—together. This is the birth of a particular strand of social

thinking. An explication of the writings of these reformers, then, illuminates a growing secularization and the origins of the Enlightenment in England.

Using the printed sermons, books and pamphlets as well as records and correspondences of these voluntary associations, I look at how ideas circulated among reformers, both elite and non-elite, through the early eighteenth century. The Society for Reformation of Manners, founded in 1691, called for the enforcement of the civil laws against prostitution, swearing, drunkenness, gambling, trading on Sundays, and other moral crimes. Leading reformer Thomas Bray and his organization, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, founded in 1698, established schools and distributed books—forming some of the first public lending libraries—throughout England and its colonies. Bray’s other organization, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, founded in 1701, sent missionaries abroad to convert, educate and civilize the European settlers, African slaves, and American Indians. Thus, I follow the process by which ideas of religious diversity were transformed in the context of the colonies, where a different set of cultural and social demands were in place. The societies hoped to encourage better—and more uniform—manners and habits on both sides of the Atlantic, bringing all peoples of the empire under a common cultural denominator. In doing so, they created a new imperial ideology.

This dissertation shows some of the consequences of the revolution of 1688 in England. Although historians have explained these events in terms of a restoration of England’s ancient liberties, some historians now argue that they were in fact revolutionary in character, and responsible for the creation of a modern British nation.<sup>1</sup> Much was left uncertain in the

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). For a different view, see Scott Sowerby, *Making Toleration: The Repealers and the Glorious Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

aftermath: political and religious questions that were hardly resolved when the civil and ecclesiastical hierarchies were re-established in England in 1660 continued to haunt post-1688 English culture. In this study, I show how reformers worked to reshape social life in the period following the revolution.

The new political and religious landscape in England after 1688, especially after the establishment of a limited toleration for Protestant Dissenters in 1689, offered fresh hope to moderate Anglicans and Presbyterians that their society could continue to be improved. The key to making a better future was to figure out how men and women might live together in peace and unity despite religious differences. Thomas Hobbes had famously described one solution in his *Leviathan*: the sovereign could arbitrarily determine religion for all his subjects. But the reformers presented another: belief, they argued, could remain a private matter, subject to individual conscience, as long as public behavior was made to conform to exacting social conventions. The notion that force could not be applied to belief, but only to behavior, became central to the ideology of the reformers. Certainly, reformers thought that men and women whose beliefs were unorthodox should be convinced of their error; but they did not think it could be done by coercive measures. Behavior, in contrast, ought to be regulated by legal force. The members of the community, then, had a responsibility to actively monitor and discipline each others' conduct through the execution of the moral laws.

Many historians have pointed to religious toleration as a central Enlightenment value, and have explained how the idea developed in the West along with ideas about democracy and individual freedoms. It is now often assumed that religious toleration is a vital component of modern liberal societies.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, religious intolerance is shown to be an essential

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Ole Peter Grell and Roy Porter, eds., *Toleration in Enlightenment Europe*

characteristic of pre-modern societies, totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, and “oriental despotisms” of the non-European world. People who view religious toleration as a natural “right” have argued that it should be exported, along with related Western ideals, to other parts of the world.<sup>3</sup> However, new histories of toleration are framed in opposition to a “Whig” tradition, which describes the rise of toleration as a linear trajectory.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to the traditional history of ideas, which focused on the writings of important thinkers like Spinoza, John Locke and Voltaire, these new histories turn their attention to how religious toleration was carried out in practice. They show how toleration developed out of the demands of contingent social and cultural circumstances. One of the most important insights to come out of this scholarship is that toleration was not the same thing as a right to religious freedom.<sup>5</sup> It was often the outcome of a social necessity—a desire to create order and peace rather than from a concern about rights.<sup>6</sup> It is not surprising, then, that many new historians of toleration draw on the methods of social and

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Justin Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696-1722* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003); Lynn Hunt, Margaret Jacob, and W. W. Mijnhardt, *The Book that Changed Europe: Picart and Bernard's Religious Ceremonies of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Belknap Press, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Some historians have recently pointed out that the story of the expansion of ideas about toleration is told to justify this goal. See, for instance Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 356.

<sup>4</sup> For a review of the classic Whig accounts of toleration, see Jeffrey R. Collins, “Redeeming the Enlightenment: New Histories of Religious Toleration,” *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 81, no. 3 (September 2009), 609. A recent book on toleration that maintains a rather linear view of its progress is Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). Jonathan Israel can also be added to this list, although he emphasizes the Netherlands as the birthplace of toleration, whereas traditionally, scholars have focused on England as well. Most of the books in this tradition point to rise of “reason” as central to this processes—for instance, greater interest in “rational religion.”

<sup>5</sup> New histories of toleration show that toleration and persecution are not necessarily contradictory. Since the middle ages, toleration, a pejorative term, was seen as a necessary evil—a practical means of “putting up” with heterodox groups and beliefs. See: Bejczy, I. “Tolerantia: A Medieval Concept.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1997), 365-84; Kaplan, *Divided by Faith* (2007); Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred* (Manchester, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey, R. Collins, “Redeeming the Enlightenment: New histories of Religious Toleration,” *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 81, no. 3 (September 2009), 629. The impetus to create order, peace and unity in a society could lead simultaneously to persecution and to toleration; see Collins, 614.

cultural history to construct their narratives.<sup>7</sup> This dissertation argues that both ideas and practice must be considered if we are to understand social reform in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in England. It shows that there was a strong connection between the practical desire for order and unity, and the development of a philosophical position that argued for greater religious freedoms.

This study is part of an emerging literature that tries to show how toleration could ultimately be coercive, both in the context of the metropole, and when it was exported to the colonies. Toleration was, in the words of Jeffrey Collins, “as much a civilizing mission as a liberating one.”<sup>8</sup> One of my central claims is that in this period toleration was connected to ideas and practices of social control. Reformers, who not only endorsed liberty of conscience in theory, but also associated with individuals of different religious convictions in practice, could at the same time be intolerant toward nonconformist behavior.

In placing so much emphasis on good behavior, rather than belief, reformers contributed to an early attempt to rethink the characteristics and logic of public institutions—police force, schools, libraries, hospitals and prisons. Reformers were champions of the New Science, and they thought that the order in the body and on the streets should mimic the order of the natural world. They were influenced by the clear and simple language of latitudinarians such as Wilkins and Tillotson, who thought all knowledge should be organized according to rational methods. Thomas Bray, for instance, compiled catalogues of books in order to schematize knowledge.

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<sup>7</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred* (Manchester, 2006); Anne Goldgar, *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters, 1680-1750* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995). Those scholars interested in the social practices of toleration have looked at the Reformation; those interested in the ideas, the Enlightenment.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey, R. Collins, “Redeeming the Enlightenment: New histories of Religious Toleration,” *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 81, no. 3 (September 2009), 630; Ethan Shagan, *The Rule of Moderation: Violence, Religion and the Politics of Restraint in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Reformers created libraries and charity schools for the poor members of society in an effort to discipline their bodies and minds. The drive to rationally organize their world can also be seen in the very way that reformers ran their organizations: they kept minutes of their meetings, they printed reports of their progress, they circulated useful forms and information, and kept many other kinds of records.

The voluntary societies, organized by private English citizens, advocated for new forms of social order outside the traditional spheres of church and state. These societies, as well as other kinds of clubs and associations, flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>9</sup> Reformers organized themselves socially for social ends; they knew that they could only accomplish their ends as a collective. Their private societies were models of the kind of society they aimed to create.

The authoritative study of the rise of the “associational world” in early-modern England is Peter Clark’s *British Clubs and Societies, 1580-1800*. Clark argues that associations were crucial for creating a sense that people had the power to improve society themselves. He concludes, “when we return to the key issue of whether clubs and societies contributed to new concepts and realities of progress in early modern Britain, the answer...seems to be strongly in the affirmative. This was a world that was conscious of being caught up in the dynamics of change and improvement, and aware that voluntary associations had a key role to play in that process.” Associations, in his words, proved to be “an important bridge to modernity.”<sup>10</sup> This dissertation shows the ways that religious people could begin to conceive of human beings as shaping their society rather than being subject to God’s providence. The reformers I look at

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associated World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), and Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Clark, *British Clubs and Societies* (2000), 471.



were deeply religious, and fully believed that the hand of God directed the course of history. But nevertheless, by focusing on reforming social ills, they began to articulate a new, more secular view of society itself.

The idea of society, for reformers, simply meant the rules that govern behavior. By privileging these rules, they presented a concept of man as a social being. Historians have argued that modernity is characterized by the development of a more secular way of understanding the world, which locates meaning not in religious, but social life. One of the aims of this dissertation is to show how people in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could begin to describe a new morality that was not based on transcendental principles—either spiritual or rational. Although reformers were committed to both a providential and rational view of the world, they began to focus on mundane social arrangements: things like manners, customs and habits.<sup>11</sup> A logical—though unintentional—consequence of their ideas was that social life could be organized without a transcendental framework. Here, then, I can trace a concrete way that secularism developed without people meaning it to or even knowing it was happening.

The clear social orientation of the reformers' ideals places them squarely within the early Enlightenment tradition, which gave new meaning to ideas of the social. As Keith Baker has put it, “‘Progress,’ ‘civilization,’ ‘toleration,’ ‘unity’: such keywords of enlightened philosophy are unthinkable without ‘society’ as their implied referent; they all assume its logical priority and moral value as the essential frame of collective human existence. ‘Society’ and ‘Enlightenment’

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<sup>11</sup> Reformers believed in a universal human nature, but were more interested in talking about manners, which were malleable. As historian Richard Sher has said, “The notion of modern manners, and society as a whole, being transformed by the spread of humanity and sensibility went to the heart of the Enlightenment worldview.” In, *The Enlightenment & the Book: Scottish Authors & Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland & America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 33. And: “Civilization was by definition the product of a softening of the heart stemming from this attribute, which...was grounded in Christianity,” *ibid.* Many scholars have pointed to the development of a public sphere, the republic of letters, and a print revolution in this period as responsible for forming a culture of politeness in the eighteenth century.

belong together.”<sup>12</sup> Society, as the sphere of human action, implied a certain variability and mutability in human affairs that played particularly well into a reformist mentality. If society could be made, it could also be remade. According to Koselleck, during the Enlightenment change became conceptually possible, and with it, the prospect that the future could be better than the past. It is not surprising then that a new emphasis was placed on progress, and that human history became “directed toward an active transformation of the world... Since the future of modern history opens itself as the unknown, it becomes plannable—indeed it must be planned.”<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Swift called his own time, “The Projecting Age,” referring to the many projects begun in an effort to change society for the better.<sup>14</sup> The reformers investigated in this study are prime examples of the kinds of people who embraced this spirit of progress.

Secularism has often been explained in terms of a process: as the divine became increasingly “absent” from early-modern society, other worldly institutions took its place. Substitutions for the divine have been described as everything from nationalism to new conceptions of the self.<sup>15</sup> One of the central questions about modernity has been, did religious institutions transform into secular ones? And, if so, how?<sup>16</sup> Karl Marx, describing how the sacred had vanished in modern times, proclaimed that “all that is solid melts into air.” Weber similarly pointed to “the disenchantment of the world.” Most scholars have located this moment

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<sup>12</sup> Keith Baker, “Enlightenment and the Institution of Society: Notes for a Conceptual History,” in *Main Trends in Cultural History*, Willem Melching and Wyger Velema, eds. (Amsterdam, 1994), 95.

<sup>13</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Dudley W. R. Bahlman, *The Moral Revolution of 1688* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).

<sup>15</sup> Charly Coleman, “Resacralizing the World: The Fate of Secularization in Enlightenment Historiography,” *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 82, no. 2 (June 2010), 373.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, Jonathan Sheehan, in *The Enlightenment Bible* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), has shown how the Bible transformed from a sacred theological work into a cultural work—with historical, literary, moral and educational value.

of change sometime in the eighteenth century.<sup>17</sup> The question, then, is, was the Enlightenment connected to a decline in faith? Certainly, the traditional view of it is that it was.<sup>18</sup>

An older historiography identified secularism as the key feature of the Enlightenment and modernity. The now classic narrative of the Enlightenment was presented in Peter Gay's two seminal works, *The Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (1966) and *The Enlightenment: The Science of Freedom* (1969). In these accounts, Gay pointed to increasing unbelief—or secularism—as one of the defining features of this era. Paul Hazard described the late seventeenth century as a period of crisis because, he argued, Europe was transitioning from a religious to a secular society. Leslie Stephen, in his *History of English Thought*, traced the divorce of faith and morality during the eighteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Recently, Jonathan Israel has produced three large volumes on the “Radical Enlightenment,” in which he argues that modern, Western values—including secularism, individual freedoms, and democracy—are the fruits of an intellectual tradition stemming from Spinoza and other materialist thinkers. Anything that cannot be made to conform to this “radical,” secular picture, Israel excludes from his enlightenment narrative altogether.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York, 1946), 129-156. Many scholars, from Marx to Foucault, have pointed to the French Revolution as the pivotal moment for modernity and the triumph of a new secular world view. A few dissenting voices, like J. C. D. Clark, argue that the *ancien regime* lasted into the nineteenth century. See Clark, *English Society 1688-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Norton, 1995); Paul Hazard, *The European Mind: The Critical Years, 1680-1715* (Cleveland, 1963); Paul Hazard, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century: From Montesquieu to Lessing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954); John Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion: The Age of Enlightenment in England, 1660-1750* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).

<sup>19</sup> Paul Hazard, *The Crisis of the European Mind: 1680-1715* (New York: NYRB Classics, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Israel has presented a picture of a radical Enlightenment that centers it in the Dutch Republic and France in opposition to a moderate enlightenment, centered in England and France (with Locke, Hume and Voltaire as its representatives). For him, the moderate enlightenment was about making compromises between faith and reason. Israel's second book of his trilogy, *Enlightenment Contested*, focuses on the “Radical Enlightenment” and theories of toleration; his last in the trilogy, *Democratic Enlightenment*, focuses on the “Moderate Enlightenment,” including

While historians like Israel have focused on the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason, and celebrated its effects on contemporary society, other scholars have been cooler in their assessment of this intellectual tradition and its legacy.<sup>21</sup> The Enlightenment has come under attack from theorists on the political right, who blame it for having advanced new values such as individualism, rights, and profit at the expense of older values such as community, civic virtue, and morality.<sup>22</sup> From the left, a postwar critique of the Enlightenment by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who identified the origins of totalitarianism within the age of reason, was subsequently expanded on by postmodern and postcolonial scholars, especially in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>23</sup> One fruitful avenue of inquiry recent scholars have pursued is to look at how the enlightenment emphasis on "universal man" contributed to the classifying of "others" outside the

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Locke, whom he situates within the latitudinarian tradition, as well as Hume. For Israel, atheism, not rational religion, was behind the development of toleration.

<sup>21</sup> For a review of enlightenment historiography today, see Karen O'Brien, "The Return of the Enlightenment," *American Historical Review* (December 2010), 1426-1435. We can add to the list of champions of the Enlightenment Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American Enlightenments* (London, 2008); Stephen Eric Bronner, *Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Louis Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (); Tzvetan Todorov, *In Defence of the Enlightenment* (London, 2009)

<sup>22</sup> Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (second edition, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*; J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Hont and Michael Ignatieff, eds., *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>23</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). An earlier indictment the age of reason can be found in Carl L. Becker's *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1932). For an assessment of the postmodern critique of the Enlightenment, see Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hanns Reill, eds., *What's Left of the Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question* (Stanford, 2001). For the postcolonial critique, see Daniel Carey and Lynn Festa, eds., *The Postcolonial Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Colonialism and Postcolonial Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). In particular, the Enlightenment's emphasis on universal concepts was attacked by postmodernists, its civilizing mission by postcolonialists. Against Horkheimer and Adorno, see Ole Peter Grell and Roy Porter, eds., *Toleration in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

boundaries of the human. At the heart of this issue is the question of inclusion and exclusion, and the development of notions of difference in the Enlightenment.<sup>24</sup>

Scholars are now beginning to take a more nuanced approach to the Enlightenment, choosing neither to celebrate nor to condemn it entirely. As one historian of the Enlightenment has put it, such a stark choice—between a picture of the Enlightenment as the source of everything right or as the source of everything wrong with modernity—“encourages the misapprehension of the complex—and often contradictory—character of the Enlightenment.”<sup>25</sup> This dissertation aims to bring to light some of those contradictions.

Some of the finest scholarship on eighteenth-century thought, which acknowledges such complexities, have focused on the role of religion in the Enlightenment.<sup>26</sup> We now understand that the Enlightenment was not always antithetical to religion. New studies attempt to show a more intimate relationship between the two, and are considering, in the words of Charly Coleman, “the extent to which the origins of secularism should be located within religion itself, rather than in absolute opposition to it.”<sup>27</sup> This dissertation intends to build on this growing literature that sees secular ideas emerging—often unintentionally—out of religious ones. Marcel

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<sup>24</sup> William Max Nelson, “Making Men: Enlightenment Ideas of Racial Engineering,” *American Historical Review* (December 2010), 1364-1394. The question remains, do we find in the Enlightenment the origins of a “universalist” or a racist theory of human beings, or both? Did the Enlightenment present people as fundamentally equal, or did it differentiate people in new, and perhaps even deeper ways than ever before? Or did the Enlightenment begin to present a culturally plural view of peoples, as Muthu has argued it did?

<sup>25</sup> William Max Nelson, “Making Men: Enlightenment Ideas of Racial Engineering,” *American Historical Review* (December 2010), 1391.

<sup>26</sup> See works by Roy Porter, J.G.A. Pocock, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Dale van Kley, David Sorkin and Jonathan Sheehan.

<sup>27</sup> Charly Coleman, “Resacralizing the World: The Fate of Secularization in Enlightenment Historiography,” *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 82, no. 2 (June 2010), 372-373: “While secularization traditionally referred to the collapse of traditional beliefs and forms of observance in the face of modern standards of rational inquiry, it has also come to designate the means by which secular concepts, institutions, and ideals emerged out of, but also within, theological antecedents.” And, he continues: “Secularization...not more often describes a nonlinear movement originating within religion itself that effectively rendered divine referents unnecessary for ordering the human world.”

Gauchet, in his important work on the rise of secularism, *Disenchantment of the World*, wrote that “Christianity proves to have been a religion for departing from religion.”<sup>28</sup> By looking at the reforming movement, I argue, we can begin to see some of the mechanisms at work in that process. Furthermore, some of the most interesting ideas of the period, this dissertation tries to show, came out of reactions to radical thought. Attempts to resist atheism produced—unintentionally—some of the most innovative ways to reimagine society.

Some historians, building on Habermas’s theory that the eighteenth century witnessed the development of a “public sphere,” have focused on the social realities of the Enlightenment, looking closely at the Republic of Letters, coffeehouses, salons, clubs and societies, the role of women, new forms of sociability and politeness, and the rise of a reading public.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, my approach to intellectual history does not follow the model offered by the classic history of “great ideas.” Rather, it attempts to reconstruct the ideas shared by both elite and non-elite men: famous and forgotten preachers, reformers of a commercial and pious “middling sort,” and poorer missionaries in the colonies. The ideas of the reformers were in dialogue with the more well-known ideas of the British Enlightenment thinkers, Hobbes, Newton, Locke, Toland, Mandeville, Shaftesbury, Berkeley, and Hume. Thus, I trace how ideas circulated within the larger cultural sphere of this period, and show how this thinking was intimately connected to the

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<sup>28</sup> Marcel Gauchet, *Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4.

<sup>29</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (MIT, 1989). Some examples of this approach to the Enlightenment are found in Richard Sher, *The Enlightenment & the Book: Scottish Authors & Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland & America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006), Karen O’Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Anne Goldgar, *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters, 1680-1750* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), Margaret Jacob, *Strangers Nowhere in the World: The Rise of Cosmopolitanism in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), Margaret Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), Brian William Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.)

actions of men, in creating volunteer organizations, and working to shape individuals and society.

Finally, most scholars have seen European contact with the wider world as contributing to the development of ideas about religious toleration, secularism, and Enlightenment.<sup>30</sup> Knowledge of other peoples led some Europeans to reevaluate their own dogmas. As Sankar Muthu has put it, “To the extent that such travel writings shaped the thinking of those who drew upon them, the variety of social forms and behaviour portrayed in these writings pointed to the relativity of European institutions, behaviour and norms. In part, Rousseau’s and Diderot’s philosophical anthropologies sought to prove that the injustices and inequalities of European societies were not inevitable or permanent. For them, social, psychological, and technological transformations over time demonstrate humans’ self-construction and malleability.”<sup>31</sup> Muthu, in showing an anti-imperial strand of thinking in the Enlightenment, argues that conceptions of man transformed from a universal natural man, to a particular artificial—or cultural—man. “For them, the art (or culture) that constitutes human practices, beliefs, and institutions is necessarily diverse and also, importantly, in many respects, incommensurable.”<sup>32</sup> However, this was not the conclusion that reformers drew. Instead, they wanted to import culture to “uncivilized” men and women, especially those in the English colonies. For them, human beings were malleable not in order to be left to their own devices, but because they could and should be shaped by good ideas and good habits. Thus, this study looks at how ideas first formulated in London were taken

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<sup>30</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Leslie Stephen could say that knowledge of other peoples gained through European exploration, led Europeans to question their truths—many embraced a new skepticism—which led to new ideas about religious toleration and led to an overall secularizing process. See Leslie Stephen, *A History of English Thought in the Eighteenth-Century* (London, 1876).

<sup>31</sup> Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 47-48.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. He continues: “Consequently, non-Europeans, including nomadic peoples who were often viewed as exotically uncultivated and purely natural, were members of societies that were artful, or cultural; they were simply artful in a different manner, one that could not be judged as intrinsically superior or inferior.”

abroad into the context of the colonies. I argue that education/discipline/manners could unite diverse people at home was transported across the Atlantic and became central to the civilizing process carried out there.

The first chapter of this dissertation locates the intellectual origins of these voluntary societies in Anglican thought of the Restoration period. It shows how reformers were the intellectual heirs of the first generation of “latitudinarian” thinkers, members of the English Church who were sympathetic to Protestant Dissenters, and aimed to present Christianity in a reasonable light. These latitudinarians thought that good manners were the best fortification against growing atheism and libertinism, and the best means to preserve the unity and stability of the English nation. They envisioned a society that was open to a wider range of religious beliefs and practices, but they also advanced a very narrow conception of acceptable moral behavior. For them, religion had a singular purpose: it preserved in its adherents good morals and manners, which in turn, safeguarded rational, civilized society. In other words, religion served a utilitarian function within the social order: it made possible the social organization of men and women.

The second chapter looks at the Society for Reformation of Manners, formed first in London, but soon with branches throughout England, Scotland, Ireland and the American colonies. With this society, reformers mobilized efforts to prosecute moral crimes in the civil courts. These reformers thought that the real threat to their community did not come from religious dissent, but from vice and bad manners. By describing manners as fundamental to social cohesion, they presented a new way of thinking socially about their community and nation. This chapter shows that moderate Anglicans and Presbyterians could find common ground when it came to the subject of social and moral reform, and consequently, appeals to



extend religious toleration to those outside the established Church of England became linked with the defense of good manners and habits.

The next three chapters explore the ways in which reformers broadened the scope of their efforts to include the peoples of America. Thomas Bray, one of the most active reformers of this period, sent collections of books to poorer parishes in England and to the colonies. He founded the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), which aimed to establish charity schools work to improve other social institutions like prisons. Reformers hoped that more schools and the greater availability of books on both sides of the Atlantic would help to establish a shared sense of community among diverse people. This chapter, then, connects the rhetoric of social and moral reform with a civilizing agenda aimed at both poor Christians at home and “heathens” abroad.

In the fourth chapter, I look at the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG). With this missionary society, reformers focused all their efforts on reforming the manners of the European settlers, American Indians, and African slaves in the colonies. They claimed that investment in their missionary project would reap countless rewards. It would help to expand the British Empire, to fortify trade, and to unify Protestants around a common cause. For reformers, the ends of religion, enlightenment and empire were indistinguishable. They were convinced that through the transmission of uniform religion, science and manners, what was now different, even unknown, in the far reaches of the globe would one day become familiar. Ultimately, this chapter suggests that the philosophy of the SPG can be placed within eighteenth-century discourses on rational religion, the universal nature of man, the progress of society, commercial growth, education, politeness and sociability that were central to the emerging corpus of Enlightenment thought. But it also suggests that the SPG’s “enlightened” outlook was

inextricably joined with efforts at social control, imperial expansion and paternalistic humanitarian relief. Thus we can see in it the development of a new imperial ideology.

The last chapter looks more closely at two unrealized plans for converting American Indians: one by Thomas Bray, and one by George Berkeley, the famous philosopher and divine. It shows that for reformer like Bray, good manners and habits had to be instilled into “heathen” communities before missionaries could attempt to convert these natives. Ultimately, this dissertation suggests that the philosophical discussions of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century reformers can illuminate how views, still rooted in religious dogma, could nevertheless contribute to the rise of secular thought and the development of an enlightened “science of man.” It describes how anxieties over religious diversity led people in London to conceptualize manners as the principle of social cohesion. That idea, in turn, became central to a new imperial ideology aimed at unifying the men and women on both sides of the Atlantic.

## Chapter 1 – The Intellectual Origins of the Reforming Societies: Latitudinarian Thought of the Restoration

“Religion is the strongest band of humane Society; and God so necessary to the welfare and happiness of mankind, as it could not have been more, if we could suppose the Being of God himself to have been purposely designed and contrived for the benefit and advantage of men: So that very well may it be taken for granted, that a Nation must be of some Religion or other.”

—John Tillotson, Sermon XXVII, 1680<sup>1</sup>

“He indeed judged that the great design of Christianity was the reforming Mens Natures, and governing their Actions, the restraining their Appetites, and Passions, the softening their Tempers, and sweetening their Humours, the composing their Affections, and the raising their minds...to the hope and pursuit of endless Blessedness.”

—Gilbert Burnet, Funeral Sermon for Tillotson, 1694

This chapter locates the intellectual origins of the reforming societies in the latitudinarian thought of the Restoration Church of England. The latitudinarians were transitional figures between seventeenth-century rationalism and the eighteenth-century philosophy of sociability. They understood human beings as rational creatures who lived a purposeful existence of obedience to a moral law. And yet, they did not describe human nature as static; rather they insisted on the possibility for human improvement, and came to see habits and customs as responsible for shaping human beings and their societies. It is now necessary to understand how the latitudinarians, who saw religion as “the strongest band of humane Society,” began to present a new—more secular—vision of society held together by manners and mores.

The term “latitudinarian” first applied to the Cambridge Platonists—Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688), Henry More (1614-1687), and Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683)—and those divines who were favorable to episcopacy but were willing to meet Puritan standards during the

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<sup>1</sup> John Tillotson, Sermon XXVII, “The protestant religion vindicated from the charge of singularity and novelty,” in *The Works of the Most Reverend John Tillotson, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury*, 12 vols. (London, 1743). This sermon was first preached and published in 1680, and the original formulation of this passage was: “Religion is the strongest band of humane Society; and God so necessary to the welfare and happiness of mankind, as if the Being of God himself had been purposely designed and contrived for no other end but the benefit and advantage of men.” All subsequent versions contained the modified version. See Thomas Birch, “Life of the Author compiled chiefly from his Original Papers and Letters,” in *The Works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury*, 3 vols. (London, 1757), xvii-xx.

1650s.<sup>2</sup> At the Restoration, the term came to refer to a younger generation of men, who had been influenced by the Cambridge Platonists, and who similarly took an optimistic view of man's abilities and potential. Although it had begun as a term of abuse, Gilbert Burnet, for one, thought that "latitudinarian" was a useful description of these Restoration churchmen and their ideas.<sup>3</sup> Like the Cambridge Platonists, latitudinarians all spoke of the dignity of the human soul and how God had made it in conformity to his own image. In contrast to the Calvinists, they emphasized man's rational faculties and his ability to work for his salvation; they thought God's grace was available to all.<sup>4</sup> As we will see, such ideas were foundational to a latitudinarian position that would emphasize the possibility of moral reformation.

Although the latitudinarians formed a minority in the Church of England, after 1688 they became the church's leaders. They included John Tillotson (1630-1694), who became the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1691, Thomas Tenison (1636-1715), who was his successor, Edward Stillingfleet (1635-1699), Bishop of Worcester, John Wilkins (1614-1672), Bishop of Chester, Joseph Glanvill (1636-1680), Edward Fowler (1632-1714), Bishop of Gloucester,

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<sup>2</sup> On the Cambridge Platonists, see Frederick J. Powicke, *The Cambridge Platonists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), G. R. Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason: A Study of Changes in Religious Thought within the Church of England, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), and Cragg, ed., *The Cambridge Platonists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> [Simon Patrick], *A brief account of the new sect of latitude-men together with some reflections upon the new philosophy* (London, 1662); Edward Fowler, *The principles and practices of certain moderate divines of the Church of England (greatly mis-understood), truly represented and defended* (London, 1670); Robert Grove, *A vindication of the conforming clergy* (London, 1676); Gilbert Burnet, *Burnet's History of My Own Time: a new edition, based on that of M.J. Routh*, Osmund Airy, ed., 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897-1900), I, 334-341; and Burnet, *A Supplement to Burnet's History of my own time*, H. C. Foxcroft, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 463-464. On the latitudinarians, see also Martin Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England*, Lila Freedman, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1992), Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason*, Margaret C. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689-1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), John Spurr, "'Latitudinarianism' and the Restoration Church," *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (March, 1988) 61-82, and Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646-1689* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> For more on this contrast, see J. Sears McGee, *The Godly Man in Stuart England: Anglicans, Puritans, and the Two Tables, 1620-1670* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) and Isabel Rivers, *Reason Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991-2000), I.

Simon Patrick (1626-1707), Bishop of Ely, and Gilbert Burnet (1643-1715), Bishop of Salisbury, among others.<sup>5</sup> Most of the latitudinarians received their education at Cambridge during the Interregnum, and were active in the London parishes during the Restoration.<sup>6</sup> Some, like Tillotson, were Calvinists in the 1640s and 1650s; others, like Tenison, were at least sympathetic to Calvinist principles. All of them fully embraced episcopacy after the Act of Uniformity in 1662.

These churchmen are perhaps best known for their commitment to the new experimental science. Margaret Jacob has shown that the latitudinarians drew on the principles of the New Science to establish social order, maintain church hierarchy, advance market values, defeat atheism, and attract nonconformists to the Church of England.<sup>7</sup> Most latitudinarians joined the newly established Royal Society; Wilkins and Glanvill, in fact, were two of its earliest promoters and most active members.<sup>8</sup> All the latitudinarians at least professed an affinity for the New Science. Burnet, for instance, remarked, “I was rather inclined to be philosophical upon all

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<sup>5</sup> Other latitudinarians included William Lloyd (1627-1717), Isaac Barrow (1630-1677), and Hezekiah Burton (1632-1681). Burnet mentioned specifically Tillotson, Stillingfleet, Patrick, Tension, Lloyd and himself: “These have been the greatest divines we have had these forty years.” Burnet, *History*, I, 338.

<sup>6</sup> The exception is Wilkins, who was at Oxford, and Glanvill, who was a preacher in Bath, not London.

<sup>7</sup> Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689-1720*. For further connections between Restoration Anglican thought and the New Science, see J. R. Jacob and M. C. Jacob, “The Anglican origins of modern science: the metaphysical foundations of the whig constitution,” *Isis*, LXXI (1980), and J. R. Jacob, “Restoration ideologies and the Royal Society,” *History of Science*, XVIII (1980). In *The Newtonians*, Jacob shows that latitudinarians not only used the New Science to combat “the threats posed by radicals, enthusiasts, and atheists,” but they also used it to work toward establishing Anglican order and stability in England: “all the latitudinarians...gave the same social meaning to natural philosophy. All used the new mechanical philosophy, that is, their vision of the natural world, to support a political world where private interest would enhance the stability of the public weal and Anglican hegemony would rest secure,” 22.

<sup>8</sup> Wilkin’s *An Essay toward a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (1668) was commissioned by the Royal Society. Thomas Sprat’s *History of the Royal Society* (1667), written under Wilkins’ direction, conveyed Wilkins’ views on language. In defense of the new experimental science, Glanvill wrote *The vanity of dogmatizing, or, Confidence in opinions manifested in a discourse of the shortness and uncertainty of our knowledge, and its causes* (1661), and *Scepsis scientifica, or, Confest ignorance, the way to science in an essay of The vanity of dogmatizing, and confident opinion* (1665).

occasions,” and Glanvill wrote, “I confess in philosophy I am a seeker.”<sup>9</sup> Tillotson admitted that he had a “love for the real philosophy of nature,” and believed that the “study of it is the most solid support of religion.”<sup>10</sup> When the Boyle Lectures series was established after Robert Boyle’s death in 1691, it was overseen by latitudinarians such as Thomas Tenison.<sup>11</sup>

There is now a long tradition of situating the latitudinarians within a larger narrative of secularization.<sup>12</sup> For many scholars, these churchmen can be credited, ironically, with popularizing atheism in England, and elsewhere. By obsessively arguing against materialist principles in their sermons and discourses, they broadcasted those ideas to wide audiences. The unintentional results of their actions can be seen, for example, in the case of Benjamin Franklin. In his *Autobiography*, Franklin recalled,

I was scarce fifteen, when...I began to doubt of Revelation itself. Some books against Deism fell into my hands; they were said to be the substance of sermons preached at Boyle’s Lectures. It happened that they wrought an effect on me quite contrary to what was intended by them; for the arguments of the Deists, which were quoted to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the refutations; in short, I soon became a thorough Deist.<sup>13</sup>

Franklin was not the only eighteenth-century individual to be influenced by latitudinarian writings in this way. By drawing on the New Science, latitudinarians believed they could present a universe that was rational (governed by universal mathematical principles) at the same

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<sup>9</sup> Bishop Burnet’s *History of the Reign of King James the Second*, M.J. Routh, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1870), 374; Glanvill, *Essays on several important subjects in philosophy and religion* (London, 1676), 28

<sup>10</sup> Birch, “Life,” ccxxvii.

<sup>11</sup> On the Boyle Lectures, see Jacob, *The Newtonians* (1976), chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>12</sup> John Tulloch, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1872), Leslie Stephen, *A History of English Thought in the Eighteenth-Century* (London, 1876; revised, 1967), Charles J. Abbey and John H. Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1878), Alfred Plummer, *The Church of England in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Methuen & Co., 1910), Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason*, Henry McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism: A survey of Anglican theological method in the seventeenth century* (London, 1965), C. John Sommerville, *The Secularization of Early Modern England: From Religious Culture to Religious Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*, John Bigelow, ed. (1869), 164.

time that it was spiritual (governed by God's providence). But in fact, it was not difficult for others to distill from that mixture only the rational picture of the cosmos.<sup>14</sup>

Historians have been conflicted in their interpretations of latitudinarian thought. Traditionally that thought has been seen as an important prefiguration of Enlightenment ideas,<sup>15</sup> in some cases a "Conservative British Enlightenment."<sup>16</sup> Another view—developed concurrently—regarded latitudinarian thought as a particularly grave sign of the general decline of the Church of England in the eighteenth century.<sup>17</sup> A counter-tradition suggests that the latitudinarian movement had little to do with the Enlightenment at all, seeing it as a pillar of a robust Church of England,<sup>18</sup> or as highly entrenched in the status quo, too establishment to have

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<sup>14</sup> See Jacob, *The Newtonians*, Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and Its Enemies, 1660-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), and Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696-1722* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Tulloch, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century*; Sommerville, *The Secularization of Early Modern England*; Knud Haakonssen, ed., *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration, and Early Enlightenment Culture: Religious Intolerance and Arguments for Religious Toleration in Early Modern And 'Early Enlightenment' Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)—he includes the latitudinarians under "rational dissent"; Steven Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Cragg offers a classic description of latitudinarian secularism: "It is surprising how many elements in Christianity the latitudinarians ignored... Because they constantly minimized the power of evil, they felt little need to stress salvation. They had no conception of the Church as a divine society, and consequently laid little emphasis upon its worship and traditions. The sacraments played a modest and utilitarian role in their scheme, and mysteries were an embarrassment which was best avoided." Cragg, *Reason and Authority in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 70.

<sup>16</sup> This view has been put forward by J. G. A. Pocock. Also see Shelley G. Burt, *Virtue Transformed: Political Argument in England, 1688-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Rivers argues against Pocock: "Though this kind of social conservatism is undoubtedly an important element in Anglican thought, especially in the post-Restoration period, it has been overemphasized by modern historians to the neglect of other elements; it is worth stressing that the latitude-men attach much less importance to this restraining aspect of the social benefits of religion than to the positive, reforming effect of religion on the individual and hence on society." Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, vol. I, 82. I would argue that the "restraining aspect" and the "positive, reforming effect" are closely related ideas.

<sup>17</sup> Abbey and Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, and Norman Sykes, *Church and State in England in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935). Plummer writes, for instance, "It is quite true that the history of the English Church during the eighteenth century is the history of a steady and grievous decline." Plummer, *The Church of England in the Eighteenth Century*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1688-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646-1689*; and Tony Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution* (Cambridge:

had any appreciable influence on the Enlightenment.<sup>19</sup> This chapter argues that the latitudinarians were indeed important figures of the early Enlightenment, but not for their rational ideas—as the traditional view would have it—but for their social philosophy. Invoking ideas of progress and reform they advanced an influential, and secular, image of man and society.

The early life of John Tillotson shows the kinds of experiences that shaped the latitudinarian outlook. Born in 1630, Tillotson was a young man during the tumultuous decades of civil war and revolution. During those years, he is said to have been a prominent radical at Cambridge. One pamphlet, referring to his youth, described Tillotson “as season’d with the principles of resistance and rebellion.”<sup>20</sup> Certainly, during the Interregnum, Tillotson was a member of an important Puritan circle.<sup>21</sup> His tutor at Clare College, Cambridge, David Clarkson, would be ejected at the Restoration for his nonconformity. And while still a student, Tillotson had become friendly with the Cambridge Platonists.

Tillotson’s connections to the Calvinist and Parliamentary faction in England were strengthened when he left Cambridge in 1656 or 1657 to become chaplain to Edmund Prideaux, who had been commissioner of the Great Seal under the Long Parliament, and was, when Tillotson entered his services, the Attorney General of Oliver Cromwell’s Protectorate.

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Cambridge University Press, 1996). Spellman, for instance, has contended that “even the Latitudinarian call to reason and the emphasis on behavior in this life in no sense obscure their understanding of the function of evil, nor did this position diminish the gravity of their commitment to a Christian humanism where the strain of original sin effectively precluded the possibility of salvation without the unmerited saving grace of Christ.” W. M. Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660-1700* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, the latitudinarians are left out of Jonathan Israel’s *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> George Hickes, *Some Discourses upon Dr. Burnet and Dr. Tillotson, occasioned by the Late Funeral Sermon of the Former upon the Latter* (London, 1695), 62; also see Birch, “Life,” iii.

<sup>21</sup> Tillotson’s contemporary biographer (and secretary to the Royal Society), Thomas Birch, said that “[Tillotson’s] first education and impressions were among those, who were then called *Puritans*, but of the best sort.” Birch, “Life,” ii.



Prideaux's son, Tillotson's pupil at that time, would later be a conspirator in the rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth in 1685.<sup>22</sup> Through Prideaux, Tillotson was exposed to a cosmopolitan group of people of different religious and political persuasions; and it may have been within this context that Tillotson first acquired a distaste for dogmatism. Much later, one of his students would recollect, "[Tillotson] seemed to be an eclectic man, and not to bind himself to opinions."<sup>23</sup>

On account of his position with Prideaux, Tillotson was in London at the death of Cromwell, on September 3, 1658, and observed a scene at Whitehall that drove him further from Calvinism. There, the new Protectorate and several preachers sat in mourning, and "[t]he bold sallies of enthusiasm" that Tillotson witnessed on that occasion, left him in search of alternative forms of religiosity.<sup>24</sup> From that moment on, he was convinced that God had to be apprehended through reason, rather than emotion. Although he remained friendly with those people who would become nonconformists after the Act of Uniformity in 1662, sometime in 1660 or 1661, Tillotson was ordained in the Church of England.

Apparently, it was while reading William Chillingworth's *Religion of Protestants* at Cambridge that Tillotson turned favorably toward episcopacy.<sup>25</sup> He thought Chillingworth was an unrivaled thinker, and he was especially attracted to Chillingworth's rational approach to religious matters. He defended Chillingworth from the charge of Socinianism, a heterodoxy that implied the rejection of everything not absolutely rational in Christianity, such as the mystery of the trinity. He wrote, "I say, I know not how it comes to pass, but so it is, that everyone that

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.

<sup>23</sup> John Beardmore in appendix to Birch, "Life."

<sup>24</sup> Birch, "Life," v.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, ii; and Gilbert Burnet, *A Sermon preach'd at the funeral of Dr. Tillotson, Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1694), 10-11.

offers to give a reasonable account of his faith, and to establish religion upon rational principles, is presently branded for a Socinian; of which we have a sad instance in that incomparable person Mr. Chillingworth.” Tillotson, himself a champion of rational religion, would also be suspected of harboring Socinian beliefs throughout his life. He added to his defense of Chillingworth, “if this be Socinianism, for a man to enquire into the grounds and reasons of christian religion, and to endeavor to give a satisfactory account why he believes it, I know no way but that all considerate inquisitive men, that are above fancy and enthusiasm, must be either Socinians or atheists.”<sup>26</sup>

The latitudinarians, notorious for their rational approach to religion, were often criticized for making “Reason, Reason, Reason their holy Trinity,” and turning “the grace of God into a wanton notion of morality.”<sup>27</sup> Gilbert Burnet explained that his friends were “suspect[ed] of Socinianism, for they magnify reason, and are often telling how rational a thing Christian religion is.”<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the latitudinarians all wrote important works on this subject: Stillingfleet’s *Origins Sacrae* (1662) was considered at its publication to provide the authoritative account of the reasonableness of Christianity. In it, Stillingfleet wrote that people had “sufficient evidence in point of reason to prove...the existence of the deity,” and that God “hath stamped an universal character of himself upon the minds of men.”<sup>29</sup> Tillotson published his own take on this subject

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<sup>26</sup> Tillotson, Sermon CCXXIV, “The effecacy, usefulness, and reasonableness of divine faith,” in *Works*, vol. 11, 4966; also see Birch, “Life,” ii.

<sup>27</sup> John Standish, *A Sermon preached before the king* (London, 1675), 24-25.

<sup>28</sup> Burnet, *A Modest Conference Betwixt a Conformist and a Nonconformist* (London, 1669), 84.

<sup>29</sup> Stillingfleet, *Origins Sacrae: or A Rational Account of the Grounds of the Christian Faith, as to the Truth and Divine Authority of the Scriptures, and the Matter therein contain’d* (Cambridge, 1701), Book III, 258. It was originally published in 1662, and later eighteenth-century versions were titled: *Origins Sacrae: or A Rational Account of the Grounds of Natural and Revealed Religion*.

in *Rule of Faith* (1668), inscribing it to Edward Stillingfleet, his “honoured and learned friend.”<sup>30</sup>

A third variation on this theme came from John Wilkins in his *Principles of Natural Religion*, edited and published by Tillotson in 1675 after Wilkins’ death.<sup>31</sup>

The latitudinarians had been influenced by Henry Hammond’s *A Practical Catechism* (1644), Jeremy Taylor’s *Holy Living* (1650), and *Practice of Christian Graces, or Whole Duty of Man* (1658), probably written by Richard Allestree. These earlier works expressed man’s ability to obey the moral duties, they rejected predestination, and they emphasized the importance of works, not just faith, for salvation. Hammond said that the point of his own work was “the reformation of lives, & heightening of Christian practice to the most elevated pitch, being the one only design of all our christianity.”<sup>32</sup> The *Whole Duty of Man* aimed to show how moral life brought pleasure and happiness to man.

The latitudinarians also thought religion brought happiness to individuals and societies—it made men social and prosperous, the nation peaceful and unified. Writing after the religious conflicts of the midcentury, however, they used this view of religion to argue for a broader Church of England, one that could include Protestants of all persuasions within its fold. To this end, they emphasized the importance of shared manners over shared beliefs. Tillotson addressed both Anglicans and Puritans when he wrote, “ought not the great matters wherein we are agreed,

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<sup>30</sup> It was in answer to a defense of the Church of Rome by John Sarjeant, *Sure footing in Christianity; or rational discourses on the rule of faith* (1664). Stillingfleet’s work—*Rational account of the grounds of the Protestant religion* (1664)—had been attacked in Sarjeant’s book, and Stillingfleet had written a *Reply* to it in the form of a letter to Tillotson in 1665, which Tillotson appended to his *Rule of Faith*.

<sup>31</sup> Tillotson’s relationship to Wilkins was especially intimate: Tillotson had married the daughter of Wilkins’ second wife, Robina, the sister of Oliver Cromwell. So it is no surprise that Tillotson gave a sermon at the consecration of John Wilkins to the Bishopric of Chester on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1668. And, when Wilkins died in November of 1672, he left his complete papers to Tillotson. In 1675, Tillotson published Wilkins’ *Principles of Natural Religion*, of which Wilkins had only completed the first twelve chapters, so that Tillotson wrote the last chapters himself using Wilkins’ notes. In 1684, Tillotson published Wilkins’s *Works*.

<sup>32</sup> Henry Hammond, *Practical Catechisme* (1644), A2. See Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 20.

in the great Duties and Vertues of the Christian life, to be of greater force to unite us, than difference in doubtful Opinions, and in little Rites and Circumstances of worship to divide and break us?"<sup>33</sup> The latitudinarians were deeply troubled by the religious divisions that had formed in England when moderate puritans were unable to conform to the church in 1662. Tillotson, for one, maintained a close relationship with many of the Dissenters, such as Richard Baxter and Edmund Calamy. He worked with them on schemes to reform the Anglican system so that it might be more acceptable to those moderate Dissenters. Glanvill admitted to the compassion he "felt toward all diversities of belief."<sup>34</sup>

The latitudinarians thoroughly condemned the persecution of Dissenters during the Restoration, but they were on the whole unsympathetic to the reasons for their nonconformity, writing several polemical tracts against separation from the church.<sup>35</sup> Their solution to these divisions was not toleration, but comprehension, namely, a softening of some of the church's membership requirements, which would enable many more men to join. The latitudinarians played prominent roles in attempts to achieve a comprehension bill in 1668 and 1675, but they were ultimately forced to abandon them.<sup>36</sup> Although in writing, latitudinarians could often be severe toward the Dissenters, in practice they remained on good terms with them. In the 1680s, Fowler's parishioners complained that his "Latitudinarian Designs and Practices" had made

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<sup>33</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XX, in *Works*, vol. 2, 58. Tillotson originally preached this sermon on July 21, 1681.

<sup>34</sup> Glanvill, *Plus Ultra* (1668), 140. Burnet recorded in his *History*: "They [the latitudinarians] loved the constitution of the Church, and the liturgy, and could well live under them; but they did not think it unlawful to live under another form. ... They continued to keep a good correspondence with those who had differed with them in opinion, and allowed a great freedom both in philosophy and divinity." Burnet, *A Supplement to Burnet's History of my own time*, 463. See Pincus, *1688*, 407.

<sup>35</sup> For example: Patrick, *Friendly Debate betwixt... a Conformist [and] a Non-Conformist* (1669), Fowler, *Principles and Practices* (1670) and *The Design of Christianity* (1671); Glanvill, "Anti-Fantatical Religion," in *Essays* (1676); Stillingfleet, *The Mischief of Separation* (1680) and *Unreasonableness of Separation* (1681).

<sup>36</sup> Those who were present during negotiations over comprehension included Wilkins, Tillotson, Stillingfleet, and Patrick.

“Cripplegate a Sanctuary for Dissenters, and brought them out of other Parishes into Ours, as if they had fled from Persecution into a City of Refuge.”<sup>37</sup> Tillotson was also criticized for “his tender methods of treating with Dissenters and his endeavours to unite all Protestants among themselves.”<sup>38</sup> Wilkins was well known for his toleration of Dissenters and lenient requirements for conformity in his diocese.

The latitudinarians became some of the Church of England’s most outspoken critics of Roman Catholicism. During the exclusion crisis of 1679, they were firmly in favor of preventing the Catholic James, Duke of York from taking the throne.<sup>39</sup> And in 1685, when James indeed became king—the same year Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, which had established toleration for Protestants in France—they were most alarmed.<sup>40</sup> In response to events in France, latitudinarians helped organize relief for Protestant refugees who had been forced to flee their homes.<sup>41</sup> Many latitudinarian sermons and discourses were devoted to attacking the authority of the papacy, and exposing the dangers of Catholic “idolatry” and “superstition.”<sup>42</sup> Tillotson even

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<sup>37</sup> William Newbury and William Edmunds, *A letter to Dr Fowler* (London, 1685). See Mark Goldie and John Spurr, “Politics and the Restoration Parish: Edward Fowler and the Struggle for St. Giles Cripplegate,” *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 109, No. 432 (Jun., 1994), 572-596.

<sup>38</sup> Birch, “Life,” xxi. Also see Burnet, *A Sermon Preached at the Funeral* (1695), 18. In his *Letter to Edward Stillingfleet* (London, 1687), 77, Simon Lowth wrote, “your good will to Comprehension, Latitudinarian principles hath all along been manifest and notorious.”

<sup>39</sup> Birch, “Life,” xxiii. Birch tells us here that “the Dean himself was so deeply affected with a just apprehension of the danger of a Popish successor to the civil as well as religious liberties of his country, that he could not but wish success to the exclusion-bill.”

<sup>40</sup> Birch, “Life,” xxxv: “The accession of King James II to the throne, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of *February* 1684/5, was soon followed with such a prospect of danger to the religion and liberties of the nation, as filled the Dean [Tillotson] with the deepest concern for both.” And, Birch writes, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 “was not only a fresh proof to the Dean of the genuine spirit of unrestrain’d Popery, but an occasion of exerting his own piety and humanity towards those distress’d persons, who escap’d thence to *England*, and had the peculiar recommendation of suffering for religion.” *Ibid.*, xxxvi.

<sup>41</sup> Birch, “Life,” xxxvi.

<sup>42</sup> See Tillotson’s sermons: “The hazard of being saved in the church of Rome” and “A Discourse against Transubstantiation.” And Stillingfleet’s works: *Of the Idolatry practised in the Church of Rome, in the Worship of Images; Of their Idolatry in Adoration of the Host, and Invocation of Saints; Of the Hindrances of a good Life, and*

believed in a conspiracy by Catholics to propagate atheism: when religious skepticism had overtaken the nation, Catholics would promise people the security of a supposedly infallible church.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, it comes as no surprise that latitudinarians were some of England's most vocal champions of the revolution in 1688 that brought William and Mary to the throne.<sup>44</sup> Glanvill and Wilkins died before the revolution, and Lloyd was already Bishop of St. Asaph, but the rest were promoted to bishoprics by William III.<sup>45</sup> Although still a minority of voices in the church, the latitudinarians now became the church's leaders. As such they were able to take their message of moral reform and preach it from their new public platform. In 1690, Tillotson delivered a sermon in front of the new king and queen. In it, he lamented "the fruitless quarrels and divisions of fifty years" between protestant conformists and nonconformists, for which he blamed parties "on both sides." Tillotson saw the political events of 1688 and the passage of the Toleration Act in 1689 as ushering in a new period in English history. It was time now to put aside religious differences and work on a reformation of manners. In the sermon, he praised England's new leaders as "Two Princes perfectly united in the same Design of promoting the true Religion, and the Publick Welfare, by reforming Manners, and as far as possible, by

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*of Devotion in the Roman Church; Of the Fanaticism of the Roman Church; The Unreasonableness of objecting Sects and Fanaticism to us, as the Effects of reading the Scriptures.*

<sup>43</sup> Birch wrote that Tillotson "saw, that Popery was at the root of the growing contempt of religion, and that the design seem'd to be laid, to make men first *Atheists*, that they might be the more easily made *Papists*, and that many did not stick to own, that no certainty could be had of the Christian faith, unless upon the basis of the infallibility of the church," Birch, "Life," ix.

<sup>44</sup> They were anti-Roman Catholic, and fed into hysteria over popery during the "Popish Plot." They had rallied the clergy against James's second Declaration of Indulgence. Lloyd, the only latitudinarian Bishop at the time, signed the petition of the Nine Bishops. Lloyd, Tenison, and Patrick were aware of the secret invitation to the Prince of Orange to invade England, and Tillotson, Patrick and Burnet gave the first thanksgiving sermons after William's arrival. Burnet had been a close friend to William and Mary in The Hague well before 1688. See Griffin, *Latitudinarianism*, 27.

<sup>45</sup> For more on this subject, see Pincus, *1688* and Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution*.

repairing the breaches, and healing the Divisions of a miserably distracted Church and Nation.”<sup>46</sup>

Now that it was clear that there would be no single unified church in England, the latitudinarian innovation—namely, that manners could be a tool of social unity—would become essential for imagining the English community both at home and abroad.

### **The great business of religion**

Latitudinarian works aimed to demonstrate the reasonableness of Christianity.<sup>47</sup> They showed how revealed religion complemented natural religion by making more explicit those universal laws that could be known independently through a careful study of nature.<sup>48</sup> These laws, plain and regular, were easily grasped by a rational mind.<sup>49</sup> Although never denying the mysteries of Christianity altogether, the latitudinarians remained faithful advocates of a fundamentally transparent and uniform physical world.<sup>50</sup> This position made them natural allies of the New Science. Indeed, God had “contrived this vast and regular frame of nature” so that it

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<sup>46</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXXVII, in *Works*, vol. 3, 252. Tillotson originally preached this sermon on June 18, 1690. And see, Sermon XLI, in *Works*, vol. 3, 415, which he preached at Whitehall on March 20, 1692.

<sup>47</sup> For example, Tillotson’s sermons: “The wisdom of being religious” (1664); “The folly of scoffing at religion”; “The advantages of religion to societies”; “The advantages of religion to particular persons”; “The excellency of the Christian religion”; “The precepts of Christianity not grievous.” Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae* (1662), especially Book II; Wilkins, *Principles and Duties of Natural Religion* (1675); Glanvill, “The Usefulness of Real Philosophy to religion,” and “The Agreement of Reason and Religion,” in *Essays on several important subjects in philosophy* (1676).

<sup>48</sup> Tillotson, Sermon VI, in *Works*, vol.1, 217: “And if we go over the Laws of Christianity, we shall find that, excepting a very few particulars, they enjoyn the very same things [as natural law]; onely they have made our duty more clear and certain.” And Wilkins, *Of the Principles and Duties of Natural Religion* (1675), 39: “I call that Natural Religion, which men might know, and should be obliged unto, by the mere principles of Reason, improved by Consideration and Experience, without the help of Revelation.” This theme, present throughout Book I, is attacked by Hume in his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*. See Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, vol. 1, 71.

<sup>49</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXVIII, in *Works*, vol 2, 409: “the impressions of the natural Law, as to the great lines of our duty, are legible upon our hearts.”

<sup>50</sup> A point Stillingfleet made many times. It was for knowledge of the mysteries of Christianity that Stillingfleet could not accept Locke’s epistemology.

could be studied according to universal laws of mathematics.<sup>51</sup> For these churchmen, scripture was almost—but not quite—superfluous.<sup>52</sup>

A distinguishing feature of latitudinarian thought was its optimistic view of man's capacity to understand his world, and his role in it. Against the Calvinist outlook that human knowledge was fundamentally limited in scope, Tillotson, for one, made a point of affirming that, "there is a knowledge which lies level to human understanding." This knowledge, he said, conveyed the two essential principles of natural religion: that there was a God, and that man had a duty to obey God's laws.<sup>53</sup> Glanvill, a great admirer of Descartes, thought that all truth should be "in simple and essential forms," which were known to everyone. This included religious truths.<sup>54</sup> The human mind, latitudinarians said, "hath this notion of a Deity born with it and stamped upon it."<sup>55</sup> Such a simple and essential notion could equally be professed by deists; for the latitudinarians, however, it further implied God's providential role in the world, as well as the necessity of faith for salvation.

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<sup>51</sup> See Jacob, *Newtonians* and Barbara Shapiro, "Latitudinarianism and Science in Seventeenth-Century England," *Past and Present*, 40 (1968), 16-41. Tillotson's interest in the New Science can be seen in his frequent correspondence with Edmond Halley. Birch, "Life," xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>52</sup> This was true for all the latitudinarians. Stillingfleet made clear that ultimately reason and religion were not equal guides—religion perfected natural human understanding. Still, it is worth noting, that for Stillingfleet, the ancient philosophers foreshadowed the ethics of the Christian Apostles: "if we admire those discourses of the Heathen Philosophers, wherein they speak more darkly and obscurely concerning those things, what admiration doth the Gospel deserve, which hath brought life and immortality to light?" Stillingfleet, Sermon IV, *Works*, 107.

<sup>53</sup> Tillotson, Sermon I (originally preached in 1664), and XXI (originally preached in 1679), in *Works*. This is repeated in many of his sermons. Glanville said that there were three principles of natural religion: the existence of God; the providence of God; the reality of moral distinctions. But his theism was very broadly defined. See, Glanvill, "The Agreement of Reason and Religion," in *Essays on several important subjects in philosophy* (1676). Wilkins said natural religion comprised of knowledge of God, his perfection, and the duties of religion. See his, *Natural Religion*, 39-40, and Tillotson's preface to it.

<sup>54</sup> Glanvill, *Plus Ultra*, 139.

<sup>55</sup> Tillotson, Sermon I, *Works*, vol. 1, 45: "[the human mind] is of such a frame that in the free use and exercise of it self it will find out God." This entire sermon is dedicated to this subject. Also See Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae*, 367: "the Idea of God is most consonant to reason," and many other times throughout that work.



But it was the second principle of natural religion that held the attention of the latitudinarians. For them, man was born knowing how he should act—his duty.<sup>56</sup> The moral laws were written on his heart. “[They] are general to mankind, and not confined to any particular Sect or Nation, or Time,” Wilkins made clear.<sup>57</sup> All men had the capacity to distinguish good from evil, and the power to fulfill their duties to God and each other. “This is the sum of the natural Law,” Tillotson explained, “that we should behave our selves reverently and obediently towards God, and justly and charitably towards men.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, for latitudinarians, man’s purpose was always the ethical life; this they often emphasized even at the expense of salvation. It is not surprising then that the latitudinarians would focus their energies on instructing people on how they should behave outwardly, rather than on what they should believe inwardly.

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<sup>56</sup> “Duty” is also called “works.” It is not surprising that the latitudinarians were often criticized by the Calvinists for their Arminian bent. For latitudinarians, knowing duty meant that people could make moral distinctions—they inherently knew right from wrong. Fowler wrote, “That Moral good and evil are not onely such because God commands the one, and forbids the other; but because the things themselves are so essentially unalterably. That there is an eternal Reason, why that which is good should be so required, and why that which is evil should be so and forbidden; which depends not so much on the divine will as the divine nature.” Fowler, *Principles and Practices*, 12-13. See Rivers, *Reason*, 63.

<sup>57</sup> Wilkins, *Principles of Natural Religion*, 55. See Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 61. In his preface to this work, Tillotson wrote, “And certainly it is a thing of very considerable use, rightly to understand the natural obligation of moral duties, and how necessarily they flow from the consideration of God and of *ourselves*. For it is a great mistake to think, that the obligation of them depends solely upon the revelation of God’s will made to us in the holy scriptures. It is plain, that mankind was always under a law, even before God had made any external and extraordinary revelation.” Tillotson is constantly reiterating that the laws of God are universal and timeless. See Tillotson, Sermon XXVIII, in *Works*, 409: “Our natural Judgment doth direct to us what is good, and what we ought to do.” When speaking of the duty of charity, for instance, he made clear that “our obligation to this duty [is] not only from our Saviour’s authority, but likewise from our own nature, and from the reasonableness and excellency of the thing commanded.” Tillotson, Sermon XX, *Works*, 39. Wilkins defined reason altogether as “that faculty whereby we apprehend, compare, and judge of Moral things.” *Ecclesiastes* (1675), 124-125. As Isabel Rivers has put it, for the latitudinarians, “moral law is not the positive or arbitrary command of a mysterious God, as Calvinism might seem to suggest, not the result of human imposition, as Hobbes states, but self evident and indisputable.” Rivers, *Reason*, 63.

<sup>58</sup> Tillotson, Sermon IV, *Works*, vol. 1, 217. These views—man’s free will and ability to work towards his salvation; God’s grace as a gift given to all—drew on a tradition beginning with the writings of the pre-Augustinian church, and then through the works of Erasmus, Arminius, and the Tew Circle in England. Stillingfleet likewise said that there are “two grand duties of men in this World, either towards God in the holiness of their hearts and lives, or towards their Brethren, in a peaceable carriage among men.” Of course, he did not exclude the teleology of salvation altogether: “This is then the grand design of Christianity, to make men happy in another World, by making them good and vertuous in this.” Stillingfleet, Sermon IV, *Works*, 107.

Latitudinarians sketched a particular portrait of the human being. According to them, man, as a rational animal, was capable not only of knowing good, but, significantly, of doing good. He could obey the moral law. As one scholar has explained it, for the latitudinarians, “reason is an active moral force: when the principles of religion are fully apprehended by reason men cannot help but put them into practice.”<sup>59</sup> Obeying the moral law required men to moderate their disorderly passions. Just as the natural laws of physics governed the material world in a regular and ordered way, the moral laws governed human behavior. Reason was ultimately about self-control. Stillingfleet described the two defining characteristics of man as his capacity for rational thought and his capacity for self-discipline. Human beings, Stillingfleet said, were endowed “with those noble Faculties of Understanding, Reasoning, Reflecting, Remembering, Discoursing with others, and Governing our selves.” The rational soul could direct human behavior according to what maintained “Order, Decency, Modesty, and Regularity.”<sup>60</sup> Reason was “capable of Controlling and Governing” the body.<sup>61</sup>

Although much of their writings focused on natural religion, the latitudinarians did not ignore the significance of revealed religion. Tillotson claimed that “all revealed religion supposes, and takes for granted, the clear and undoubted principles and precepts of natural

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<sup>59</sup> Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 65. Also see Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England*, 280-281, 284: “theology is not a bare speculative science, which ultimately terminateth in the understanding, but...is a doctrine ordered and directed unto practice”; “Profession is the only badge of a Christian, belief the beginning, but practice the nature, and custom the perfection. For it is this which translates Christianity from a bare notion into a real business; from useless speculation into substantial duties; and from an idea in the brain into an exercise in the life. ...The grand deciding question at the last day will be, not, What have you said? or, What have you believed? but, What have you done more than others?”

<sup>60</sup> Stillingfleet, Sermon XXVI, in *Works*, (originally preached in 1689/90), 505. This is what Stillingfleet also refers to as the ability to distinguish between good and evil. Animals, of course, driven by instincts alone, have none of the self-discipline of human beings: “they are not capable of any Check from themselves, having no Law of Reason or Conscience within them to control or govern their Sensual Desires.” Tillotson wrote: “and that in order to the fitting of us for the better discharge of these duties, we should govern our selves in the use of sensual delights with temperance and moderation.” Tillotson, Sermon VI, in *Works*, vol. 1, 217.

<sup>61</sup> Stillingfleet, Sermon XXX, in *Works*, (originally preached in 1691/2), 560.

religion, and builds upon them.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, for latitudinarians, revealed religion served as the handmaiden to natural religion. Scripture illuminated the moral laws and demanded obedience to them. “The great design of the christian religion is to reinforce the practice of the natural law, or which is all one, of moral duties.”<sup>63</sup> Christianity, like reason, exerted a power over the individual. When man obeyed the Christian laws, Fowler explained, “he keeps his Supreme Faculty [reason] in its Throne, brings into due Subjection all his inferior ones, his sensual Imagination, his Brutish Passions and Affections.”<sup>64</sup> As Glanvill put it, the Christian Laws were intended “To restore the empire of our minds over the will, and affections; To make them more temperate, and more humble, courteous, charitable and just towards others.”<sup>65</sup> Indeed, members of the early eighteenth-century missionary societies, like the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, would conceive their role in empire building as forming “humble, cautious, charitable and just” subjects overseas. Christianity, then, had one goal wherever it was:

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<sup>62</sup> Tillotson, Sermon CIII, “Instituted Religion not Intended to Undermine Natural,” in *Works*, vol. 6. Also see Fowler, *Principles and Practices*, 220: “I am clearly sensible, that nothing revealed by God can possibly contradict those principles that are impressed in (as I think) indelible characters upon the souls of men.” Patrick *Brief Account*, 11: “nothing is true in Divinity, which is false in Philosophy, or the contrary.”; Tillotson, Sermon XXI, in *Works*: “All supernatural Revelation supposeth the truth of the Principles of Natural Religion. We must first be assured that there is a God, before we can know that he hath made any Revelation of himself: and we must know that his Words are true, otherwise there were no sufficient reason to believe the Revelations which he makes to us: and we must believe his Authority over us, and that he will reward our obedience to his Laws, and punish our breach of them; otherwise there would neither be sufficient obligation nor encouragement to Obedience. These and many other things are supposed to be true, and naturally known to us, antecedently to all supernatural Revelation; otherwise the Revelations of God would signifie nothing to us, nor be of any force with us,” 73.

<sup>63</sup> Tillotson, Sermon CIII, in *Works*, vol. 6. According to Beardmore, Tillotson had told him “that Christianity, as to the practical part of it, was nothing else but the religion of nature, or pure morality, save only praying and making all our addresses to God in the name, and through the mediation of our Saviour, and the use of the two sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.” Birch, “Life,” appendix. See also, Fowler, *Principles and Practices*, 75-8; Whichcote, *Several Discourses*, III, nos. 1-2; *Whole Duty*, 4; and Taylor, *Holy Living*, 61. Rivers, *Reason*, 76.

<sup>64</sup> Fowler, *Design*, Intro and chapt 1.

<sup>65</sup> Glanvill, *Essays*, no. 7, 25. See Rivers, *Reason*, 80. Also see Burnet, *Rochester*, 93-4; Tillotson, Sermon V, in *Works*, vol. 1: “Such precepts require the good order and government of our selves in respect of the pleasures and enjoyments of this life. Christian Religion commands whatsoever things are pure and chaste, all manner of sobriety and temperance and moderation in reference to our appetites and passion; and forbids whatever is unnatural, and unreasonable, and unhealthfull in the use of pleasures and of any of God's creatures.” These precepts “tend to beget in us such vertues and dispositions as are reasonable and suitable to our nature and every way for our temporal convenience and advantage,” 191.

to form and maintain good morals in men and women, a goal that was thought to be vital to the advancement of civilization. “The great business of Religion,” Tillotson said, “is, to make men truly good, and to teach them to live well.”<sup>66</sup> “The grand designe of the Gospel,” Fowler similarly stated, “is to make men good and to reform mens lives.”<sup>67</sup> Christianity was a tool that shaped human behavior. This notion could have far-reaching implications.

For one thing, it meant man could be reformed. He was not as Calvinists often depicted him—depraved and impotent, absolutely at the mercy of God’s grace for salvation.<sup>68</sup> Rather, he could actively earn his salvation; he was capable of doing good works.<sup>69</sup> “We are not destitute of sufficient power and strength for the performing of God's commands,” Tillotson said.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXI (originally preached in 1679) in *Works*, 107. Against the Dissenters, he wrote: “And if Religion have not this effect, it matters not of what Church any man lists and enters himself; for most certainly, *A bad man can be saved in none.*” Ibid. He meant that faith was nothing without a good life. The Dissenters had put too much emphasis on beliefs of conscience and too little on works.

<sup>67</sup> Fowler, *The Principles and Practices of Certain Moderate Divines* (1670), I, 18. Against the Dissenters, Fowler made clear that the design of religion was “not to intoxicate [men’s] brains with notions, or to furnish their heads with a systeme of opinions.” Also see the sequel to this work, Fowler, *The design of Christianity* (London, 1671). Bunyan famously contested Fowler on this point.

<sup>68</sup> For more on Calvinism in England, see: Rivers, *Reason*; Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination* (1982); Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Sommerville, *Popular Religion* (1977); McAdoo, *Spirit of Anglicanism* (1965); Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans, and Puritans* (1989); Tulloch, *Rational Theology* (1872); and Miller, *New England Mind*.

<sup>69</sup> For the latitudinarians, works and grace cooperated as the means to salvation. As Tillotson put it, “We say that without the powerful excitation and aid of God’s grace, no man can repent and turn to Good: but we say likewise, that God cannot be properly said to aid and assist those, who do nothing themselves.” Sermon CVII, in *Works*. However, it was easy to interpret Tillotson’s message as putting responsibility for salvation on the individual rather than on God’s grace. Glanvill and Fowler said that faith produced good works (as opposed to works as a sign of faith). Tillotson stated that works were necessary for salvation in Sermon CVII. Burnet implied much the same thing in *Exposition of the Thirty Nine Articles*. Also see Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England* (1991), 299-301.

<sup>70</sup> Tillotson, Sermon VI, “The precepts of Christianity not grievous,” *Works*, vol. 1, 223. Against the Dissenters, he added: “Had God given us Laws but no power to keep them, his commandments would then indeed have been grievous.” Whichcote, who greatly influenced the latitudinarians, described man as naturally good. For him, vice was not original to man; rather, it signified a deviation from human nature: “Vice is contrary to Nature, and to a Mans Interest; It is against the Reason of Mankind; And till a Man has forced himself, and miserably abused his Nature he will not consent unto it.” Whichcote, *Several Discourses* (1673), I, no. 8. Tillotson denied the Puritan notion of the elect: God “leaves no man under a fatal necessity of being wicked and perishing everlastingly. He tenderly considers every man's case and circumstances, and it is we that pull destruction upon our selves, with the works of our own hand.” Tillotson, Sermon XXVIII, in *Works*.

Certainly, the latitudinarians put an exceptional amount of trust in moral works, or works performed by the natural powers of men without divine grace. They repeatedly attacked the Dissenters for emphasizing the necessity of faith at the expense of works: “Many are so taken up with the deep Points and Mysteries of Religion,” Tillotson remarked, “that they never think of the common Duties and Offices of humane Life. But Faith and a good Life are so far from clashing with one another, that the Christian Religion hath made them inseparable.”<sup>71</sup> The latitudinarians were afraid that Calvinism—taken to its logical conclusion—would lead to Antinomianism, or the belief that people were not responsible for their moral actions.<sup>72</sup> They found this view absurd, and even worse, threatening to the social order.<sup>73</sup>

Since human beings had the capacity to know the moral law, and power to fulfill their duty, it was clear that they were not a lost cause. If they let their passions get the best of them, if they became vicious in their morals and manners, they could be reformed. When the famous libertine, Lord Rochester, circulated a letter in which he repented for his dissolute ways, Tillotson took this as a sign that even the most morally corrupt could be reclaimed.<sup>74</sup> For the

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<sup>71</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XLII, “Against Evil Speaking,” in *Works*, 458. Patrick worried that “spiritual” preachers forgot about morality and tended toward antinomianism. See Patrick, *A Friendly Debate*.

<sup>72</sup> Fowler exposed the antinomian tendencies in Calvinist doctrines of predestination and justification by faith alone. Latitudinarians were also concerned that the logical conclusion of these views was that God was responsible for human sin. Fowler, *Principles and Practices*, 201: “’tis more dishonourable to the infinitely-just and holy God, to assert that he is the author of sin, than to say that there is no God at all.” Also see Tillotson Sermon IV, in *Works*; and Tillotson’s preface to Wilkins’ *Principles*: “But yet it is nevertheless very useful for us to consider the primary and natural obligation to piety and virtue, which we commonly call the *law of nature*; this being every whit as much the *law of God*, as the revelation of his will in his word; and consequently nothing contained in the word of God, or in any pretended revelation from him, can be interpreted to dissolve the obligation of moral duties plainly required by the law of nature. And if this one thing were but well considered, it would be an effectual antidote against the pernicious doctrines of *Antinomians*, and of all other *Libertines* whatsoever; nothing being more incredible, than that *divine revelation* should contradict the clear and unquestionable dictates of *natural light*; nor anything more vain than to fancy, that the *grace of God* does release men from the law of nature.”

<sup>73</sup> Jacob, *Newtonians*, 47: “The latitudinarians would make men responsible for their actions because they feared that in the tenants of extreme Calvinism radicals would find, as they had found during the Revolution, justification for abrogating individual responsibility for one’s plight”—in other words, Antinomianism.

<sup>74</sup> Tillotson entered into his commonplace book his thoughts on Rochester’s repentance: “The omnipotency of God’s grace can easily change any man, by letting light into his mind... Bad men are infidels *se defendendo* [in order to

latitudinarians, human beings were fundamentally good. “There is left, even in the worst of men,” Tillotson affirmed, “a natural sense of the evil and unreasonableness of sin; which can hardly be ever totally extinguished in humane nature.”<sup>75</sup>

But what had the power to reform man? After 1688, the heirs of the latitudinarian tradition, organizing themselves into the Societies for Reformation of Manners and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, would turn to civil law and education as the instruments best suited for this job. In this earlier period, however, latitudinarian preachers turned to the pulpit and the press.

Latitudinarian sermons and essays were meant to reinforce the internal voice of reason, and remind men and women of their moral duties. The latitudinarians developed their own distinct way of preaching that presented moral arguments in a rational manner. Tillotson’s first published sermon, which he gave at St. Giles Cripplegate in September 1661, was remarkable for its plain and logical style.<sup>76</sup> In contrast to the ornateness of earlier Anglican sermons, and to the emotiveness of Puritan sermons, Tillotson’s lucid style was an innovation. Thomas Birch, his eighteenth-century biographer wrote that, “being sensible of the importance of a plain and edifying manner of preaching, [Tillotson] was very little dispos’d to follow the patterns then set him, or indeed those of former times. He form’d therefore one to himself.”<sup>77</sup> Tillotson hoped to move men’s minds, not their hearts, with his words.<sup>78</sup>

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defend themselves]. When the affection of our lusts is gone, the objections against religion vanish of themselves.” “Atheism and infidelity do not bind up the senses of men strongly enough” that men cannot regain right reason, as was the case of Rochester. However, Tillotson had no delusions that overcoming “false religion, if a man be sincere in it,” is an exceedingly difficult thing to do. In Birch, “Life,” xxi.

<sup>75</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXIX, “Of the difficulty of reforming vicious habits,” in *Works*, 453.

<sup>76</sup> Birch, “Life,” v. Tillotson may have still been a Calvinist then, making his style even more remarkable.

<sup>77</sup> Birch, “Life,” vi. Birch also wrote that Tillotson had mastered “the art uniting dignity with simplicity, and tempering these so equally together, that neither his thoughts sunk, nor style swell’d; keeping always a due mean between flatness and false rhetoric. Together with the pomp of words he cut off likewise all superfluities and

This was, unsurprisingly, met with some resistance. One of Tillotson's first offices in the church was as rector in Suffolk. But the people in that parish were overwhelmingly Puritan, and resented his preaching style, which they found cold and remote. Birch describes the people of Suffolk as being "in favour of a religious system, too prevalent in that age, but directly opposite to the more rational one... upon which he [Tillotson] had form'd all his discourse to them."<sup>79</sup> The members of the parish wanted a preacher who roused the emotional wellsprings of religion, and they complained "that Jesus Christ had not been preach'd amongst them, since Mr. Tillotson had been settled in the parish."<sup>80</sup> This was a charge that would be leveled at Tillotson many times over. In a sermon preached before William and Mary thirty years after his appointment in Suffolk, Tillotson admitted that he was still defending himself from this accusation: "I foresee what will be said, because I have heard it so often said in the like case, that there *is not one word of Jesus Christ in all this*. ...Some men are pleased to say, that *this is mere Morality*."<sup>81</sup>

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needless enlargements. He said what was just necessary to give clear ideas of things, and no more. He laid aside all long and affected periods. His sentences were short and clear; and the whole thread was of a piece, plain, and distinct. No affectations of learning, no torturing of texts, no superficial strains, no false thoughts, nor bold flights. All was sold yet lively, and grave as well as elegant; so that few ever heard him, but they found some new thought occur'd; something, which either they had not considered before, or at least not so distinctly, and with so clear a view, as he gave them." Also see Burnet, *Funeral Sermon for Tillotson*.

<sup>78</sup> Beardmore wrote about Tillotson's style: "his endeavour was to make all things clear, to bring truth into open light; and his arguments of persuasion were strong, and tended to gain the affections by the understanding; and those, that heard him with attention, must either be persuaded to become good, or else they must do violence to their best faculties, and notoriously act contrary to their own reason." Birch, "Life," appendix. Tillotson, Sermon CXLIII, in *Works*: "he that would teach men what faith is, he must first acquaint men with the thing, and describe it in as proper and simple words as can be, and not by figurative and metaphorical phrases." Toland showed appreciation for Tillotson's rational style on the title-page of *Christianity Not Mysterious*; and Collins in *Discourse of Free Thinking*, 171. See Rivers, *Reason*, 56, and Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason*.

<sup>79</sup> Birch, "Life," vii-viii. Tillotson accepted this position after declining an offer to replace his friend Edmund Calamy, the well-known dissenter, when the latter was ejected by the Act of Uniformity from his position at the parish of St. Mary Aldermanbury in London.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XLII, "Sermon against evil speaking," in *Works*, 459. He answered the accusation by saying, "And yet I hope that Jesus Christ is truly preach'd, when-ever his *Will and Laws*, and the *Duties* injoyn'd by the *Christian Religion* are inculcated upon us." Also see Birch, "Life," viii.

In the cosmopolitan environment of London, however, latitudinarians could draw large crowds to their parishes. Burnet recounted in his *History* what it was like to hear Tillotson deliver a sermon: “His notions of Morality were fine and sublime; His thread of reasoning, was easy, clear, and solid; he was not only the best Preacher of the age, but seemed to have brought Preaching to perfection; His sermons were so well heard and liked, and so much read, that all the Nations proposed him as a Pattern, and studied to copy after him.”<sup>82</sup> Tillotson was not the only preacher in London famous for his clear- and simple-styled sermons. Samuel Pepys recorded in his diary that he went to hear Stillingfleet, “the famous young preacher,” whom people “believe is the ablest young man to preach the gospel since the apostles. He did make a most plain, honest, good, grave sermon in the most unconcerned manner that ever I heard in my life.”<sup>83</sup> Latitudinarians did not only compose sermons in a new rational style, they also theorized about their form. Wilkins’s book, *Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language*, written for the Royal Society and published in 1668 by Tillotson, advocated for a language “of so much clearness and closeness and strength.”<sup>84</sup> When words represented clear, simple, and universally recognizable ideas, the latitudinarians were confident, people would be able to converse about matters of all kinds without breaking out into “heats and factions.” Rational language had the ability to bring people together. Thus, the external form of words could be just as important as their internal meanings.

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<sup>82</sup> Burnet, *History*, Book II, 135. Also see Burnet, *Funeral Sermon for Tillotson*.

<sup>83</sup> Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, entry from Sunday, 23 April 1665. Latitudinarians also wrote guides to good preaching, for instance: Wilkins’s *Ecclesiastes*, and Burnet’s *Discourse of the Pastoral Care*.

<sup>84</sup> Tillotson in preface to Wilkins, *Principles*. Rivers has shown how the latitudinarians employed a rational style of language aimed at addressing a London audience. According to her, this style is one of the central characteristics distinguishing the latitudinarians: “what emerges is the development of a collective language and rhetorical method which by the end of the century had largely succeeded in...establishing itself...as the standard for rational public discourse.” In Rivers, *Reason*, 38.



## **It is upon all accounts calculated to our interest**

Like many seventeenth-century philosophers, latitudinarians were interested in establishing the principles of human nature. They hoped to build on that foundation a case for moral human action. Describing the basic mechanisms of human nature in materialist terms, they claimed that human beings naturally pursue pleasure and avoid pain.<sup>85</sup> But what they had in mind was not a picture of Hobbes's Natural Man. For the latitudinarians, humans could use their reason to maximize their total happiness over the long run. Rational beings made calculations: lesser pleasures could be sacrificed for the sake of greater ones. Central, then, to latitudinarian thinking was the idea of interest. Obedience to the moral duties, latitudinarians would argue time and time again, was in man's own interest.<sup>86</sup> In his preface to Wilkins's *Principles of Natural Religion*, Tillotson wrote, "surely nothing is more likely to prevail with wise and considerate men to become religious, than to be thoroughly convinced, that *religion* and *happiness*, our *duty* and our *interest*, are really but one and the same thing considered under several notions."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Tillotson, Sermon III, in *Works*, vol. 1, 29: "One of the first principles that is planted in the nature of man, and which lies at the very root and foundation of his being is the desire of his own preservation and happiness. Hence it is that every man is led by interest, and does love or hate, chuse or refuse things, according as he apprehends them to conduce to this end, or to contradict it." The latitudinarian description had many similarities, ironically, to Hobbes' description of human motivation in the *Leviathan*.

<sup>86</sup> Latitudinarians used commercial metaphors. Wilkins explained the calculated risk the religious man takes: "A Present Good may reasonably be parted with, upon a probable expectation of a future Good which is more excellent." In *Principles*, 14-16. This is comparable to the risk merchants are willing to take with investments.

<sup>87</sup> Tillotson, preface to Wilkins's *Principles*. Tillotson, Sermon III, in *Works*, 30: "[Religion] doth not onely tend to make every man happy consider'd singly and in a private capacity, but is excellently fitted for the benefit of humane society." In his preface to *Principles*, Tillotson said Wilkins aimed "to persuade men to the practice of religion, and the virtues of a good life, by shewing how natural and direct an influence they have, not only upon our future blessedness in another world, but even upon the happiness and prosperity of this present life." In his own sermon, Tillotson wrote, religion is in "the interest of mankind; both of private persons, and of publick societies." And: "God hath given us no Laws but what are for our good, nay so gracious hath he been to us as to link together our duty and our interest, and to make those very things the instances of our obedience which are the natural means and causes of our happiness." Sermon VI, 219, and VI, 175.

One of the objections to the Christian religion, Tillotson explained, was that it was thought to put too great a burden on man: “it requires us to be patient under sufferings, ready to sacrifice our dearest interests in this world.” Some people suggested that religion was “opposite to our present welfare, and did rob men of the greatest advantages and conveniences of life.”<sup>88</sup> As far back as St. Augustine, Christianity had taught that the path of a saint was full of obstacles. Certainly the Puritans believed that it was not easy to be one of the faithful. But the latitudinarians thought just the opposite. They aimed to show that religion was not inconvenient or harmful to worldly interests. Tillotson admitted that “humane nature is most powerfully affected with sensible and temporal things. And consequently, there cannot be a greater prejudice raised against any thing than to have it represented as inconvenient and hurtfull to our temporal interests.” His objective, throughout his writings, was to prove the utility of religion “by reconciling it with the happiness of mankind and by giving satisfaction to our reason, that it is so far from being an enemy that it is the greatest friend to our temporal interests.”<sup>89</sup> He was not the only one to emphasize this point: religion was described by all latitudinarians as fundamentally instrumental in maximizing the happiness of individuals and societies.<sup>90</sup> Thus, for the latitudinarians, obedience to the Laws of Christianity could never be considered a hardship.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Tillotson, Sermon III, “The advantages of religion to societies,” in *Works*, 130.

<sup>89</sup> Tillotson, Sermon III, “The advantages of religion to societies,” in *Works*, 130.

<sup>90</sup> Tillotson, Sermon IV, “Religion and obedience to the Laws of God do conduce to the happiness of particular persons,” in *Works*, 152: “Religion conduceth to the happiness of this life; and that both in respect of the inward and outward man.” “Religion does tend to the happiness of the outward man”; “Religion in all respects conduces to the happiness of this life.” Sermon III, in *Works*, 136: “Religion in general, and every particular vertue, doth in its own nature conduce to the publick Interest”; “how advantageous Religion and Vertue are to the publick prosperity of a Nation.”

<sup>91</sup> Tillotson dedicated one entire sermon—“The Precepts of Christianity not Grievous” (Sermon VI)—to this subject. Also see Sermon V, in *Works*, 189: “But the perfection and the reasonableness of the Laws of Christianity will most plainly appear by taking a brief survey of them. And they may all be referr’d to these two general heads. They are either such as tend to the perfection of humane nature and to make men singly and personally good, or such as tend to the peace and happiness of humane Society.” Sermon III, in *Works*, 145: “Religion hath so great an influence

While the Calvinists saw life as a constant struggle, while they might be consumed by melancholy, and anxious about their salvation, latitudinarians found religion psychologically comforting, and materially profitable. They always emphasized the easiness of a religious life: the Laws of God “command nothing that is unnecessary and burdensome,...but what is reasonable, and usefull.”<sup>92</sup> So that a religious life was “the most pleasant course any man can take.”<sup>93</sup>

The latitudinarians enumerated the many ways that religion was advantageous to individuals and to society.<sup>94</sup> The Moral Laws, by making men virtuous, promoted their self-interest: temperance and chastity preserved a man’s health; fidelity and industry enlarged his fortune and estate; justice and beneficence gave him “credit and value” among other men.<sup>95</sup>

These virtues were not only profitable to the individual, but also to his family. Moreover, these

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upon the felicity of men that it ought to be upheld, and the veneration of it maintained, not onely out of a just dread of the Divine vengeance in another world, but out of regard to the temporal peace and prosperity of men.”

<sup>92</sup> Tillotson, Sermon V, “The excellency of the Christian religion,” in *Works*, 186. Tillotson, Sermon IV, 176: “God requires no man's service upon hard and unreasonable terms.”

<sup>93</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXVIII, “Objections against the true religion vindicated,” in *Works*, 428. Also see Sermon VI, 216: God “hath commanded us nothing in the gospel that is either unsuitable to our reason, or prejudicial to our interest; nay, nothing that is severe and against the grain of our nature”; “The greatest part of our work is a present reward to it self.”

<sup>94</sup> Tillotson, who treated this subject in a number of sermons, made “The Advantages of Religion to Societies” and “The Advantages of Religion to particular Persons” the third and fourth sermons of his collected works.

<sup>95</sup> Tillotson, Sermon IV, in *Works*, 160-162; 176: “Religion doth oblige men to the practice of those vertues which do in their own nature conduce to the preservation of our health, and the lengthening of our days”; “As to our estates, Religion is likewise a mighty advantage to men in that respect. ...this Religion principally does, by charging men with truth and fidelity and justice in their dealings”; “As to our estates, Religion is likewise a mighty advantage to men in that respect. ...this Religion principally does, by charging men with truth and fidelity and justice in their dealings”; “Religion does likewise engage men to diligence and industry in their Callings, and how much this conduces to the advancement of mens fortunes daily experience teaches.”; “And if men did but truly and wisely love themselves they would upon this very ground if there were no other, become Religious. For when all is done there is no man can serve his own interest better than by serving God. Religion conduceth both to our present and future happiness, and when the Gospel chargeth us with piety towards God, and justice and charity towards men, and temperance and chastity in reference to our selves, the true interpretation of these Laws is this, God requires of men in order to their eternal happiness that they should do those things which tend to their temporal welfare, that is in plainer words, he promises to make us happy for ever upon condition that we will but do that which is best for our selves in this world.”

laws tended to “the peace and happiness of humane Society” because they made men social: “For they command all those vertues which are apt to sweeten the spirits and allay the passions and animosities of men one towards another.”<sup>96</sup> They produced “mutual love and good-will and confidence among men, which are the great bands of peace.”<sup>97</sup> In other words, the Moral Laws rendered social life possible. The latitudinarians claimed, against Hobbes, that “mankind can devise nothing more proper to this end than these Laws.”<sup>98</sup> If these laws were not followed, they admitted, “humane society would in a short space disband and run into confusion, the earth would grow wild and become a great forest, and mankind would become beasts of prey one towards another.”<sup>99</sup> Indeed, something like this had transpired in the 1640s and 50s, when men’s passions had run their course without restraint. This was why latitudinarians could be sure that self-discipline was necessary for the order and stability of society.

Hobbes, notoriously, had argued in *Leviathan* that men in the state of nature agreed to put an external restraint upon themselves in order to “[get] themselves out from that miserable

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<sup>96</sup> Tillotson, Sermon V in *Works*, 193. Also see Sermon III, 145; 140: “For the whole design of [Religion] is to procure the private and publick happiness of mankind, and to restrain men from all those things which would make them...unpeaceable and troublesome to the world”; “Now if this be the design of Religion to bring us to this temper, thus to heal the natures of men and to sweeten their spirits, to correct their passions and to mortifie all those lusts which are the causes of enmity and division, then it is evident that in its own nature it tends to the peace and happiness of humane society; and that if men would but live as Religion requires they should do the world would be a quiet habitation, a most lovely and desirable place.” See also, Tillotson, Sermon XXVII.

<sup>97</sup> Tillotson, Sermon III, in *Works*, 136-137. He continued: “And on the contrary, wickedness doth in its own nature produce many publick mischiefs. For as sins are link'd together and draw on one another, so almost every vice hath some temporal inconvenience annexed to it and naturally following it. Intemperance and lust breed infirmities and diseases, which being propagated spoil the strain of a Nation. Idleness and luxury bring forth poverty and want; and this tempts men to injustice, and that causeth enmity and animosities, and these bring on *strife* and *confusion*.” “Religion tends to make men peaceable one towards another. For it endeavours to plant all those qualities and dispositions in men which tend to peace and unity, and to fill men with a spirit of universal love and good will. ...[I]t requires the extirpation of all those passions and vices which render men unsociable and troublesome to one another, as pride, covetousness and injustice, hatred and revenge and cruelty.”

<sup>98</sup> Tillotson, Sermon V, “The excellency of the Christian religion,” in *Works*, 193.

<sup>99</sup> Tillotson, Sermon III, in *Works*, 140. He concluded: “And if this discourse hold true surely then one would think that vertue should find it self a seat wherever humane societies are, and that Religion should be owned and encouraged in the world until men cease to be governed by reason.”

condition of Warre, which is necessarily consequent...to the natural Passions of men.”<sup>100</sup> But whereas Hobbes thought men needed an external government to restrain their passions, the latitudinarians thought each man had an internal government—his conscience, or what was the same thing, his reason—which moderated his passions. As historian Ethan Shagan has recently argued, “the quintessentially English quality of moderation, as developed in the early modern period, was at heart an ideology of control.”<sup>101</sup> The word “moderation” could have multiple meanings for the latitudinarians. It could describe their broad views on church doctrine and administration, but it could also describe their views on human behavior—moderation implied self-control. Latitudinarians were appalled by the outpouring of emotionalism that could be seen in the preaching of many of their Puritan counterparts. Feelings needed to be moderated, they thought—for one, because excesses of all kinds brought more pain than pleasure. “Nothing is more certain in reason and experience,” Tillotson wrote, “than that every inordinate appetite and affection is a punishment to it self; and is perpetually crossing its own pleasure, and defeating its own satisfaction, by over-shooting the mark it aims at. For instance, *Intemperance* in eating and drinking, instead of delighting and satisfying nature, doth but load and cloy it; and instead of quenching a natural thirst, which it is extremely pleasant to do, creates an unnatural one, which is troublesome and endless.”<sup>102</sup>

Latitudinarians, however, insisted upon moderation, not austerity. They criticized certain ancient philosophers, monastics, and Puritans alike for their extreme self-denial of the pleasures of the body. Stillingfleet admitted that while “some degree of love to this World is allowable,” it

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<sup>100</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 223.

<sup>101</sup> Ethan Shagan, *The Rule of Moderation: Violence, Religion and the Politics of Restraint in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2011), 10.

<sup>102</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XVIII, “The example of Jesus in doing good,” in *Works*, 422. Stillingfleet thought it was a great cause of sorrow that “so many Passions are not brought into their due order.” Stillingfleet, Sermon XXV (originally preached in 1688/9), in *Works*.

should not be in excess.<sup>103</sup> Wilkins cautioned against “running into extremities of all kinds: As, the generality of men on the one hand [run] to licentiousness and prophaneness, so some on the other, to frame unto themselves such rules of holiness as God doth not require.”<sup>104</sup> Moderation was a form of self-regulation which still allowed for the pleasures of the world, but within liberally drawn limits: “God and Reason have set us no other bounds concerning the use of sensual pleasures,” Tillotson explained, “but that we take care not to be injurious to our selves, or others, in the kind, or degree of them.”<sup>105</sup>

Thus, the moral law, by regulating the passions, promoted men’s worldly interests. “[It] is upon all accounts calculated for our benefit. Let but all things be truly considered and cast up.” Tillotson listed the benefits so that his readers could make the calculation themselves.<sup>106</sup> The question remained, though, if the advantages of a moral life were so easily computable, why was revealed religion necessary at all? Certainly, heathen peoples were capable of knowing the

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<sup>103</sup> Stillingfleet, Sermon XXV, *Works*. Stillingfleet, Sermon V, 120: “there ought to be a *Governing our Appetites according to Reason*, and that is Temperance.” See also Stillingfleet, Sermon XXIX.

<sup>104</sup> Wilkins, *Sermons*, Sermon I, 35; “*Intemperance* is either an over-charging of Nature, so as to make it to sink or totter under the load; or it is a wanton humouring and pleasing the Appetite, not, for the Service of Nature, but for the Pleasure of Eating and Drinking.” Tillotson, Sermon XXVIII, in *Works*, 435: “According to the design of nature, men should eat and drink that they may live; but the voluptuous man onely lives that he may eat and drink. Nature in all sensual enjoyments designs pleasure, which may certainly be had within the limits of vertue: But vice rashly pursues pleasure into the enemies quarters; and never stops.” Some philosophers could take self-denial too far. Stillingfleet, Sermon XXIX (originally preached 1690/1), in *Works*: “they tell us, [reason] lies in a plain simple Diet, such as the Beasts use, without provoking or raising the Appetite. But I know not where God hath forbidden the Use of Art, as to our Eating and Drinking”; “and if this were so, we must practise Temperance only in the Use of Water and Acorns. If meer *Satisfaction of Nature* were the exact Rule of Temperance, then eating or drinking any thing beyond it were a Sin; which would fill the Minds of those who are afraid to sin, with infinite Scruples; and make all Feasting unlawfull.”

<sup>105</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXVIII, “Objections against the true religion vindicated,” in *Works*, 422-423.

<sup>106</sup> Tillotson, Sermon IV, in *Works*, 173. Also see Sermon XXVIII, 429: “And if this be true that the Laws of God, how contrary soever to our vicious inclinations, are really calculated for our benefit and advantage, it would almost be an affront to wise and considerate men to importune them to their interest; and with great earnestness to persuade them to that which in all respects is so visibly for their advantage.” And Sermon XL, 367: Religion “is so equally calculated both for our comfort in this World, and for our happiness in the other.”

moral law; latitudinarians insisted upon this point.<sup>107</sup> Even Indians in the New World had to know their duty, “else, how shall God judge the world? how shall they, to whom the word of God never came, be acquitted or condemn’d at the great day? For where there is no law, there can be neither obedience nor transgression.”<sup>108</sup> In fact, the history of the ancients bore evidence of virtuous heathens who had obeyed the moral laws with more fidelity than so many of their Christian successors.

In order to understand the significance of God’s revelation, then, the latitudinarians turned their attention once more to human nature. Nothing could more effectively motivate men to keep the moral laws, they thought, than consideration of what was in their own self-interest, which ultimately, as Christianity made abundantly clear, was their salvation. Thus, Christianity provided the strongest motivation for behaving well in the world—promises of rewards and punishments in the next: “The Christian Religion propounds the most powerfull arguments to perswade men to the obedience of these Laws,” Tillotson explained. “The Gospel offers such considerations to us, as are fit to work very forcibly upon two of the most swaying and governing passions in the mind of man, our hopes and our fears. To encourage our hopes it gives us the highest assurance of the greatest and most lasting happiness, in case of obedience; and to awaken our fear it threatens sinners with the most dreadfull and durable torments, in case of

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<sup>107</sup> Glanvill, *Essays*, no. 5, 3-4: “The Matter and Substance of the Gospel [is] more clearly and explicitly reveal’d to the Christian Church; but in some measure owned also by the Gentiles.” Fowler, *Principles and Practices*, 79-80: “In know no duties enjoy’d in the Gospel, besides that of Faith in Christ, and the two Sacraments, but may be found, as to the substance of them, at least commended as noble perfections, in some one or other of the Heathenish writings.” Stillingfleet admitted, “the Heathens had a kind of Apostles among them, viz. the Philosophers, who sought to amend the manners of men by the moral instructions they gave them; so that if men were bad, it was not for want of good counsel, but for not observing it.” Stillingfleet, Sermon IV, in *Works*, 107.

<sup>108</sup> Tillotson in preface to Wilkins, *Principles*. Wilkins argued in *Principles of Natural Religion* that the heathens’ obedience to natural law must be acceptable to God.

disobedience.”<sup>109</sup> Christianity, then, appealed both to man’s reason, and to his passions. It was this, Tillotson continued, “which makes the doctrine of the Gospel so powerfull an instrument for the reforming of the world...as no Religion ever did.”<sup>110</sup> With these words, Tillotson distilled from Christianity its essential utility: it was an instrument of reformation. The ends produced by Christianity—human moral behavior—gave it its value.

The latitudinarian description of Christianity almost always presented it as one among several complementary religions. The task for the latitudinarian, then, was to demonstrate why Christianity was the best of the lot. So that its good qualities might be rendered more vividly, Tillotson weighed Christianity against other religions of the world, asking his readers to consider which religion, in its philosophy and in its institutions, provided humankind with the greatest insight into the moral duties and the greatest assistance to fulfilling them: “My design...is to

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<sup>109</sup> Tillotson, Sermon V, in *Works*, 196. Also see Sermon XXXV, 155: “The serious consideration of [eternal state of Rewards and Punishments in another World] is the greatest discouragement to Sin, and the most powerful argument in the World to a holy and vertuous life: Because it is an argument taken from our greatest and most lasting interest, our happiness or our misery to all Eternity: A concernment of that vast consequence, that it must be the greatest stupidity and folly in the World for any man to neglect it.” Sermon V, 198: “And the firm belief of a future Judgment,... if it be well consider'd, is to a reasonable nature the most forcible motive of all other to a good life; because it is taken from the consideration of the greatest and most lasting happiness and misery that humane nature is capable of. So that the Laws of Christianity have the firmest sanction of any Laws in the world to secure the obedience and observance of them”; “eternal rewards in the life to come are the great motive to well doing.” See Patrick, *A Friendly Debate between a Conformist and Non-conformist* (1668), 27. Tillotson explained the mechanism of human motivation in mechanical terms: “This consideration [rewards and punishments of the next life] ought to have a mighty Operation upon us... The firm belief of a future state of eternal Happiness or misery in another World is the great weight or spring that sets a going those two powerful Principles of humane Activity.” Tillotson, Sermon XXXVIII, 279.

<sup>110</sup> Tillotson, Sermon V, in *Works*, 196. Fowler, *Principles and Practices*, 86-9: “The Gospel gives far greater helps to the performance of our duty; and enforceth its precepts with infinitely stronger, and more perswasive Motives and Arguments, than were ever before made known.” Also see Fowler, *Design of Christianity*. Stillingfleet, in Sermon IV, *Works*, explained the difference between ancient and Christian morals: “To which I answer, that our business is not now to enquire whether there hath not been an incomparably greater advantage to the World by Christianity, in the reforming mens lives, than ever was by any of the Heathen Morals, but whether there, taking them in the fairest dress, were sufficient for the bringing men to eternal happiness, that there needed not any such Doctrine as Christianity, be published for that end? And there are two great things we may charge the best of their discourses with an insufficiency in, for the accomplishment of this end, which are Certainty, and Motives, or the want of Arguments to believe, and Encouragements to practice.” See also Tillotson, Sermon XX, 38: The value of the gospel in particular was that it has “cleared the dimness and obscurity of natural light,” and made clear humankind’s responsibilities in this world, which, in comparison, “all the philosophy and religions that had been before in the world, whether jewish or pagan, were remarkably defective.”



represent the excellency of this knowledge of the Christian Religion above that of any other Religion or Institution in the world,” he said.<sup>111</sup> The latitudinarians repeatedly made comparisons when speaking about religion.<sup>112</sup> Tillotson imagined Christ telling his followers: “I have proposed the best Religion to your choice. It is so reasonable and wise, so much your Interest and your Happiness to do it.”<sup>113</sup> Indeed, man was confronted with a choice at the marketplace of religions; Christianity had to prove its usefulness to him. At the end of his defense of Christianity in the sermon, “The Excellency of the Christian Religion,” Tillotson wrote a remarkable passage:

And now methinks I may with some confidence challenge any Religion in the world to shew such a compleat body and collection of holy and reasonable Laws establish'd upon such promises and threatenings as the Gospel contains. And if any man can produce a Religion that can reasonably pretend to an equal or a greater confirmation than the Gospel hath, a Religion the precepts and promises and threatenings whereof are calculated to make men wiser and better, more temperate and more chaste, more meek and more patient, more kind and more just, than the laws and motives of Christianity are apt to make men; if any man can produce such a Religion, I am ready to be of it. Let but any man shew me any Book in the world, . . . that commands us every thing in reason necessary to be done. . . ; a Book the rules whereof, if they were practic'd, would make men more pious and devout, more holy and sober, more just and fair in their dealings, better friends and better neighbours, better magistrates and better subjects and better in all relations, and which does offer to the understanding of men more powerfull arguments to perswade them to be all this; let any man, I say, shew me such a Book, and I will lay aside the Scripture and preach out of that.<sup>114</sup>

Of course, Tillotson was using a rhetorical device here. But, the passage nevertheless shows to what extent the latitudinarians described the value of Christianity in terms of its social utility. Christianity was superior to other religions because it made men sociable—“what could any Religion do more towards the reforming of the dispositions and manners of men?”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Tillotson, Sermon V, in *Works*, 180. Stillingfleet, Sermon IV, in *Works*: “Christianity be of unspeakable advantage to this World, there being no Religion that tends so much to the peace of mens minds, and the preservation of civil Societies as this doth.”

<sup>112</sup> See Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt, *The Book that Changed Europe: Picart and Bernard's Religious Ceremonies of the World* (Cambridge MA.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>113</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XLIX, *Works*, vol. 3, 395.

<sup>114</sup> Tillotson, Sermon V, in *Works*, 206-207.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

## A real reformation of our lives

A defense of Christianity was never needed more than now, latitudinarians thought, because the threat from atheism was getting stronger. Tillotson's preface to his own collected works stated that he composed his discourses with one particular aim in mind, namely, "[t]o show the unreasonableness of atheism, and of scoffing at religion."<sup>116</sup> With these words, he summed up a lifetime's achievements, 254 sermons in twelve volumes. In March 1664, he preached a sermon in St. Paul's before the Lord Mayor and the Court of Aldermen. In the dedication to the sermon, published as *The wisdom of being religious*, Tillotson conveyed one of his most fundamental concerns, which most of his sermons would in one way or another seek to address, namely, the threat of atheism. He stated, "I know not how acceptable discourses of this nature may be: I am very sure they are seasonable in this degenerate age, in which *atheism* and *prophaneness* are grown so impudent, and, notwithstanding the restraints of shame and laws, do appear with so bold a face in the world."<sup>117</sup> He believed, like his fellow latitudinarians, that an epidemic of skeptical opinions, from the press and from the stage, on the streets and in the coffeehouses, was weakening the authority of religion. Atheism was in fashion. "We are fallen into so prophane and sceptical an age," Tillotson lamented, "which takes a pleasure and a pride in unraveling almost all the received principles both of religion and reason."<sup>118</sup> Stillingfleet

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<sup>116</sup> Tillotson, *Works*, preface.

<sup>117</sup> Tillotson, Sermon I, in *Works*. Also see Birch, "Life," viii-ix. Tillotson lived through an age, Birch said, "in which the hypocrisies and extravagances of the times preceding the restoration, concurring with the liberties and looseness of morals immediately following it, disposed many persons to impiety and atheism." Tillotson directed all his energies to combating this growing irreligion. "In order to that he laboured particularly to deduce every thing from the clearest principles, and to make all people feel the reasonableness of the truths, as well as the precepts of the Christian religion," Birch, "Life," ix.

<sup>118</sup> Tillotson, Sermon I, in *Works*, 21. He wrote similarly about "this degenerate age, which is prodigiously sunk into atheism and prophaneness, and is running head-long into a humour of scoffing at God and religion and every thing that is sacred." Sermon III, 146. He continued: "When men arrive to that degree of confidence, as to tell the world, that the notion of a spirit implies a contradiction: that fear and fancy are the parents of a deity, and *ignorance* and *melancholy* the true causes of *devotion*; and that *religion* is nothing else but *the fear of invisible power feigned by*

characterized his contemporaries as “such a forward, unthankfull, Atheistical Generation of Men.”<sup>119</sup> Religion, he said, was too often the subject of “Scorn and Contempt.”<sup>120</sup>

The latitudinarians were especially troubled by materialist views of nature presented in the works of philosophers like Hobbes and Spinoza. They disputed the ideas in those texts with their own reasonable arguments based on the natural science developed by Robert Boyle, and later by Isaac Newton.<sup>121</sup> They were particularly eager to point out the moral messages contained in divine providence, and to dispel materialist notions that the world had its origin in a random collision of atoms and that God took no part in its government.<sup>122</sup> Tillotson devoted an entire sermon to proving that the mark of God’s providential hand was visible in nature. Things could not be the result of “blind Necessity or Chance which hath such plain characters upon it of a Divine Power and Wisdom.”<sup>123</sup>

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*the mind, or imagined from tales publikly allowed:* When it shall be counted brave to defy God, and every dabbler in natural philosophy, or mathematics, or politics, shall set up for an atheist; sure then it is high time to resist this growing evil.” Tillotson was quoting, in the italics, Hobbes’ words in the *Leviathan*. See Roy Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979).

<sup>119</sup> Stillingfleet, Sermon XXIX, “The Nature and Extent of a True Christian Obedience” (1690/1), in *Works*.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* Stillingfleet railed against individuals who “wilfully and presumptuously, not only break, but contemn [God’s] Laws; not barely neglect their duty, but despise it; such as are not meerly cold and indifferent about Religion, but are zealously concerned against it, and endeavour to expose it to scorn and contempt.” Stillingfleet, Sermon XXI (1683/4).

<sup>121</sup> See Jacob, *Newtonians*; Shapiro, “Latitudinarianism”; and John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture*, 522-525;

<sup>122</sup> Jacob, *Newtonians*: “the most significant achievement of Restoration natural philosophers...was the articulation of a mechanical philosophy that required God’s active participation in the workings of nature. ... The design and harmony so evident to Restoration natural philosophers existed only because the providential deity supervised every operation of nature. He did so through rules that expressed his will, and the task of science was to discover and explicate the rules that govern nature, in effect to explain to man the operations of providence and creation,” 23.

<sup>123</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXXVI, in *Works*, 196. Tillotson argued in this same sermon that “there is a secret Providence which governs and over-rules all things, and does, when it pleases, interpose to defeat the most hopeful and probable designs”; “Because a Providence does suppose all things to have been at first wisely fram’d, and with a fitness to attain their end; but yet it does also suppose that God hath reserved to himself a power and liberty to interpose, and to cross as he pleases, the usual course of things; to awaken men to the consideration of him, and a continual dependence upon him; and to teach us to ascribe those things to his wise disposal, which, if we never saw any change, we should be apt to impute to blind necessity. ... God hath so order’d things, in the administration of the affairs of the World, as to encourage the use of means; and yet so, as to keep men in a continual dependence upon

The latitudinarians remained certain that the only way religion could successfully challenge irreligion was by engaging with it in the same language and on the same terms. While they hoped their sermons and discourses would arm their listeners and readers with the strongest arguments against atheism, latitudinarians worried that by disputing skeptical ideas, they might, in the end, transmit them further.<sup>124</sup> Stillingfleet expressed this dilemma when he wrote, “I am sensible, that in this Sceptical and Unbelieving Age...it would seem as if we were afraid to look their [atheists’] Objections in the Face, if we take no Notice of them; and on the other side, to insist too much upon them, were we to make them appear much more considerable than they are.”<sup>125</sup> On the whole, the latitudinarians overcame any misgivings they might have had concerning this matter, for they preached and wrote prolifically against atheism.

But it was not just philosophical atheism that the latitudinarians opposed. Of even greater concern to them were the men and women who identified themselves as Christians, but

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him for the efficacy and success of them: To encourage Industry and Prudence, God generally permits things to their natural course, and to fall out according to the power and probability of second Causes. But then, lest men should cast off Religion, and *deny the God that is above*; ...lest men should look upon themselves as the Creators and framers of their own fortune, and when they do but a little outstrip others in wisdom or power, in the skill and conduct of humane affairs, they should grow proud and presumptuous, God is pleased sometimes more remarkably to interpose, ... to make us to know *that we are but men*, and that the reins of the World are not in our hands, but that there is *One* above who sways and governs all things here below.”

<sup>124</sup> Just a few of the many examples of passages in which Tillotson conveys materialist notions follow. Tillotson, Sermon III, in *Works*, 142-143: Atheists claim that “vertue and vice are arbitrary things founded onely in the imaginations of men and in the constitutions and customs of the world, but not in the nature of the things themselves; and that *that* is vertue or vice, good or evil, which the Supream Authority of a Nation declares to be so. And this is frequently and confidently asserted by the ingenious Author of a very bad Book, I mean the *Leviathan*.” Sermon XL, 347: “And considering [the] wonderful frame of a humane Body, this infinitely complicated Engine; in which, to the due performance of the several functions and offices of life, so many strings and springs, so many receptacles and channels are necessary, and all in their right frame and order.”; but God’s providence is visible within the mechanical order: “there are so many flood-gates to let Death in and Life out, that it is next to a miracle, though we take but little notice of it, that every one of us did not die every day since we were born. I say, considering the nice and curious frame of our Bodies, and the innumerable contingencies and hazards of humane Life, which is set in so slippery a place, that we still continue in the land of the living, we cannot ascribe to any thing but the watchful Providence of Almighty God.”

<sup>125</sup> Stillingfleet, Sermon XXXI (originally preached in 1693) in *Works*.

had adopted, what Stillingfleet called, a “Coldness and Indifferency about Religion.”<sup>126</sup> In question was not these people’s belief, but their behavior. Their faith had not translated into good manners or good works. These were the “practical atheists,” the men and women later targeted by the reforming societies. Tillotson made clear that faith was nothing if it did not manifest in good actions: “let us not cheat our selves with an empty and insignificant name, but if we will call our selves Christians let us fill up this great title, and make good our profession by a suitable life and practice.”<sup>127</sup> One had to live as one professed, the latitudinarians repeatedly said.

Thus, latitudinarians made a distinction between two kinds of atheists, one philosophical and the other practical. The former came to atheism by means of speculative reasoning, the latter through immoral behavior.<sup>128</sup> However, in most cases, the latitudinarians conflated philosophical and practical atheism, identifying religious skepticism with moral depravity: they considered that atheism was, at bottom, an intellectual system meant to justify bad manners. To them, atheism could only make sense to people who were ready to believe that if there were no future rewards and punishments, men and women had full license to indulge in all manner of vice.<sup>129</sup> That is to

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<sup>126</sup> Stillingfleet, Sermon XXXII (originally preached in 1693/4) in *Works*.

<sup>127</sup> Tillotson, Sermon VII, in *Works*, 256. Also see Sermon V, 208-209: “Let us not then deceive our selves by pretending to this excellent knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, if we do not frame our lives according to it. It concerns every one of us to consider seriously what we believe; and whether our belief of the Christian Religion have its due effect upon our lives.”; “the great weight of our charge will be this that we did not obey that Gospel which we profess’d to believe, that we made confession of the Christian Faith but liv’d like Heathens.” ; “But alas! who will believe that we do so, that shall look upon the actions and consider the lives of the greatest part of Christians? How grosly and openly do many of us contradict the plain precepts of the Gospel, by our ungodliness and worldly lusts by living intemperately or unjustly; or prophanely in this present world?”

<sup>128</sup> Tillotson, Sermon I, in *Works*, 18: “Now all that are irreligious are so upon one of these two accounts: either, first, because they do not believe the foundations and principles of religion, as the existence of God, the immorality of the soul, and future rewards: or else, secondly, because though they do in some sort believe these things, yet they live contrary to this their belief; and of this kind are the far greatest part of wicked men. The first are guilty of that which we call speculative, the other of practical atheism.”

<sup>129</sup> Tillotson, Sermon II, in *Works*, 112; 107: “The advantage indeed that men make of [principles of Atheism] is to give themselves the liberty to do what they please, to be more sensual and more unjust than other men”; “I

say, irreligious views sprang from the minds of people who followed a loose course of life, who had allowed their passions to rule their reason.<sup>130</sup> In *The Principles and Duties of Natural Religion* (1675), John Wilkins argued that the truths about God and Duty were so clear and distinct that it was unlikely for any person to maintain a real intellectual atheism. Philosophy reinforced religion, he thought, not irreligion. “The sum is, the true reason why any man is an Atheist,” Tillotson explained, “is because he is a wicked man. . . . For when men live as if there were no God it becomes expedient that there should be none: and then they endeavour to persuade themselves so, and will be glad to find arguments to fortify themselves in this persuasion.”<sup>131</sup> Ultimately, then, the threat of atheism signaled an even larger problem—growing vice.

The fact was, vice was visible everywhere on the streets of London, and it troubled the latitudinarians almost more than the circulation of skeptical texts. This was partially because

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remember it is the saying of *one*, who hath done more by his *Writings* to debauch the Age with Atheistical principles than any man that lives in it, *That when reason is against a man, then a man will be against reason*. I am sure this is the true account of such mens enmity to Religion, Religion is against them and therefore they set themselves against Religion.” Sermon XXVII, 383: “the *contrariety of the true Religion to the vicious inclinations and practices of men*. . . usually lyes at the bottom of all prejudice against Religion. Religion is an enemy to mens beloved lusts, and therefore they are enemies to Religion.”

<sup>130</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXIX, in *Works*, 445-446: “yet after he hath continued for some time in this course and is heartily engaged in it, his foolish heart is darken’d, and the notions of good and evil are obscured and confounded, and things appear to him in a false and imperfect light: His lusts do at once blind and byass his understanding; and his judgment by degrees goes over to his inclinations; and he cannot think that there should be so much reason against those things for which he hath so strong an affection. He is now engaged in a Party, and factiously concerned to maintain it, and to make the best of it: and to that end, he bends all his wits to advance such principles as are fittest to justifie his wicked practices; and in all debates plainly favours that side of the Question which will give the greatest countenance and encouragement to them.”

<sup>131</sup> Tillotson, Sermon II, in *Works*, 106. He continued: “Men of dissolute lives cry down religion, because they would not be under the restraints of it; they are loath to be tied up by the strict laws and rules of it.”; “Religion would curb him in his lusts, and therefore he casts it off and puts all the scorn upon it he can. Besides, that men think it some kind of apology for their vices that they do not act contrary to any principle they profess: Their practice is agreeable to what they pretend to believe, and so they think to vindicate themselves and their own practices by laughing at those for fools who believe any thing to the contrary.” Sermon XXXVIII, 280: “...being resolv’d upon an evil course, since they cannot reconcile their practice with such Principles as these, they will fit their Principles to their practice; and so they will believe nothing at all of the Rewards and Punishments of another World, lest this should disturb them in their course.” Also see Stillingfleet, Sermon XV (1674/5) in *Works*; Stillingfleet, Sermon XXVI (1689/90).

vice affected a greater number of people than philosophical atheism did. But it was also because latitudinarians thought that little could be done to protect religion from the threat of atheism without first bringing about a reformation of manners. “If men were in some measure reconciled to the practice of Religion,” Tillotson claimed, “the speculative Objections against it would almost vanish of themselves.”<sup>132</sup> As preachers in London, the latitudinarians were intimately familiar with urban daily life, and often had opportunity to remark on the vices they encountered in the city. “(I speak it knowingly),” Tillotson said, “a man can hardly pass the streets without having his ears grated and pierced with such horrid and blasphemous oaths and curses.”<sup>133</sup> Stillingfleet complained that swearing had become “too fashionable a sort of Profaneness,” which was damaging to “Piety and Good Manners.”<sup>134</sup> Latitudinarians blamed the decline in good manners on the disorders of the 1640s and 50s: “It is most apparent that of late years Religion is very sensibly declin'd among us. The manners of men have almost been universally corrupted by a Civil War.” Moral vice and political disorder went hand in hand.<sup>135</sup> Any chance at religious unity and social stability in England would first require a reformation of manners. As popular preachers, the latitudinarians hoped that through their sermons, they might inspire the beginnings of this reformation. “I have insisted the longer upon these arguments,” Tillotson told his parishioners, “that I might, if possible, awaken men to a serious consideration of their lives, and perswade them to a real reformation of them; that I may oblige all those who call themselves

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<sup>132</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXVIII, in *Works*, 405.

<sup>133</sup> Tillotson, Sermon III, in *Works*, 148.

<sup>134</sup> Stillingfleet, Sermon XXIX, “The Nature and Extent of a True Christian Obedience” (1690/1) in *Works*.

<sup>135</sup> Tillotson, Sermon III, in *Works*, 149. For Tillotson, England was threatened equally “by our prophaneness and impiety, by our lewdness and luxury, by our oppression and injustice, by our implacable malice one towards another, and by our senseless divisions and animosities one against another.” Sermon XXXVIII, 248.

Christians to live up to the essential and fundamental Laws of our Religion.”<sup>136</sup> The problem was, that vice was a bad habit, and it was not easily broken.

The latitudinarians rarely described vice as natural to man; instead they blamed bad behavior on bad habits. Stillingfleet wrote, “no Man could ever say, that he had a *Swearing Constitution*, or that it was an *Infirmity* of his *Nature*. There is nothing in it but the Tyranny of a very bad Custom.”<sup>137</sup> But habits, once they became entrenched by constant practice, were difficult to change. Tillotson devoted a sermon, “Of the difficulty of reforming vicious habits” to this topic. In it, he explained the nature of habits: “the farther we proceed the more we are confirmed in them: and that which at first we did voluntarily, by degrees becomes so natural and necessary that it is almost impossible for us to do otherwise. This is plainly seen in the experience of every day, in things good and bad, both in lesser and greater matters.”<sup>138</sup> He showed how people, “who have been deeply engaged in vitious habits and long accustomed to them,” had lost sight of their true interests; but, he made clear, their reformation was not an impossibility. “The result of my discourse will be,” he promised, “not to discourage any, how

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<sup>136</sup> Tillotson, Sermon VII, in *Works*, 269.

<sup>137</sup> Stillingfleet, Sermon XXIX, in *Works*. He continued: “It is really a matter to be wonder'd at, that among Persons professing a better sort of Breeding, as well as *Christianity*; a Vicious Custom, so Untempting in it self, so Unbecoming the Decency of Conversation, so Affronting to the Divine Majesty, so directly contrary to the Commands of Christ, should get so deep a rooting in ordinary Conversation, that it seems almost impossible to be Reformed.”

<sup>138</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXIX, in *Works*, 442-443. And also: “If we consider the nature of all Habits, whether good, or bad, or indifferent. The custom and frequent practice of any thing begets in us a facility and easiness in doing it. It bends the powers of our Soul, and turns the stream and current of our animal Spirits such a way, and gives all our faculties a tendency and pliability to such a sort of actions. And when we have long stood bent one way, we grow settled and confirmed in it; and cannot without great force and violence be restored to our former state and condition. For the perfection of any habit whether good, or bad, induceth a kind of necessity of acting accordingly. A rooted habit becomes a governing Principle, and bears almost an equal sway in us with that which is natural. It is a kind of a new nature superinduced, and even as hard to be expelled as some things which are Primitively and Originally natural.” See also Sermon LIII, 149: “*Custom* is of mighty force. It is, as *Pliny* in one of his *Epistles* says of it, *efficacissimus omnium rerum Magister, the most powerful and effectual Master in every kind*. It is an acquired and a sort of *Second Nature*, and next to Nature it self a principle of greatest power. Custom bears a huge sway in all Human actions. Men love those things and do them with ease to which they have been long inured and accustomed. And on the contrary men go against Custom with great regret and uneasiness.”



bad soever, from attempting this change, but to put them upon it, and to perswade them to it.”

And he assured his listeners, “the case of these persons, though it be extremely difficult, is not quite desperate.”<sup>139</sup>

Habits were not always bad. When duties were performed over and over again, they too became habits, good ones. “And this is truly the case. It is troublesome at first for a man to begin any new course, and to do contrary to what he hath been accustom’d to,” Tillotson explained, “but let a man but habituate himself to a religious and vertuous life, and the trouble will go off by degrees.”<sup>140</sup> Piety came easily to the person who practiced being good. So that “When a man hath once engag’d himself in a Religious course, and is habituated to piety and holiness, all the exercises of Religion and devotion, all acts of goodness and vertue are delightfull to him.”<sup>141</sup> That was why religious duties needed to be practiced with repetitive motions—so that they would become habits of life, or customs. “Religion,” Tillotson said, “should be a constant frame and temper of mind, discovering it self in the habitual course of our lives and actions.”<sup>142</sup> The latitudinarians had famously defended religion as the most rational set of beliefs and practices; here they also defended it as the best set of habits and customs. “If by this custome [Religious life], vertue will come to be more pleasant than ever vice was,” Tillotson concluded, “then the advantage is plainly on the side of Religion.”<sup>143</sup> In other words, Religion’s utility was once again expressed as its ability to promote good behavior in its adherents.

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<sup>139</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXIX, in *Works*, 452-453.

<sup>140</sup> Tillotson, Sermon VI, *Works*, 241. And: “we have in a good measure conquer’d the first difficulties of Religion, and gain’d some habitual strength against sin.” See also, Sermon XXVIII, 418: “And though to those who have wilfully contracted vicious habits a religious and vertuous course of life be very difficult, yet the main difficulty lyes in our first entrance upon it; And when that is over, the ways of goodness are easy.”

<sup>141</sup> Tillotson, Sermon IV, in *Works*, 156. See also Sermon XIV (1675); Burnet, *Rochester*, 117.

<sup>142</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXXVIII in *Works*, 263.

<sup>143</sup> Tillotson, Sermon VI, in *Works*, 241.

## Nature sometime hath a great latitude

It was crucial to latitudinarians that good manners, so important to the welfare of individuals and society, be instilled in people while they were still young. People were born with a few simple notions, but beyond that, they would be shaped by their environment—namely their education.<sup>144</sup> Tillotson preached at least four sermons on the importance of education, and Patrick gave a thorough treatment of the church catechism in a number of his works.<sup>145</sup> “I know nothing that is of greater concernment to Religion and to the good Order of the World than the careful Education of Children,” Tillotson said. And he insisted that this was not only with respect to catechism, but also to “the *Education of Children* in general, as a matter of the greatest consequence both to Religion and the Publick welfare.”<sup>146</sup> Children, he thought, should receive an education not only in religious principles and scientific ideas, but also in proper behavior. Discipline was needed for the mind *and* the body. He was confident that “by good instruction and example in their tender years they may be...without great difficulty formed to goodness.”<sup>147</sup> Through education children learned good manners and habits. “We are forming and fashioning Children to Religion and Virtue,” Tillotson explained.<sup>148</sup> “It requires great wisdom and industry to advance a considerable Estate, much art and contrivance and pains to raise a great and regular

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<sup>144</sup> Tillotson, Sermon LIV in *Works*, 188: “Youth is *aetas Disciplinae*, the proper *Age of Discipline*; very obsequious and tractable, fit to receive any kind of impression and to imbibe any tincture: Now we should lay hold of this golden Opportunity.” Against Dissenters, the latitudinarians argued that all people could benefit from an education. Sermon LIII, 147: “surely there is no Temper that is absolutely and irrecoverably prejudiced against that which is good. This would be so terrible an Objection against the Providence of God as would be very hard to be answered. God be thanked, most Tempers are tractable to good Education.”

<sup>145</sup> Patrick, *Catechism*.

<sup>146</sup> Tillotson, Sermon LI, in *Works*, 66.

<sup>147</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXVIII, in *Works*, 410.

<sup>148</sup> Tillotson, Sermon LII in *Works*, 121. Also see Sermon LI, 66: “The instruction and good Education of Children...does not only require great sagacity to discern their particular disposition and temper, but great discretion to deal with them and manage them, and likewise continual care and diligent attendance to form them by degrees to Religion and Virtue.”

Building: But the greatest and noblest Work in the World, and an effect of the greatest prudence and care is to rear and build up a Man, and to form and fashion him to Piety, and Justice, and Temperance, and all kind of honest and worthy actions. Now the Foundations of this great Work are to be carefully laid in the tender years of Children, that it may rise and grow up with them.” Children had to be “carefully observed and prudently restrained,” in order to be formed and fashioned appropriately. Good habits developed over time. Only then might men “by degrees be managed and brought under government.”<sup>149</sup>

Education for the latitudinarians was thus more about forming good manners than it was about teaching doctrine.<sup>150</sup> “Good Education,” Tillotson said, “gives the *Advantage of Habit and Custom*.”<sup>151</sup> Children should be taught the virtues—industry, honesty, moderation. They should be raised to be sociable and charitable; their natural “tenderness and pity” should be cultivated, “Which, when they come to engage in business and to have dealings in the World, will be a good bar against Injustice and Oppression; and will be continually prompting them to Charity, and will fetch powerful Arguments for it from their own bowels.”<sup>152</sup> This then, was how the virtuous citizen would be made. It could be hoped that through the education of children, a better future generation of men would rise, who would work to mend the religious and political divides in England. The laws of physics might be fixed, but human nature certainly was not.

Tillotson once again, eloquently stated:

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<sup>149</sup> Tillotson, Sermon LI, in *Works*, 92.

<sup>150</sup> Tillotson, Sermon LII, in *Works*, 129: “when the minds of Children are once thoroughly possest with the true Principles of Religion, we should bend all our endeavours to put them upon the practice of what they know: Let them rather be taught to do well than to talk well.”

<sup>151</sup> Tillotson, Sermon LIII, in *Works*, 149. And: “Custom is most strong which is begun in Childhood: And we see in Experience the strange power of Education in forming persons to Religion and Virtue. Now Education is nothing but certain Customs planted in Childhood, and which have taken deep Root whilst Nature was tender.”

<sup>152</sup> Tillotson, Sermon LI, in *Works*, 90. And: “They who write of *Japan* tell us that those People, though mere *Heathens*, take such an effectual course in the Education of their Children as to render a *Lye* and *breach of Faith* above all things odious to them.”

So that it is not universally true which Aristotle says, That Nature cannot be altered. It is true indeed in the Instance in which he gives of throwing a Stone upward; you cannot, says he, by any Custom, nay though you fling it up never so often, teach a Stone to ascend of it self: And so it is in many other Instances in which Nature is peremptory: But Nature is not always so; but sometimes hath a great *latitude*: As we see in young Trees, which though they naturally grow straight up, yet being gently bent may be made to grow any way. But above all, Moral inclinations and habits do admit of great alteration, and are subject to the power of a contrary Custom.<sup>153</sup>

Here then was another definition of “latitudinarian”—in this case, it meant one who was subject to the education, manners, habits and customs of society. “Latitudinarian” had been used as a word of abuse to imply someone who was willing to conform to any church—who was “prepared for the embracing of any Religion, & to renounce or subscribe to any Doctrine.”<sup>154</sup> But in the passage above we see it being used in a positive way to show how man could be shaped by good manners and customs. The implication was that, this latitudinarian man, and his society, could continue to improve forever.

Latitudinarians followed Aristotle in thinking that human beings were naturally sociable. With the right education, they were sure, men and women could be sympathetic, benevolent, charitable, and humane to each other. On this point, the latitudinarians were especially influenced by the Cambridge Platonist, Benjamin Whichcote. He had stated that, “There is in Man, a secret Genius to humanity; a Bias that inclines him to a Regard of all of his own Kind... There is a secret Sympathy in Human Nature, with Vertue and Honesty; with fairness and good Behavior; which gives a man an Interest even in bad Men.” This natural sympathy manifested in man’s desire for friendship and association. Whichcote could say with confidence, “Man is a sociable Creature, he delights in Company and Converse.”<sup>155</sup> This notion found its way into many of Tillotson’s sermons: “So far is it from being true, which Mr. Hobbes asserts as the

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<sup>153</sup> Tillotson, Sermon LIII, in *Works*, 151-152.

<sup>154</sup> Folwer, *Principles and Practices*.

<sup>155</sup> Whichcote, *Select Sermons*, Part II, Sermon 4, 382. This was quoted with approval by Shaftesbury in his preface to the sermons, A8. And he made clear, against Hobbes, “We may detest and reject that Doctrine which saith, that God made Man in a State of War.” Quoted in Rivers, *Reason*, 77. Also see Tillotson, Sermon III in *Works*.

fundamental principle of his politicks, ‘That men are naturally in a state of war and enmity with one another,’” Tillotson wrote, “that the contrary principle, laid down by a much deeper and wise man, I mean Aristotle, is most certainly true, ‘that men are naturally akin and friends to each other.’”<sup>156</sup> These ideas on human sociability, coming from the Cambridge Platonists, and reformulated by the latitudinarians, had a profound influence on British thought from Shaftesbury to Hume. But they also influenced the reforming societies of the 1690s to 1730s.

That period in England has been called “the age of association,” and certainly, the latitudinarians were early enthusiasts of association, especially in the form of charitable societies.<sup>157</sup> These kinds of organizations, Tillotson claimed, worked “for two of the best and noblest ends that can be, the maintaining of Friendship, and the promoting of Charity.”<sup>158</sup> Latitudinarians themselves were active in organizing charities in the city. Patrick and Tenison founded a number of charity schools, and Tillotson and Patrick aided Thomas Gouge in his philanthropic work with poor people in Wales.<sup>159</sup> Patrick remained in London during the plague in order to assist his parishioners.<sup>160</sup>

In 1681, Tillotson preached a sermon before a charitable society organized by the sons of clergymen—both conformists and nonconformists—in London. He praised “this sort of Meeting,” not only for administering aid “to very good purpose and effect,” but also, for fostering friendships across denominational lines. He thought this kind of social contact “hath tended very much to the reconciling of the minds of men, and the allaying of those fierce heats

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<sup>156</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXXIII, in *Works*, 90.

<sup>157</sup> Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford, 2000). Women and the poor were rarely members of these societies. Also see Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven, 2005).

<sup>158</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XX, in *Works*, 64. He called these organizations, “charitable customs.”

<sup>159</sup> Schlatter, *Social Ideas of Religious Leaders, 1660-1688*.

<sup>160</sup> See, Patrick, *Autobiography*.

and animosities which have been caused by our Civil confusions, and Religious distractions. For there is nothing many times wanting to take away prejudice, and to extinguish hatred and ill-will, but an opportunity for men to see and understand one another; by which they will quickly perceive, that they are not such Monsters as they have been represented one to another at a distance.”<sup>161</sup> Tillotson firmly believed that “charity and mutual forbearance among Christians would make the Church as peaceable and happy, as perhaps it was ever design’d to be in this World, without absolute unity in Opinion.”<sup>162</sup> Associating, then, could unite men who maintained different religious beliefs, but who were equally invested in the social welfare of their shared community. Certainly this was the case for the Societies for Reformation of Manners, established a decade later.

The call for moral reform got louder after 1688 when the latitudinarians were promoted to powerful positions within the church hierarchy. With the assistance of these churchmen, and certainly influenced by their ideas, Londoners organized themselves into charitable associations to set in motion a reformation of manners. But it now seemed to these reformers that the promises of rewards and punishments in the next life were not motives strong enough to break the habits of a vicious generation. Tillotson himself had admitted that for some individuals, “Their case plainly requires an extraordinary remedy.”<sup>163</sup> The reformers would find that remedy in civil law.

For the latitudinarians, the moral law was something that man understood internally, through his conscience, or what was the same, through his reason. Tillotson described the

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<sup>161</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XX, in *Works*, 66.

<sup>162</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXI, in *Works*, 96.

<sup>163</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXVIII, in *Works*, 416. In the case of swearing, Tillotson exclaimed, “Is it not then high time that the Laws should provide by the most prudent and effectual means to curb these bold and insolent defiers of Heaven, who take a pride in being monsters, and boast themselves in the follies and deformities of humane nature?” But he was referring to the church courts. Sermon III, 148.

conscience as an internal court which interpreted the moral laws for each individual. “Every man is represented as having a kind of Court and Tribunal in his own breast, where he tries himself and all his Actions,” he explained. Conscience played the role of accuser, recorder, witness and judge; “[it] declares the Law, and what we ought, or ought not to have done, in such or such a Case, and accordingly passeth Sentence upon us by acquitting or condemning us.”<sup>164</sup> But as the seventeenth century came to a close, people who had been raised in the latitudinarian tradition—convinced that outward behavior was what was essential to the peace and prosperity of the nation—turned from the spiritual court to the civil court as the instrument of moral reform in England.

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<sup>164</sup> Tillotson, Sermon XXVIII, in *Works*, 265.

## Chapter 2 – Religious Toleration and Social Order: The Societies for Reformation of Manners

In the late seventeenth century, voluntary associations called “societies for reformation of manners” formed first in London, and then throughout England. Members of these societies encouraged good manners in their communities by demanding the enforcement of the civil laws against moral crimes. These reformers believed that they lived in “degenerate and debauch’d Times.”<sup>1</sup> The nation suffered from two related disorders: the proliferation of “corrupt atheistical principles touching God and Religion” on the one hand, “and almost a total neglect of anything that may be truly termed practical piety” on the other hand.<sup>2</sup> As pious members of the community, these reformers set out to stop all instances of moral vice. To this end, they organized the arrest and prosecution in the civil courts of men and women who were found transgressing the moral laws against prostitution, swearing, drunkenness, gambling, or trading on Sundays. In 1694, the societies published their first pamphlet, *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners*, which had attached to it, “The Black Roll, Containing The Names and Crimes of Several hundreds Persons, who have been prosecuted by the Society, for Whoring, Drunkenness, Sabbath-breaking, etc.” In the forty years that they flourished, the societies would claim responsibility for over 100,000 prosecutions of moral offences in the courts of law.<sup>3</sup>

This generation of reformers, active from the 1690s until the 1730s, mobilized efforts to prosecute moral crimes in the civil courts rather than in the religious courts, which traditionally

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<sup>1</sup> Josiah Woodward, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London* (London, 1701), 43-46. See also Dudley Bahlman, *The Moral Revolution of 1688* (New Haven, 1957), 37-40.

<sup>2</sup> *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners, Humbly Offered to the Consideration of Our Magistrates & Clergy* (London, 1694), 15.

<sup>3</sup> This is by the societies’ own estimation. *Forty-Fourth Account of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners* (1738) gives the total number of prosecutions since the societies’ inception as 101,683. Also see; Garnet Portus, *Caritas Anglicana* (1912), 3; and Shelley Burt, *Virtue Transformed: Political Argument in England, 1688-1740* (Cambridge, 1992), 43.



saw such cases. This chapter argues that by looking at these societies, we can see their members confronting—and ultimately advancing—a new secular world view. Reformers were deeply religious people, yet the rhetoric they adopted for the sake of legitimizing religious behavior was often secular. They argued that the benefits good manners and morals brought individuals and societies were bodily, commercial and social. In contrast to their grandparents, whose discourses were filled with Scriptural references, these individuals preferred to draw on a non-religious vocabulary. It is significant, I argue, that even the most religious people spoke in secular terms. Through the writings of the societies for reformation of manners, I trace the unfolding of secularization and the origins of the Enlightenment in England.<sup>4</sup>

Dudley Bahlman was the first to identify a “Moral Revolution of 1688.” He explains the moral revolution as part of a popular frenzy to consolidate England’s protestant gains following the Revolution of 1688, and especially to fortify the nation against looming threats of popery.<sup>5</sup> According to his view, moral reformers looked to the revolution as an opportunity to restore a kind of puritan piety, which had nearly been extinguished in the Restoration years. Acknowledging that most reformers were not in fact puritan, Bahlman nevertheless writes, “Here one sees the expansion of certain puritan attitudes—debased in many ways—beyond the limits of any sect.”<sup>6</sup> Tony Claydon, in his book, *William III and the Godly Revolution*, presents a more nuanced reading of moral reform in this period. He argues that William III and his court drew on

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<sup>4</sup> Whether England was undergoing secularization in the early modern period has been a matter of debate for a long time, but revived by C. John Sommerville in *The Secularization of Early Modern England: From Religious Culture to Religious Faith* (Oxford, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Bahlman, *The Moral Revolution of 1688* (1956). He wrote, “The papacy, the reformers thought, was ever watchful of a chance to regain its power in England and viewed the prevailing immorality as favorable to its aims. Over and over the reforming pulpit and press warned of the connection between popery and vice... Every prostitute was a Jacobite,” 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, vi.

a providential moral rhetoric in order to ideologically justify the revolution.<sup>7</sup> But for all their talk of “revolution,” neither Bahlman nor Claydon describe any real change over time. Claydon disputes the idea that there was a “secularization” of early-modern England, and instead attempts to demonstrate a continuity in how people thought from the Tudor to the late-Stuart period. He argues that in 1688, William drew on language that would have been immediately comprehensible to men living a century earlier.

These are not the only scholars to describe more continuity than change. Following Bahlman, historians looking at the societies for reformation of manners have often dismissed them as part of a larger—and momentary—revival of Puritanism in this period.<sup>8</sup> I argue against this interpretation. The societies for reformation of manners were not puritan. Despite the fact that moderate Presbyterians quickly became active members of the societies, this movement was firmly situated in a “latitudinarian”-Anglican position. Reformers rejected the looseness of Restoration culture (associated with Catholicism and absolutism), but they did not then attempt to restore an older puritan morality. Instead they thought up new ways of creating a moral society. We should not assume that the only people who were interested in forms of moral control were Puritans.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Latitudinarian reformers were reacting in part to concerns they had that puritanism led to Antinomianism—a rejection of moral discipline altogether.

W. M. Jacob situates eighteenth-century moral reform within the Anglican tradition, but he too interprets it as a revival, in this case of an older Anglican piety, now at odds with an

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<sup>7</sup> Tony Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution* (Cambridge, 2004). Claydon presents a particularly top-down approach to this subject, concentrating on the ideas and actions of the government. However, the societies for reformation of manners, in particular, were completely independent of the state. For another view of moral reform and its place in high politics, see David Hayton, “Moral Reform and Country Politics in the Late Seventeenth-Century House of Commons,” *Past and Present*, no. 128 (August, 1990), 48-91.

<sup>8</sup> See Paul Griffiths, et al, *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (1996), and Paul Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> See, David Little, *Religion, Order, Law* (New York, 1984), 235.

increasingly out-of-touch church.<sup>10</sup> Thus, his interpretation offers, in the end, a portrait of a deeply conservative movement. Finally, Shelley Burt has described the societies in the context of a rebirth of ancient civic virtue. Against her view, I argue, reformers were not articulating a republican ideology or acting in a republican tradition. They were not engaged in making laws or becoming political actors in their state. They were interested in shaping social, not political behavior.<sup>11</sup>

For Edward Bristow, Robert Shoemaker, and Faramerz Dabhoiwala the societies for reformation of manners figure into a larger history about social, and especially sexual control. Edward Bristow has examined various moments in British history when men and women campaigned vigorously to push “the erotic in its many forms out of the public sphere.”<sup>12</sup> He sees the societies for reformation of manners as one of the many examples in a continuous two hundred year effort to impose standards of sexual decency on the British nation. Shoemaker, in a brief but informative article, explains moral reform in eighteenth-century London as a reaction to population growth in the city.<sup>13</sup> He has argued that the reformation of manners campaign cannot be explained only “in the religious terms advanced by the society’s founders;” for him, it is best understood as “a response to concerns about social problems (poverty, crime, and disorder) in

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<sup>10</sup> W. M. Jacob, *Lay People and Religion in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Shelley Burt, *Virtue Transformed: Political Argument in England, 1688-1740* (Cambridge, 1996). Burt does not claim that the societies engaged directly in politics; rather, she claims they worked in the private sphere, but their work had consequences for politics. I argue, on the other hand, that the societies worked in the public sphere, but independent from politics. They were interested in social change rather than political change; or we can say that they were interested in society rather than the polity.

<sup>12</sup> Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (Dublin, 1977), 2. Also see Alan Hunt, *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation* (Cambridge, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> For a list of historians who have addressed population in eighteenth-century London, see Robert Shoemaker, “Reforming the City: The Reformation of Manners Campaign in London 1690-1730,” in *Stilling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England 1680-1750*, ed. Lee Davison, Tim Hitchcock, Tim Kiern and Robert B. Shoemaker (1992), 100.

England's cities, particularly in London."<sup>14</sup> For instance, although reformers claimed to be particularly interested in targeting moral offences such as blasphemy, swearing, and Sabbath breaking, in reality reforming efforts were much more frequently aimed at prostitutes, gamblers, and drinkers. He explains the discrepancy between what reformers said they aimed to accomplish and what they actually accomplished by suggesting that because the movement was so loosely organized, "the founders of the reformation of manners campaign in effect lost control of it."<sup>15</sup> In the end, people on the streets were more interested in maintaining social control than in promoting religion. Dabhoiwala offers an interpretation of the societies for reformation of manners that goes counter to this. He argues that the effect of this movement ultimately "was that all forms of sexual policing became ever more suspect."<sup>16</sup> He sees society becoming more sexually liberated in this period.<sup>17</sup> Dabhoiwala's actual account of the societies, however, mostly repeats the same points made fifty years earlier by Bahlman.

Scholarship on moral reform, then, can be divided into two camps: those works that show it as an example of a revival in popular piety, and those that show it as an example of growing interest in social control and the changing nature of cities, crime and sex. These two interpretations of this phenomenon are not mutually exclusive.<sup>18</sup> While this chapter does not reject either of these interpretations, it argues that individually they do not tell the whole story. The societies were interested in restoring religion and in maintaining social order. Only when

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<sup>14</sup> Shoemaker, "Reforming the City: The Reformation of Manners Campaign in London 1690-1730" (1992), 102.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-110. Shoemaker uses the blacklists and yearly accounts of the reformation as evidence of the kinds of crimes that were actually prosecuted. Also see: Shoemaker, "The London 'mob' in the early eighteenth century," *Journal of British Studies* 26 (1987), 273.

<sup>16</sup> Dabhoiwala, "Sex and Societies for Moral Reform, 1688-1800," *Journal of British Studies* (April 2007), 308.

<sup>17</sup> See Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex* (New York, 2012). Also see a review of it by Lynn Hunt in the *London Review of Books* (June 23, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Shoemaker points this out in "Reforming the City: The Reformation of Manners Campaign in London 1690-1730" (1992).

we recognize both of these concerns, can we begin to see how novel their ideas in fact were. Now we can address some important questions. Why did reformers adopt secular arguments against vice? Why did they want to prosecute moral crimes in the civil courts? What were the meanings and implications of their views of man and society? An intellectual history of the societies can tell us much about growing secularization, religious toleration, and the birth of a new conception of society—one that privileged shared manners over shared beliefs—in this period.

### **Post Revolutionary Paradigm**

Steven Pincus has recently and convincingly argued that 1688 was the first modern revolution. It marked a conscious and successful break with the past and established a new state of affairs—politically, economically and religiously.<sup>19</sup> Such change brought about a culture of uncertainty. As Pincus has shown, people viewed their world after the revolution in significantly new ways. England had been undergoing a long process of modernization—this included the expansion of its manufacturing industry and its overseas trade, and the development of its infrastructure (streets and street lights, a postal service, new architecture). London, but also manufacturing and trading cities like Bristol, had become crowded with poor workers.

It was amid this disorientation that the societies for reformation of manners arose. The societies were not reactionary institutions as one might expect. Reformers were the heirs of the very latitudinarians who had worked for the revolution, and who by and large supported progressive measures such as religious toleration. These people did not want to turn back the

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<sup>19</sup> Steven Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven, 2011). Pincus is arguing against both “whig” scholars, who interpreted the Glorious Revolution as a successful defense of the ancient English liberties from the attempted reforms of the Stuarts, but also revisionist scholars such as J.C.D. Clark (*English Society*, 1985), who have argued that English society changed very little in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

clock and restore an older church and society. Rather, I argue, that in responding to the uncertainties of the post-revolutionary period, they advanced new ideas about the nature of society. These people were searching for stability, but not in the shape of a continuity of old modes of life, but in new forms that would render social life stable. They turned to manners and habits as social cement. As they argued for greater religious toleration, they sought social cohesiveness in something else—something rather secular—manners and mores.

These were deeply religious people, and they were sincerely concerned about the state of the church, their own souls, and the souls of their neighbors. But, in coming to terms with the Dissenters, in an effort to have a voice in a growing commercial world, and in response to the proliferation of atheistical ideas, the arguments they marshaled for the sake of advocating religion often, ironically, presented a secular world view. Even though their conception of man was seeped in religious thinking, their emphasis on man's behavior, his manners and his sociability, meant that they were concerned with the temporal role of man as much, if not more, than with his eternal. Thus, I wish to show an intellectual transformation. As the ideas and practices of religious toleration became more firmly rooted in English society, people turned to manners as the glue that held the community—or nation—together. This is the birth of a particular strand of social thinking.

Coming from a deeply pious sensibility, these religious men articulated a new—rather secular—notion of the social, grounded in an awareness of the significance of shared manners, mores, customs, and habits. These men were brought to this point of view by a commitment to the principles of toleration, but also at the same time by the great anxieties caused by it. They articulated a rational, moderate, utilitarian view of religion, but they were also anxious that that point of view might be taken to its logical conclusion—libertinism and atheism. For them, the

practical part of religion had a utilitarian function: it safeguarded morals and virtues, which in turn safeguarded laws, order, peace, liberty, security, trade, and ultimately civilization and empire. Shared polite manners were seen as primary to civilized life. Thus, I am seeking the origins of the British Enlightenment—one that is middle class, moderate, reforming—in an unlikely place, in organizations that are often characterized as conservative and regressive.

Why did reformers turn away from the church in order to accomplish their religious goals? The answer begins to take shape within the pages of the societies' pamphlets and sermons. Good manners, reformers explained, were the foundation of any good society regardless of the disparate religious denominations, political factions, or social rankings of its members. In other words, shared manners, habits and customs formed the necessary common denominator in a society that could allow for more differences of opinion. Reformers argued for greater liberties in thought, while they condemned license in behavior.

Many historians have pointed out that latitudinarians and their moderate Presbyterian counterparts would have preferred a comprehension to toleration of Dissenters. The fact that no comprehension was agreed on in the end was seen by many as one of the great disappointments in the aftermath of the 1688 revolution. Latitudinarians were still of the mindset that there should be one national church, albeit a liberal one. The idea that religious belief was a private matter, not the object of state interference, was not an idea they wholeheartedly embraced. Nevertheless, the reform movement, from the very beginning in the early 1690s, offers us an example of toleration in action. As Benjamin Kaplan has recently shown, toleration is not only about principles, but it is also about practice.<sup>20</sup> In the case of the societies, conformists and

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<sup>20</sup> Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith* (Cambridge, MA, 2007). Also see Margaret C. Jacob, *Strangers Nowhere in the World* (Philadelphia, 2006), and Alexandria Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500-1700* (2006).

nonconformists united—conspicuously, alarming many High-Churchmen—to work toward a common goal. Society members thought that the real threat to their community did not come from religious dissent, but from vice and debauchery.

Moral crimes in England traditionally fell under the jurisdiction of the church rather than the state. Church tribunals, called “bawdy courts,” arranged to hear cases concerning impiety. The minister who presided over these cases disciplined transgressors according to the biblical laws. Moral crimes included adultery, incest, homosexuality, brothel-keeping and prostitution, drunkenness, swearing and blasphemy, trading on Sundays, and misconduct during religious services. Civil laws also prohibited these activities, however, the civil authorities had neither the will nor the infrastructure to organize a moral police to enforce them.<sup>21</sup> While all citizens agreed that vice, a disease of the soul, was a matter of concern for the clergy, who took an interest in all things spiritual, they did not expect public institutions or officers to interfere in these kind of private moral transgressions. Thus, when in the 1690s English citizens began to insist on a new approach, a secular approach, to the problem of vicious behavior, they had broken with long-established traditions.

### **Origins of the Societies for Reformation of Manners: The Latitudinarians**

The late seventeenth century has often been characterized as a period of transition in Europe.<sup>22</sup> In no place was change more evident to contemporaries than in England, where the nation, at peace after decades of internal conflict, seemed to be embarking on a new chapter in its

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<sup>21</sup> See Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York, 1997), chapter 8; Shoemaker, “Reforming the City: The Reformation of Manners Campaign in London 1690-1730” (1992); Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (1977), 11-12. Bristow calls reformers “vigilantes,” but they were not. Reformers worked within the boundaries of the law.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Hazard, *The European mind, 1680-1715* (Cleveland, 1963).



history, marked by prosperity, Parliamentary supremacy, and religious toleration established by the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688/89 bringing William III to the English throne. William III was a great champion of moral reform. In 1689, soon after acquiring the English Crown, he wrote a letter proclaiming, “We most earnestly desire and shall endeavour a General Reformation of the Lives and Manners of all Our Subjects.” The letter, addressed to the Bishop of London, requested that all clergy preach regularly against “those particular Sins and Vices which are most prevailing in this Realm.” It also requested that the clergy read to their parishioners the “Statute-Laws as are provided against...Blasphemy, Swearing and Cursing; Against Perjury; Against Drunkenness; and against Prophanation of the Lords Day.” These laws were printed together with the king’s letter, and circulated throughout the nation.<sup>23</sup>

The latitudinarians, advanced to important positions by William after the revolution, were particularly outspoken against libertinism, indicting loose morals as contrary to the “laws of nature” as well as to those of religion. The latitudinarians stressed moral performance as the essence of Christianity; thus it is perhaps unsurprising that the Glorious Revolution, which brought these men to episcopal power, ushered in a period that was not, relatively speaking,

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<sup>23</sup> *His Majesties letter to the Lord Bishop of London* (1689). Subsequent proclamations issued by the Crown against profaneness and vice in 1691, 1697, 1699, 1702, 1703 and 1708 were required to be read four times a year from the pulpit by parish priests and in the courts of law and to be posted in conspicuous places. For more on the crown’s encouragement of moral reform, see Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution* (1996), especially 114. Claydon argues that because William III had not inherited the throne, but rather had acquired it after invading England, he and his champions felt compelled to establish his legitimacy as king by appealing to other justifications. In his invaluable monograph, Claydon explores Williamite court ideology, which he labels “courtly reformation,” and describes it as a biblically based discourse that “presented William as a providential ruler who had a divine commission to protect the protestant church in England, and to return the nation to its pristine faith, piety, and virtue,” 3. However, William’s proclamations were not unique. Charles II and James II had issued similar letters. Moreover, reformers were aware that the King’s proclamations were not particularly effective in causing reform. Without willing witnesses to testify in court, the government was powerless to execute the laws against moral transgressors. For more on William’s court and reform, see Bahlman, *The Moral Revolution of 1688* (1957), 17; Jacob, *Lay People and Religion in the Early Eighteenth Century* (1996), 125; and Hunt, *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation* (1999), 32-33. It is a mistake, however, to over-emphasize the importance of the government, crown, royal proclamations, and statutes, to reform. This was a movement coming from lay people—religious ones—who took advantage of tools within the state apparatus to advance their own ends.

tolerant of atheism or “lewd” and “debauched” behavior. The public articulation of atheism remained subject to many forms of censorship, particularly in the form of the Blasphemy Act of 1698.<sup>24</sup> William and Mary’s court officially repudiated libertine and debauched behavior, and supported the campaign for moral reform that arose in the wake of their accession to the throne.

The Glorious Revolution was aptly called a “moral revolution” by Gilbert Burnet. Burnet’s sermon given on December 23, 1688 condemned the “criminal excesses” of “debauchery” during the Restoration, and his 1689 Coronation sermon itself declared that the “chief design” of William and Mary’s rule was that “impiety and Vice are punished.”<sup>25</sup> The reformation of manners campaign, then, can be viewed as the practical realization of an intellectual position that had been articulated by latitudinarians against corrupt manners and habits since the beginning of the Restoration, and which had received renewed vitality by the events of 1688/1689.

How did these latitudinarians and moral reformers begin to understand society as grounded in more “secular” values such as manners, habits and customs, rather than religious beliefs and practices? Could it be that when the public, as conceived of by latitudinarians and reformers alike, was broadened to include people with a wider range of religious views, anxieties arose over what would hold the community together? It seems that many people in England at the turn into the eighteenth century looked to polite manners, good habits, and moral propriety as providing the needed glue of society. Perhaps we are witnessing here what might be understood as the origins of the kind of socially-directed thinking present in some Enlightenment thought of the later eighteenth century.

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<sup>24</sup> Clark, *English Society, 1688-1832* (Cambridge, 1985), 286-287.

<sup>25</sup> Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution*, (1996), 52-53.

The societies carried out their activities for a half century. Their membership was comprised of a generation of youth that matured in a similar environment and that held similar concerns. They rejected the decadence and impiety of their parents' era, seeking to rectify the "dismal state this nation in the last two reigns was in."<sup>26</sup> They formed themselves into societies in order "to excite new spirits in the degenerate professors of our Holy Religion, and as an antidote for those damnable heresies, and to check that exorbitant wickedness which hath appeared with great impudence in these latter days."<sup>27</sup> By looking at the particular way in which society members conceptualized their struggle, then, we can begin to understand the specific danger that this generation thought it faced: a social and intellectual environment that was increasingly encouraging secular behavior and thought.

During the days of Charles II's loose Restoration court and James II's assault on the Church of England, pious Anglicans joined informal religious societies, hoping that the communal practice of spiritual exercises might serve to bolster their private devotions. Members of these societies were mostly craftsmen and tradesmen who condemned the immorality of the lower classes and the irreligion of the upper classes.<sup>28</sup> The Revolution of 1688, however, marks a change in the nature of religious societies. Whereas religious societies in the Restoration

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<sup>26</sup> *An Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners in England and Ireland*, fifth edition (London, 1701), 78. The first edition was published as: *An Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners in London and Westminster, and other parts of the Kingdom. With a Persuasive to Persons of all Ranks, to be Zealous and Diligent in Promoting the Execution of the Laws against Prophaneness and Debauchery, for the Effecting a National Reformation* (London, 1699).

<sup>27</sup> Josiah Woodward, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London*, third edition (London, 1701), 1-2. The first edition was published in 1696.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 43-46.

focused on maintaining a space for personal piety, societies for reformation of manners in the 1690s shifted their emphasis toward public matters.<sup>29</sup>

The inspiration for these societies came in 1690, when a handful of men, living in the Tower Hamlets in the east side of London, pledged to suppress “bawdy-houses” in their neighborhood. Convinced that these lewd places harbored “Pick-locks and House-breakers,” they blamed a rising crime rate on the pervasiveness of vice. Their views reveal mounting social anxieties over crime, vice, disorder and poverty in the crowded city. These men explained how idle and lewd persons, making no decent living, were driven to “robbery, shoplifting, burglary, and picking of locks and pockets” in order to maintain their vicious courses. Fed up with authorities who were unable to put a stop to disorders on the streets, these men founded a society, which aimed to facilitate the prosecution of prostitution, drunkenness, swearing and trading on Sundays in the courts. This society established regular weekly meetings, and kept extensive records of its activities. It organized a rotating central committee to see to its day-to-day affairs; it hired two informers to patrol the streets; and it enlisted several stewards from each parish to oversee the work of constables and collect money from subscribers, which would defray the cost of arresting and prosecuting moral offenders in court.<sup>30</sup> The governor of the Tower and the magistrates of the Middlesex quarter sessions encouraged this program, and the *Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London* was able to

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<sup>29</sup> The religious societies of the Restoration seemed to continue after 1688, but we know little about them aside from what we learn from Woodward and from some letters kept by the SPCK.

<sup>30</sup> “The Agreement of the Tower Hamlet Society,” Rawlinson MS D129. The “Agreement” is mentioned in the *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701), and in Woodward, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London* (1701). We know the society in the Tower Hamlets kept records from their original agreement which survives, and from the testimonies of the *Account* and Woodward. But the society’s records do not survive.

claim that this “spontaneous movement” had resulted in the prosecution of “several hundred” offenders.<sup>31</sup>

The first society for the reformation of manners, formed a year later in 1691, in the Strand, London, was modeled after the one in the Hamlets. But this society was notably different: while the society in the Hamlets remained focused on local problems, the society in the Strand, and societies formed thereafter, adopted a more sweeping vision for eliminating vice. Soon, several subordinate branches of this society were established: a society of about fifty persons—“tradesmen and others”—that directed its efforts at suppressing “lewdness,” and that published the yearly blacklists; another society of constables, whose members, much like a support group, met to discuss the difficulties of their job, and how to distribute themselves throughout the city most advantageously;<sup>32</sup> and a fourth society of informers, who, the *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* called, “so highly instrumental in this Undertaking, that they may be reckoned a Corner-Stone of it.”<sup>33</sup>

In the same year, Edward Stillingfleet, Bishop of Worcester, perhaps acting as representative of the Strand society, successfully petitioned Queen Mary to send a letter to the Middlesex judges urging them to execute the moral laws against swearing, cursing, drunkenness and “all those other lewd and enormous and disorderly practices.” Her letter acknowledged that magistrates had been neglectful of their duty to execute the laws against moral crimes. The magistrates responded by encouraging constables and “all good Christians” to give information

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<sup>31</sup> Woodward, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London*, (1701), 56-61. Also see: Edward Stephen, *The Beginning and Progress of a Needful and Hopeful Reformation* (London, 1691); *Antimoixeia: or the honest and joynt-design of the Tower Hamlets for the general suppression of bawdy houses* (London, 1691); *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners* (London, 1694). The Tower Hamlets society had only served as inspiration; the first society for reformation of manners was founded in 1691.

<sup>32</sup> “Agreement of Diverse Constables & Other Officers of London,” Rawlinson MS D129.

<sup>33</sup> *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701), 10.

to assist in the prosecution of offenders, and assured everyone that in the future they would execute the laws against moral crimes.<sup>34</sup> This added momentum to the reforming movement, and soon branches of the society for reformation of manners appeared in various neighborhoods of London, throughout England, and even in Scotland and Ireland.<sup>35</sup> The societies reached their active peak from 1697-1702, perhaps galvanized by the threat of newly published heterodox works like John Toland's *Christianity not Mysterious* (1696).<sup>36</sup>

The societies for the reformation of manners were comprised mostly of men of the so-called "middling sort," both Anglican and Presbyterian, but they also gained the support of some important clergymen, specifically, the latitudinarians. Thus they provide us with an opportunity to study the ways in which elite thought and popular culture converged.<sup>37</sup> The societies claimed to invite "Men of all Order, Ages, Conditions, from the highest to the lowest" to join their ranks. One reformer described the members of the societies as "Men of such different Tempers and

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<sup>34</sup> Queen Mary's letter was issued on July 9, 1691. The proclamations of William, and later Anne's as well as Mary's letter, and the Middlesex justices' orders were often printed and attached to the society's various pamphlets. Edward Fowler reported that the societies circulated "thousands" of the latter in *A Vindication of a late undertaking of Certain Gentlemen in Order to the Suppressing of Debauchery and Profaneness*. London, 1692.

<sup>35</sup> Woodward, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London* (1701); *Her majesties gracious letter to the justices of the peace in the county of Middlesex, July 9 1691, for the suppressing of prophaneness and debauchery* (1691). Woodward reported that by 1701 there were "near twenty societies...formed in subordination and correspondency one with another, and engaged in this Christian design in and about this city and suburbs." In 1701, the *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* reported 39 societies in the capital alone. It also claimed there were societies in New England, Jamaica, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany and Holland, all of which corresponded with the central society in London. Societies in Ireland included ones in Kilkenny, Drogheda, Manmouth, and Dublin. For a list of the locations of the other societies, see Bahlman, *The Moral Revolution of 1688* (1957), 37-40. See Portus, *Caritas Anglicana* (1912) for a list of societies in North England, Midlands, the South, and in Wales.

<sup>36</sup> In 1698, William issued another proclamation against vice. Evidence of the societies' energy in this period comes from the abundance of pamphlets, sermons, broadsheets they published, as well as the formation of societies in other cities besides London. Societies in places like Nottingham, Bristol and Dublin published sermons too. There are manuscript records of the Bristol society preserved in the Bristol archives. By 1702, the records show that reformers in Bristol were much less active.

<sup>37</sup> Josiah Woodward wrote that membership to the societies included "skilled craftsmen and tradesmen," and also other "divers worthy gentlemen, and citizens of England, as well as by several bishops and dissenting ministers" in his, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies* (1698), 26, 28.

Inclinations, Educations and Ways of Living.”<sup>38</sup> The societies were indeed cosmopolitan for their day.

Although England’s legal code included laws prohibiting “night-walking,” excessive drinking, cursing, swearing, gambling, and other “lewd and debauched” activities, these laws were rarely enforced by the authorities.<sup>39</sup> Reformers offered two explanations for such negligence. In the first place, they assumed that the justices of the peace did not sufficiently prioritize moral crimes; and in the second place, they recognized that constables faced difficulties in obtaining the evidence required to charge moral offenders in court. Specifically, constables could bring an offender to court only after obtaining a warrant, which entailed that a witness first give evidence under oath against the offender in question. Members of the society for reformation of manners attempted to remedy both of these problems—on the one hand, by noisily reminding the magistrates of their responsibilities concerning the moral laws, and on the other hand, by making it their duty to provide the needed evidence against offenders to the courts of law. As one of the society’s founding members, Edward Stephens, reported, reformers took it upon themselves “not only to give Information of all such Offenses of this kind as they occasionally should take notice of, but moreover, as their leisure should permit, to go out into the Streets and Markets, and publick places on purpose, and to observe the peoples behaviour there; and of such Offenses as they observed to be committed against any of the said Laws, to give information to some Justice of the peace at their next leisure.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas Jekyll, *A Sermon Preach’d at St. Mary-le-Bow, June 27, 1698, before the Societies for Reformation of Manners, in the City of London and Westminster, published at their request* (London, 1698), 39.

<sup>39</sup> Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment* (Cambridge, 1991), 238-239, and Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance* (1977), 13.

<sup>40</sup> Edward Stephens, *The Beginning and Progress of a Needful and Hopeful Reformation* (London, 1691), 4.

In order to facilitate the work of informing, the society printed and dispersed blank warrants to its informers. If an informer should witness a person openly committing a crime, he only had to fill out the warrant with the correct information and take it to a magistrate. The magistrate, after examining the informer under oath, was obliged to sign the warrant ordering the appearance of the offender in court. The informer could then deliver this warrant to the appropriate constable and ensure that the transgressor was indeed charged with his crime. The penalty taken from the offender was earmarked for the poor.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Societies for Reformation of Manners and Their Texts**

The societies for reformation of manners and their apologists published an abundance of propaganda works. During their forty-seven year lifespan, the societies published sermons, accounts of their progress, pamphlets and books promoting their agenda. In London, both Anglican and dissenting members of the societies met four times a year at St. Mary-le-bow, where a minister of the Church of England preached a sermon to them. These sermons were published, first quarterly, beginning in 1697 with Woodward's sermon, but by 1710, annually.<sup>42</sup> They may have chosen to congregate at St. Mary-le-bow because the church enjoyed a particularly dissolute reputation, which William Hogarth highlighted in the fifth panel of his

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<sup>41</sup> For more on the procedure for criminal arrests, see Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment* (1991). Also see Edward Fowler, *A Vindication of a late undertaking of Certain Gentlemen in Order to the Suppressing of Debauchery and Profaneness* (1691) and *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701).

<sup>42</sup> These sermons can be found at the British Library, where I first looked at them, and many of them are now on Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (ECCO). I have also consulted many of them at the Clark Library and the Huntington Library. Alan Hunt counts 135 sermons, both Anglican and dissenting, published by the societies, but does not give their titles, authors, or dates of publication, in *Governing Morals* (1999), 225, note 31. Tina Isaacs calculates 156 sermons were given in St Mary-le-bow and Salters Hall, but some are missing. Most of the sermons (given at St. Mary-le-bow) and the pamphlets of the societies were published by Joseph Downing, who also published books and pamphlets for the SPCK. The SPCK often distributed the societies' pamphlets for them.



series of paintings from 1733 entitled *A Rake's Progress*.<sup>43</sup> In this painting, Tom Rakewell, who has inherited a fortune and promptly exhausted it by gambling, drinking, pursuing women, and indulging in other like vices, is seen at St. Mary-le-bow marrying a wealthy, one-eyed hag, while ogling her maid-servant. In the corner, Tom's previous lover is being hustled out of the church, baby in arms. The implication of Hogarth's painting is clear: the church is willing to condone vice even within its own walls. Society members perhaps hoped to come in close proximity to debauched Londoners by using this church as their London headquarters. The societies also published some of the sermons given by dissenting ministers, often at Salters Hall, a Presbyterian meetinghouse on Ironmonger's Lane.<sup>44</sup> Anglicans and dissenters were present at both meetings.<sup>45</sup>

We find the history and progress of the reformation of manners detailed in various books and pamphlets circulated by the societies. From 1694 to 1707, the societies printed an annual black roll, which listed the names of moral offenders brought to justice by the actions of the reformers. The first black roll was attached to the society's pamphlet, *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners* (1694). From, 1708 to 1738, the societies published instead an annual "account of their progress," which remained roughly the same in format from edition to edition, and was attached to the printed sermons. Each account contained a report of the number of prosecutions of moral offences that year along with the total number of prosecutions in London since 1691. It also gave the total number of arrests according to each type of crime, without listing actual names, as the black-rolls had done. On December 1, 1718, for example, the

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<sup>43</sup> William Hogarth, "A Rake's Progress: The Marriage" (London: The Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum), 1733.

<sup>44</sup> For example: Daniel Williams, *A Sermon Preach'd at Salters-Hall to the Societies for the Reformation of Manners* (London, 1698), and Moses Lowman, *A Sermon Preach'ed to the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, at Salters-Hall, June 27, 1720* (London, 1720).

<sup>45</sup> Isaacs has said that Anglican and dissenting reformers went exclusively to hear the sermon of the minister of their own faith, 84; but that is not the case, as we can see from the societies' own accounts, and from the language of the sermons, which will be discussed more below. Ministers of both faiths addressed Anglicans and dissenters in their sermons.

twenty-fourth annual account numbered 1,801 prosecutions in London in that year (1,253 for lewd and disorderly practices; 31 for keeping of bawdy and disorderly houses; 492 for exercising their trades or ordinary callings on the Lord's Day; 17 for drunkenness; and 8 for keeping common gaming houses), and on December 1, 1726, the thirty-second annual account numbered 92,959 prosecutions in London since 1691. In 1738, the last account claimed that the societies in London and Westminster were responsible for a total of more than 100,000 arrests.<sup>46</sup>

Sometimes these accounts contained helpful resources for the reformer like booklets of “black warrants” which, once filled out, could be used to bring an offender to court. The pamphlet, *A Help to a National Reformation*, was an especially popular handbook, which provided informers with a list of the penal laws against vice, blank warrants, “Prudential rules for the giving of informations to the magistrates in these cases,”—so that informers would say out of trouble—and “a specimen of an agreement for the formation of a Society for Reformation of Manners in any city, town, or larger village of the kingdom,” the king's proclamation against vice, as well as some other useful pieces of information. These were printed for the “ease” of the magistrates and ministers, but especially for “the direction and encouragement of private persons.”<sup>47</sup>

Josiah Woodward, the latitudinarian minister of Poplar, a leading member of the societies for reformation of manners, and a Boyle lecturer, was a remarkably prolific promoter of the

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<sup>46</sup> “The Forty-Fourth Account of the Progress Made by the Societies for Reformation of Manners” (London, 1739), attached to the Samuel Smith's sermon to the societies. There were total forty-four of these accounts of the societies for reformation of manners, and they too can be found at the British Library, while some are available on ECCO, as well as at the Clark and the Huntington Libraries.

<sup>47</sup> Josiah Woodward, *A Help to a National Reformation*, fifth edition with additions (London, 1702). The first edition is from 1699.

reformation agenda in print.<sup>48</sup> His, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies* (1698), went through numerous editions throughout the eighteenth century, and remains an important source for understanding the ideas and history of the societies. He also wrote a number of other reforming texts such as: *A Dissuasive from the sin of Drunkenness* (1701); *A Rebuke to the odious Sin of Uncleanness* (1701), and *A Kind Caution to Profane Swearers* (1711).<sup>49</sup> And he wrote several tracts defending the methods of informing adopted by the societies.<sup>50</sup> The other great promoter of the reformation of manners movement was John Disney, a corresponding member of the SPCK. He wrote *An Essay upon the Execution of the Laws against Immorality and Prophaneness* (1708), and *A Second Essay upon the Execution of the Laws against Immorality and Prophaneness: Wherein the Case of giving Informations to the Magistrate is considered, and Objections against it answered* (1710). Both of these works presented justifications of the reformation of manners in the form of a dialogue between two friends, and added up to over four hundred pages of text.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> He was also a member of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), and he most probably wrote, *An Account of the Progress of the Reformation of Manners in England and Ireland, and parts of the world* (1699), which also went through numerous editions, as well as many other anonymous tracts supporting moral reform.

<sup>49</sup> A sampling of his many pamphlets includes: *A friendly discourse concerning profane cursing and swearing* (1697); *An Earnest Perswasive to the serious Observance of the Lord's-Day* (1702); *Kind caution to profane swearers* (1701); *A Disswasive from the Sin of Drunkenness* (1701); *A Rebuke to the Odious Sin of Uncleanness* (1701); *Against Gaming* (1705); and *A Serious Reflection on the Grievous Scandal of Prophane Language in Conversation*, second edition (1708). Other members of the societies also published books and pamphlets against a variety of sins. The theater was the object of much condemnation, especially by the reformer Arthur Bedford. For instance: Bedford, *Serious Reflections on the Scandalous Abuse and Effects of the Stage* (Bristol, 1705).

<sup>50</sup> Woodward, *A Short Vindication of those Pious and Useful Persons who Give Informations of the Breeches of the Laws, Made Against Profaneness and Immorality* (London, 1701), and *A Short Answer to the Objections that are Made by Ill or Ignorant Men against these Pious & Highly Useful Persons, who out of a Love to God and their Neighbour, give Informations to Magistrates of the Breeches of the Laws, Made against Profaneness and Immorality* (London, 1705).

<sup>51</sup> John Disney, *An Essay Upon the Execution of the Laws against Immorality and Prophaneness* (London, 1708); Disney, *A Second Essay Upon the Execution of the Laws against Immorality and Prophaneness: Wherein the Case of Giving Informations to the Magistrate Is Considered, and Objections against It Answered* (London, 1710); Woodward, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London* (1701).

## Anglicans and Presbyterians: United for a Common Cause

Conformists and nonconformists of the Church of England were members of the same societies for reformation of manners in London and Westminster. The dissenting ministers who preached to the societies were among the most accomplished puritan leaders. These men included Matthew Sylvester, John Shower, John Howe, Daniel Williams, Vincent Alsop, John Spademan, Edmund Calamy, and Thomas Reynolds. They were friends and colleagues in London, and some of them even spent a few years together in Holland.<sup>52</sup>

Although conformists and nonconformists had their religious differences, they could agree on what was important: the need for a reformation of manners in their shared community. As the dissenter Matthew Sylvester observed, “I find so many of different Communion, to be so evidently one in this important matter.”<sup>53</sup> A reformation of manners transcended doctrinal

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<sup>52</sup> Shower and Howe, for instance, were neighbors in Utrecht in 1687 before Shower moved to Rotterdam that same year, and remained there until 1691. Sylvester was friend to Tillotson, and very close friend and colleague of Baxter.

<sup>53</sup> Matthew Sylvester *Holy Confidence Well Improved, by Nehemiah and the Jews: Whose Faith and Spirit were considered and applied to the Societies for Reformation of Manners; in a Sermon at Salters-hall in London, on Monday August 16, 1697, and now at their request made publick* (London, 1697), v. He also wrote: “we (tho differing in Sentiments as to some small things of ritual Consideration and Concern) do now unite as Brethren, to love, encourage, and assist each other, to run down Immoralities, and to reduce Men to that visibly orderly Behaviour which may conciliate to our Religion (our Christianity) its just and genuine Reputation,” 30. And also: “The World, I hope, will hereby see, that our Hearts are one in God and Christ, and for their Glory and the publick Good, tho we have some different Sentiments about Excentricals,” 5. Howe (1698) similarly wrote: “in universal love to Mankind, and in a design of doing all the good we can in the world, notwithstanding such go under different denominations, and do differ in so Minute Things, is the most Valuable Agreement that can be among Christians,” 48. Woodhouse said: “And by our bearing with, and forbearing of one another, on our lesser Differences, [we] have heartily joynd in those Methods, that might promote the common Interest, of our common Lord,” 34. It was not just dissenters who made this point. The *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701) made clear that “[We] unite our strength against the patrons of vice, who are the enemies of God and goodness, more than against those that differ from us in some few things, and those of lesser moment,” 90. The Dissenter Daniel Williams (1700) wrote: “That there is no such difference between Members of the *Established Church*, and the *Dissenters*, that will not be *overlook'd* by all Serious Persons, when the undoubted Concernments of Christ and Practical Godliness are in danger,” preface. And again: “Union in these great things may well consist with difference in less considerable Matters, and is more Christian and of higher consequence than Agreement in many disputed Notions, or accord in a Ceremony,” 29-30. Calamy (1699): “A General Conflagration calls for every Man’s Bucket; And our spreading Immoralities for all Hands to check them. And it is an hopeful Prognostick in the present Case, that those who differ in Rituals but with too much Vehemence, should unanimously join together in forming those Societies for Reformation, who aim at the Checking those Vices which threaten to over-run us, which are heartily detested by

differences. As the *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* put it, “all religions being, I think, agreed, that bad men are a scandal to the best religion.”<sup>54</sup> Not only did conformists and nonconformists mutually defend a reformation of manners, but more significantly, they recognized the benefit of working together for it. The Anglican minister Samuel Bradford said to reformers, “Let us with one consent promote the common Interests of our Religion, and the Virtue of the Nation, of which we are all Members.”<sup>55</sup> The Presbyterian John Woodhouse insisted that “Reformation-Work, is a Work that needs many Hands.” So much so, he explained, that “all the People of the Land, whatever else they differ in, whether in Opinions, or Practices, or Religious Rites, they must all unite in this, all joyn in this.” He told reformers, “do not so much distinguish between the Sexes, or Sects.”<sup>56</sup> There is no evidence that women became members of the societies. They did, however, contribute money to them. The idea that a reformation of manners was something that came from, and applied to, all members of society—men and women, rich and poor, Anglican and Puritan—was a frequent trope of the reforming rhetoric. Whatever differences people had, it was worth laying them aside for this cause.

But after years of mutual animosity between members of the Church of England and dissenters, such disputes were not easily arbitrated. Reformers called for a stop to the hateful

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Good Men of all Perswasions,” dedication. Shower (1697): “Consider, These are Things that *we All Agree in*. The visible Countenance of so many worthy Persons, of different Perswasions in lesser Things, this to abet the Cause of Religion, and to discourage Profaneness, in a Great Thing. It may help to bring Sobriety and Serious Godliness into request,” 58.

<sup>54</sup> *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701), 22.

<sup>55</sup> Samuel Bradford, *Christian Religion the Occasion, not the Cause of Division: a Sermon Preached before the King, at St. James’s, On Sunday January 22, 1715/16* (London, 1716), 43. Shower (1697) said: “Let us agree to mind the same thing. And to suppress Immorality and Profaneness, I am sure, is one of those things, wherein we *ought*, and *may*, and *do* Agree,” 59. Howe (1698): “let us draw as near one another as we can. And particularly unite in the most Vigorous Endeavour of carrying on *this Excellent Design*, which is now before us,” 49. Reynolds (1700) told reformers, “Go on to convince the World, that whatever particular Sentiments you may have about lesser doubtful matters of Religion, yet in the most substantial, plain and necessary things you heartily agree, and can as heartily concur to promote them,” 54.

<sup>56</sup> Woodhouse (1697), 7-8.

and bigoted attacks on one another. Sylvester said, “I neither do, nor can expect much Good from any inordinate Heats or Bigotry.” He encouraged pious men of all persuasions to work together for a reformation of manners, rather than “by their Tongues and Pens to dispute and write each other into such dangerous, unaccountable, and unwarrantable Distances, Jealousies and Discords!”<sup>57</sup> Woodhouse regretted that small differences in religion had managed “to divide and embitter the Hearts of good Men, both Ministers, and People,” so that they “revile and reproach one another.”<sup>58</sup> The *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* condemned anyone who propagated “dangerous or unnecessary controversies or divisions,” or expressed “a fierce and uncharitable heat against those that differ from them in some things relating to religion.”<sup>59</sup> Edmund Calamy urged reformers to consider that men of all religious persuasions could be guilty of bad manners and vicious habits. Vice was a general problem of the age. He condemned anyone “who would confine it to any one of the Parties wherein we are unhappily divided.”<sup>60</sup>

Dissenting ministers, in particular, expressed their affection for members of the Church of England. John Woodhouse confessed, “that the Veneration I have for such valuable and useful Members of the Church of England, is so agreeable to the Temper and Affection, I have long had toward the Reverend and Pious Clergy of that Communion (with whom I have all along held some Communion, and Brotherly Conversation).”<sup>61</sup> Sylvester emphasized the piety and learning of his Anglican counterparts when he told reformers, “I do not hate nor censure those of

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<sup>57</sup> Sylvester (1697), vii; 6.

<sup>58</sup> John Woodhouse *A Sermon Preach'd at Salters-Hall, to the Societies for Reformation of Manners, May 31, 1697* (1697), 33.

<sup>59</sup> *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701), 21-22.

<sup>60</sup> Edmund Calamy *A Sermon Preach'd before the Societies for Reformation of Manners, in London and Middlesex, upon Monday, February 20, 1698/9, published at their request* (London, 1699), dedication.

<sup>61</sup> Woodhouse (1697), iv.

my Brethren whom I differ from, so many of whom I find so very much beyond my self in Parts and Learning, and Practical Christianity.” These ministers were united by a generally moderate outlook on religion. “No man (I hope),” Sylvester said, “is of a greater Latitude and Candour for free Thoughts, and Searches, and Expressions, than my self.” He claimed to have the highest respect for any person who, through modest and careful considerations, came to different opinions from his own. This included men who conformed to the Church of England, but it did not include men who were atheists and libertines.<sup>62</sup>

Within the rhetoric of the reformation of manners, we see an emphasis on polite and sociable behavior, even, perhaps especially, among men who have different opinions. Still traumatized by the violence and hatred of the Civil Wars, and the suspicions and divisions that continued through the Restoration, reformers longed for unity among Protestants. Most of them had campaigned for comprehension and then for toleration. But toleration could bring about new anxieties. It meant an acceptance of a number of religious denominations within the same community. For people who were used to having one truth determine their entire world-view, toleration required a huge transformation in thinking. What determined social relations if not a shared religious outlook? Reformers were resigned to live beside neighbors with different religious views than themselves, rather than resort to violence. They emphasized the virtues of conversation, sociability, and civility. Polite manners could contribute to the making of new common values that could bring diverse men and women together. Even the societies themselves were an experiment in bridging the divide between Anglicans and Presbyterians. Within these societies, members of both religious denominations had an opportunity to socialize

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<sup>62</sup> Sylvester (1697), vi-vii; 31-32. He continued: “I am please’d to see in this Affair such eminent Proofs, that in the Church of *England* there are more excellent and worthy Persons, than strait-lac’d and censorious Spirits may possibly imagine,” 6-7.

and to discuss their opinions, hopefully depoliticized by their shared interest in a reformation of manners.

One of the benefits reformers saw coming from the association of dissenters and churchmen was that it would cultivate good conversation and civility between the two groups. They could at least develop a polite sociability with each other while working together for a common cause. By conversing, they could learn to respect each other, even if they could not share the same opinions. Woodhouse told reformers, “may your converse together tell you, you are none of you, the Men, which some of both sides have represented you.”<sup>63</sup> And Shower hoped that “by more familiar Acquaintance with one another, you may find so many Persons, of both sorts, worthy of your Esteem and Love, as will take off many Prejudices, destroy Bitterness and Rancor, and cure that Evil speaking and Detraction, which hath been complained of on all sides.”<sup>64</sup> The Anglican Bradford saw the cooperation of members of both religious groups as indication of the rise of a better generation. Using similar words to those of Shower, he said, “‘Tis to be hoped, that frequent conversing upon so good an Occasion as this, may be a means of removing all Unreasonable Prejudices, and by degrees may beget a better Understanding, and a more favourable Opinion of each other.”<sup>65</sup> Sylvester thought meeting together on a regular basis would “make us candidly and respectfully to converse and act together.” What was important to reformers, he said, was not so much specific religious convictions, but “orderly Lives, peaceable

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<sup>63</sup> Woodhouse (1697), v.

<sup>64</sup> John Shower, *A Sermon Preach'd to the Societies for Reformation of Manners, in the Cities of London and Westminster, November 15, 1697, published at the desire of the said Societies* (London, 1697), 59-60. He continued: “It may tend to heal that Moroseness, and Reservedness, and Distrust of on another, which has kept us at such a Distance: And let us see, that there was no sufficient reason for such an Estrangement. I promise my self, that Dissenters will be so wise and charitable.” And: “I am not without hope, that this laudable and Christian Undertaking will promote a better Understanding between the Protestants of the National Church and Those who is some things dissent from it,” 60.

<sup>65</sup> Bradford (1697), 43.



Principles and Behaviour, cordial Affections, with all fit Civilities of Conversation.”<sup>66</sup> It was hoped that a greater sympathy for men of different opinions would have the effect of making everyone a bit more moderate in their own. Moderation was the key to toleration working, and to a lasting peace. The Daniel Williams told reformers, “Your very Meeting together, and joynt Concurrence in this laudable Employment, will Conciliate your Minds, and melt them down into Moderation, which is a Temper so necessary, and upon which our Happiness so much depends, that I dare deliver this Prognostick: England can never be fixedly happy in its Religious, or Civil Concernments, but by an union between the Moderate Churchmen, and the Moderate Dissenters.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, the reformers saw not only the ends they hoped to accomplish—a reformation of manners—as fostering the peace and prosperity of the nation, but their very joining together in the first place as a necessary step in that direction. It was the extremes—atheists, enthusiasts, papists—that threatened to tear apart society and bring back violence and destruction. It was only when moderate Protestants worked together could the ever-present threat of France be held at bay.

One of the most significant aims of the societies, then, was to promote a sense of unity between the two groups, and prove that a toleration of religious diversity did not destroy society, but made it more stable. It strengthened bonds, secured liberty, property and order in new ways. Sylvester hoped that the more these two groups worked together, “the more of Peace and Love we shall experience amongst our selves. And the more evident we shall render it to all Men, that we can be different in our Sentiments about the Modes of Discipline and Worship, and yet most

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<sup>66</sup> Sylvester (1697), 46; vii. He repeated to reformers, “I hope we shall go on, both hand in hand, and heart in heart; and make it evident to all, that our different Sentiments in some other Matters will not extinguish or abate reciprocal Affections and Respects, nor make any Breaches or Encroachments upon any fit civilities of Conversation; nor upon any Articles of mutual Helpfulness as to the Publick Good, or our Civil Concerns with one another,” 46.

<sup>67</sup> Daniel Williams, *A Sermon Preached at Salters-Hall to the Societies for Reformation of Manners, May 16, 1698, and now printed at their request* (London, 1698), 54.

dearly love each other.”<sup>68</sup> Woodhouse confirmed that because these religious groups were conversing and working together, they “are coming to a better Temper towards one another.” This, he said, is “verifying the old *Irenick* Saying, *Opinionum varietas & Opinantium unitas no sunt* [Difference of belief and unity of believers are not inconsistent].”<sup>69</sup> These words not only reveal Woodhouse’s moderation, but specifically, his belief in the possibility of a diverse society that could still function as one nation. Shower, when listing the many benefits brought by the societies, included, “the Union of so many Worthy Members of the national Church with Protestant Dissenters in this Undertaking.”<sup>70</sup> So for him, this was a good in and of itself, not merely a means to the final goal of a reformation of manners in other people.

Latitudinarians called not only for moral reform, but also for a more inclusive Church of England that would embrace moderate dissenters (though not “enthusiasts” and “fanatics”), for which they helped pass a toleration act extending limited toleration to nonconformists in 1689.<sup>71</sup> These moderate Anglicans, many of whom envisioned a society that was open to a wider range of religious beliefs and practices, were the same moderate Anglicans who advanced a very narrow conception of acceptable moral behavior. As they published sermons and pamphlets that described religious toleration as conforming to the natural order of things, they encouraged informers and justices of the peace to arrest and prosecute anyone who deviated from the standards of moral propriety. This tension—between religious toleration and moral rigidity—provides one focus of this chapter, and an important theme in my overall project.

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<sup>68</sup> Sylvester (1697), vi. The dissenter Burgess (1697) said that men “shall learn to do as Themistocles and Aristides; who were no sooner joined in Commission for publick Service, but they laid down their petty Differences at the City Gates: and went out with no more than one Heart to propagate the Common Good,” vi.

<sup>69</sup> Woodhouse (1697), 34.

<sup>70</sup> Shower (1697), 46.

<sup>71</sup> Two works which offer good accounts of this are Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England* (Georgia, 1993), 48; 52-53; and John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge, 2006), 80, 110.

## The Philosophy of Toleration

Several of the leaders of the societies were John Locke's friends, and many of their attitudes were close to his.<sup>72</sup> Locke's call for toleration is perhaps the most important in English history, and we can see in it this very tension—between religious toleration and moral control—that characterized the reform movement. Locke's 1689 *Letter Concerning Toleration* stated that the sole end of civil society was the “temporal good and outward prosperity” of the people.<sup>73</sup> Men formed a commonwealth only for “the procuring, preserving, and advancing” of “civil interests,” which were “life, liberty, health, and indolency of body; and the possession of outward things.” Government, therefore, had no business interfering in spiritual matters, and people had an “absolute and universal right to toleration.”<sup>74</sup> Locke further argued that religious oppression was most often the cause of conspiracy and sedition in the state, while toleration, in contrast, promoted peace and the uniting of the people to the magistrate.<sup>75</sup> However, Locke's relative open-mindedness in religious matters did not extend to moral matters. In his *Letter Concerning Toleration* he made clear his view that “moral vices” were “certainly more contrary to the glory of God, to the purity of the church, and to the salvation of souls, than any conscientious dissent from ecclesiastical decisions, or separation from public worship.”<sup>76</sup> Whereas toleration of religious dissent made the state stronger and less susceptible to rebellion, toleration of moral transgressions did just the opposite: it jeopardized the security of the commonwealth. As an advisor on the Poor Law in the 1690s, Locke recommended suppression

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<sup>72</sup> Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (2006), especially 110; and Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge, 1994), Introduction.

<sup>73</sup> John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Paul Negri, ed. (2002), 142.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 118. See: Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (2006), 540.

<sup>75</sup> Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, (2002), 147.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

of alehouses, and attributed growing poverty to the “relaxation of discipline” and “corruption of manners.”<sup>77</sup> While the state had no right to enforce religious worship or belief, regulation of moral behavior was an affair for both church and state: “A good life, in which consists not the least part of religion and true piety, concerns also the civil government; and in it lies the safety both of men’s souls and of the commonwealth. Moral actions belong therefore to the jurisdiction both of the outward and inward court; I mean both the magistrate and conscience.”<sup>78</sup> As John Marshall has pointed out, Locke’s writings “are replete with the attempt to distinguish religious ‘liberty’ from ‘libertinism.’”<sup>79</sup>

### **In the Company of Reformers**

Latitudinarian sympathies for the hardships of moderate dissenters, and a desire to incorporate them into a broader Anglicanism, was, in part, tied to fears of moral decay in England. It was the opinion of many individuals during the Restoration that an unfortunate double standard had been established: at the same time that many Protestants were regularly prosecuted and imprisoned for their nonconformity, “atheism” and “libertinism” were shown a blind eye by the authorities. When dissenters were persecuted during the Restoration, it was widely known that the court itself was libertine. The court of Charles II was thought to have been the epitome of absolutist decadence—filled with wits, rakes, and libertines.<sup>80</sup> Unsurprisingly, “Country” and “Whig” attacks on the court frequently condemned the king’s

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<sup>77</sup> Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (2006), 541. See also, Ethab Shagan, *Rule of Moderation* (Cambridge, 2011).

<sup>78</sup> Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (2002), 140-141.

<sup>79</sup> Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (2006), 461.

<sup>80</sup> Harold Weber, *The Restoration Rake Hero: Transformations in Sexual Understanding in Seventeenth-Century England* (1986).

sexual appetites as representative of his tyrannical desires.<sup>81</sup> The king and court provided patronage for Hobbes, widely accused of being an atheist, and sheltered the Earl of Rochester, the most notorious sexual libertine of the period. Thus, many people were convinced that atheism and libertinism had become the leading virtues of Restoration England, and they decried that the effective toleration of libertinism—even while it was legally proscribed by laws against prostitution, sodomy, and drunkenness—at the same time that pious Protestant dissenters were violently persecuted, was an outrageous inversion of the legitimate organization of a polity in which libertinism would have been prosecuted and religious dissent tolerated. As Tim Harris has shown, nonconformist hostility to the failure to enforce sexual morality at the exact moment of enforcing religious intolerance erupted in riots against “bawdy-houses” in London in 1668.<sup>82</sup> Thus, it is remarkable that dissenters and their friends argued for informing when they themselves were the victims of this practice.<sup>83</sup>

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, England witnessed a proliferation of clubs and societies, especially in its urban areas. Men—mostly of a burgeoning middle class—met regularly in order to socialize and discuss topics of shared interest—politics, trade, arts, sciences, charity.<sup>84</sup> Members of the societies for reformation of manners were no different. They created a private space for sociability, while remaining dedicated to the improvement of public welfare. Combining into societies not only strengthened their social bonds, but furthered their mutual goals. Effecting a real reformation of manners—one that touched all members of the

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<sup>81</sup> Tim Harris, *Restoration: Charles the Second and His Kingdoms, 1660-1685* (2005), 114.

<sup>82</sup> Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II* (Cambridge, 1987), 82.

<sup>83</sup> Interestingly, many of the sermons that mention this are by Anglicans.

<sup>84</sup> Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford, 2000). Women and the poor were rarely members of these societies. Also see Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven, 2005).

community—required more than a few hands: “it must be by a Company.”<sup>85</sup> Reformers were told “to unite your Forces, that you may mutually advise, and countenance, and support, and encourage, and vindicate, and defend on another.”<sup>86</sup> The promise of fellowship was not insignificant either. Samuel Bradford, in his sermon to the societies, noted, “how many Voluntary Societies are formed Yearly in this City for the promoting good Correspondence and Friendship among Neighbors or Countrymen?” The societies for reformation of manners would rank among them.<sup>87</sup> Associating, then, had a double advantage: it fostered camaraderie among men, and it served their ends.

Most likely reformers were not only members of societies for reformation of manners, but were also members of various secular organizations, especially those promoting commercial interests. After all, reformers generally were merchants and traders. At the very least, they looked to commercial organizations when considering their own. The *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* marveled, “with what advantage our civil concerns are carried on by companies and corporations!” It recommended that religious concerns be carried on in much the same way.<sup>88</sup> Samuel Bradford said that the benefits of associating was what “Men of Business in the World do well know.”<sup>89</sup> John Hancocke called the work of reforming a “trade.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> John Hancocke, *A Sermon Preach'd at the Church of St. Mary-le-Bow, to the Societies for Reformation of Manners, December 26, 1698* (London, 1698), 36.

<sup>86</sup> Lilly Butler, *A Sermon Preach'd at St. Mary-le-Bow, to the Societies for Reformation of Manners, April 5, 1697* (London, 1697), 19. Bradford (1697) said that reformation required “the joint and unanimous Endeavours of many, who will encourage and assist one another,” 17. The *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701) testified to “the great usefulness, or rather necessity, of good men's confederating and meeting frequently together, to concert methods, and encourage one another in this difficult work,” 14.

<sup>87</sup> Bradford (1697), 18.

<sup>88</sup> *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701), 13-14.

<sup>89</sup> Bradford (1697), 17. He continued: “How many Corporations are for that reason embodied throughout this Kingdom, for the carrying on particular Trades and Professions?” 17-18. Disney (1708) made a similar point: “The End of forming *Societies* for any thing, is to carry it on the more successfully with united Heads, and Hands, and Purses, as a common Interest: So *Companies in Trade* are form'd, and the Advantage is visible,” 110.

But reformers had another purpose in mind when they drew parallels between their own religious societies and commercial ones: they hoped to show that by associating, they did nothing unusual or subversive. Reformers were responding to a suspicious press that portrayed the societies as fronts for illegal religious conventicles. When Bradford praised reformers for their “orderly” and “regular” associations, he assured them that “‘Tis no other thing than what is constantly done without offense in Cases of *Secular* Concernment.”<sup>91</sup> What really troubled critics, though, was that the societies united Anglicans and Presbyterians under one roof. John Disney defended this cross-denominational federation by writing, “Now if you would know, why Dissenters are so freely admitted into the Societies for *Reformation*: I ask, why they are not as well to be excluded from the Societies for *Trade*?”<sup>92</sup> Commerce required that men set aside religious differences—a reformation of manners did too. It is not insignificant that reformers were eager to portray their societies as organizations closer to commercial ventures than to religious factions, for it shows that they conceptualized their own work in a kind of harmony with other more secular engagements in the temporal world.

Reformers also imagined and constructed their societies to serve as foils to so-called clubs of atheism and debauchery, which were said to be convening in every dark corner. Within these vicious circles, men multiplied and spread their offensive thoughts and nasty practices. “I have been told there are some Clubs in this City,” John Hancocke told reformers, “where the

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<sup>90</sup> Hancocke (1698), 35. He made sure to clarify that this was not because reformers made money from their work.

<sup>91</sup> Bradford (1697), 17.

<sup>92</sup> And Disney (1708), 110. He continued: “The Business which they [reformers] join in prosecuting, and upon which they meet is nothing at all to the Dissenters Purpose, as Dissenters, nor affects the Church of England at all, as a particular Constitution. What has the Punishment of a Swearer or a Drunkard to do with the Presbyterian Scheme and the abolition of Episcopacy? No more than a Cabal upon the Rates of Merchandise. If you will still ask, how the Dissenters (if they had nit some secret End to drive at) come to unite so readily with us in these Attempts? I answer, because Prophaneness and Impiety are Enemies in common both to them and us, as they are in general to the Christian Religion, which we both profess,” 111-112.

very profest Design of their Meeting is, by obscene Discourse and other ways, to promote Lewdness and Debauchery.”<sup>93</sup> Gilbert Burnet advised that, just as “Men of Impiety enter into Clubs and Confederacies to advance their wicked designs,” reformers should enter into rival associations to advance their good ones.<sup>94</sup> Men were inherently sociable: they would always unite for commerce, conversation, and entertainment. And it was often within these social forums that men picked up their notions and habits, good or bad. If there were no pious places for social engagement, men would be inevitably drawn to vicious ones. The societies’ annual accounts always included a quote from *The causes of the Decay of Christian piety*: “There must be Combinations and Confederacies in Virtues, to balance and counterpoise those of Vice.”<sup>95</sup> But while that text was referring to associations within the purview of the church, which had traditionally been the space for pious gatherings, and moral edification, reformers recognized that that space was becoming increasingly peripheral. Awareness of this had led to the formation of the privately-oriented religious societies. Now, reformers intended to expand the scope of that moral space to encompass the entire community.

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<sup>93</sup> Hancocke (1698), 37. He said that therefore it was necessary for the pious members of the community to “joyn their Hearts and Hands to break these Bonds of Wickedness,” 38.

<sup>94</sup> Gilbert Burnet *Charitable Reproof: A Sermon Preached at the Church of St. Mary-le-Bow to the Societies for Reformation of Manners, the 25th of March, 1700, published at the request of the said societies* (London, 1700), 27. *The Account of the Reformation of Manners* (1701) said: “Do we not see by what methods the men of the world propagate wickedness, and countermine good design? Is it not by their clubs and confederacies?” 14. And Reynolds (1700) similarly pointed out, “Wicked men think it no offence to combine and club together,” 42.

<sup>95</sup> *The causes of the decay of Christian piety. Or An impartial survey of the ruines of Christian religion, undermin'd by unchristian practice. Written by the author of The whole duty of man* (London, 1667), 434. See also Samuel Wesley, “A Letter concerning the Religious Societies,” in Adam Clarke, *Memoirs of the Wesley Family*, vol. 1 (London, 1836), 154.



## Societies Against the Church?

The societies fought against a constant onslaught of criticism for their approach to moral reform.<sup>96</sup> In particular, the societies were faulted for encouraging the prosecution of moral crimes in the civil courts. Most people took for granted that the clergy, rather than the magistrate, maintained jurisdiction over moral crimes. It was true that there were civil laws prohibiting swearing, drinking, prostitution, trading on Sundays and the like—a fact that the societies never ceased to point out—and these often complemented the ecclesiastical laws. Indeed, the civil government did not unfairly appropriate ecclesiastical power when it prosecuted moral crimes in its courts. But its efforts did seem redundant. The reformer John Disney raised this point in his essay in order to refute it later. He asked in the voice of a critic, “But are not these immoralities presentable in the spiritual courts? Does not the *Church* take notice of them, require public penance, or pronounce excommunication against the offenders, which seems the most proper way to punish them? Does not this render it needless for the civil magistrates to interpose?”<sup>97</sup> To this objection, Disney answered, that although moral crimes should ideally be censured by the church and prosecuted in its courts, in truth the church institution was not up to this task. Whether the problem was that moral crimes were rarely brought before ministers, or whether it was that ministers “take no notice of them when they are brought, I can’t tell,” Disney wrote, “but so it is in fact, that the discipline of the Church, and the terror of penance and excommunication are at a very low ebb, seldom exercised, and little feared.”<sup>98</sup> Thus, reformers were able to shake off any scruples they might have had when they chose to join forces with the

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<sup>96</sup> In the early years especially, the sermons published by the societies addressed these criticisms. Later, books by Woodward and Disney continued that work. Most of what we know about these criticisms comes from the societies’ own documents. The exceptions being responses to the societies by a few famous figures including Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, and Bernard Mandeville.

<sup>97</sup> Disney (London, 1708), 16.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

magistrate, which represented real law and order, over the clergy.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, for this reason, many churchmen remained suspicious of the reformation of manners, concerned that the societies were ultimately, even if unintentionally, subversive to the church.<sup>100</sup>

A growing opinion among many people was that the Church of England was corrupt. Reformers accused the church's ministers of being more concerned with how to advance their own worldly interests than the interests of religion. "In this debauched age," one pamphlet exclaimed, "how many loose pastors or ministers are there throughout the city, or rather throughout the whole nation?" These ministers, it went on to say, did not suppress vice, but promoted it, "either by neglect of duty, or by giving bad example."<sup>101</sup> Even conscientious ministers had lost their credit with people; clergy were characterized as careerists. In a sermon preached before the societies, the minister John Leng explained why his calls for moral reform did not stir the hearts of his flock: "they are ready to look upon it as our trade and business to preach such things; they scorn to take our advice, because it is our profession and our interest to give it." Leng, concluded: "Perhaps the serious advice and sober reproof of a layman, would

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<sup>99</sup> The civil courts, in comparison to the ecclesiastical ones, appeared unshakeable ever since the Settlement Act of 1689 had established the supremacy of law and Parliament over crown and Church.

<sup>100</sup> John Sharp, William Nicholson, and especially high-churchmen such as Henry Sacheverell, remained antagonistic to the societies for reformation of manners. Even Thomas Tenison only gave his support to them with reservation. See, for instance, Sacheverell, *The Communication of Sin: A Sermon Preach'd at the Assizes held at Derby, August 15<sup>th</sup> 1709. Publish'd at the request of the Gentlemen of the Grand-Jury* (London, 1709).

<sup>101</sup> *Proposals* (1694), 18, 29. That pamphlet goes on to say: "And this is certainly true, that many young persons, who have been loosely educated, and scarce know the principles of Christianity and Church-Communion, etcetera, yet have long since, and even at this day, imbibed (of there own accord, without any document from others) a real disrelish and disesteem of the Church of England, and that for no other reason than this palpable corruption of many of the ministers thereof in this neglect of there discipline, so contrary to the Canons of the Church. And when they see such an epidemical distemper overspreading itself, (without redress) the consequence thereof may be such, as is not difficult for any considerate persons to conjecture. And it must needs be for a daily lamentation, that the complexion of the Christian Church (though anti-Roman) looks so like that of the highly degenerated Church of the Jews," 19-20.

sometimes have better effect.”<sup>102</sup> It is not difficult to see how some members of the Church of England—especially high-churchmen—would consider that such a message undermined the role of the church and its clergymen.

The involvement of the magistrate in what was traditionally the clergy’s role, would, according to Disney, make men and women aware “that virtue is not only a topic of discourse for their minister, but that the state insists upon it too, and declares against vice as an enemy to the public, which will tend to heighten their reverence to the sacred office of the clergy, and possess them with a better opinion of the foolishness of preaching.” Thus, reformers were looking to the secular state as a way to bolster the influence of the church. Disney reiterated, “This execution of the laws will strengthen the good instructions of the pulpit.”<sup>103</sup> Thus, in the literature of the societies a strong sense of the waning power of the church over people’s lives becomes clear. Hancocke’s statement, “Nor does this imply the weakness and insufficiency of Religion, that it needs the Support of the Civil Power,” is quite telling: the very fact that Hancocke was compelled to defend the strength of the church, does more to underscore its perceived impotency.<sup>104</sup>

Not only were ministers powerless to reform the lives of men and women, but religion itself—through the mediums of sermons, scripture, or even conscience—was in no position to do better. Religion could not always offer compelling argument for why individuals ought to live virtuously. Reformers thought that the hope of rewards and the terror of punishments in the afterlife, powerful emotions which had secured good behavior for countless generations, no

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<sup>102</sup> John Leng, *A Sermon Preached to the Societies for Reformation of Manners at St. Mary-Le-Bow, on Monday, December the 29th, MDCCXVIII, published at their request* (London, 1719), 23.

<sup>103</sup> Disney (1708), xxi-xxii.

<sup>104</sup> Hancocke (1699), 14.

longer moved the hearts of men and women. Although “vices are plainly condemned by the word of God, which expressly excludes drunkards and unclean persons, etcetera from the kingdom of heaven,” reformers found, “by sad experience, that those who are fully abandoned to the conduct of custom and ill example, seem too generally almost deaf to the calls of conscience, nay, often even to the powerful rhetoric of the Gospel.”<sup>105</sup> That was one of the main reasons why “many hundred sermons are preached, and not one soul turned from the power of sin and Satan unto God.”<sup>106</sup>

This led reformers to take one of two courses of action: on the one hand, reformers adopted arguments against vice that did not draw from Scripture. On the other hand, reformers concluded that if the fear of eternal fire did not persuade individuals to behave properly, perhaps the more immediate threat of civil punishment would compel them to that end instead. What was required were “*some other measures* to put a stop unto the wide floodgate of atheistical vice and profaneness, which (like the poet’s dust from Pandora’s box) hath so overspread all places and persons.”<sup>107</sup> These *other measures*, they argued, would not be found within the ranks of the church, but within those of the state.

The rampant impiety of men and women at religious services served as a strong indication to reformers that popular religiosity was in a state of decay. More often than not, religious commitments “caused so little conscience” in people that they abstained from participating in the Sunday ceremonies altogether. This was partially seen as one of the detrimental effects of toleration. It was thought that Anglicans could take advantage of the toleration extended to dissenters to avoid church services themselves. Moreover, when men and

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<sup>105</sup> *Account of the Reformation of Manners* (1701), 92.

<sup>106</sup> *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners* (1694), 6.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

women were present at church, reformers thought, they concerned themselves with their social rather than their spiritual obligations. “How little communion hath one Christian with another,” reformers lamented, when these men and women assembled together “as if to see each others faces, once a week or month, within the church walls.” Reformers observed that services tended “to no greater good, than to a *How do ye?* and, *What news?* Or, if there be an intimacy of acquaintance, the unprofitable discourses are interlaid with some fattening provision for the belly.” Often religious services actually bolstered habits of vice; reformers marveled, “What strange communion of saints is this, when those visits which are given tend but rather to promote greater licentiousness, and vanity of mind, and idle talk!”<sup>108</sup> Many of these individuals whom reformers thought were guilty of openly ridiculing religion would themselves have claimed to be members of the faith. But reformers argued that it would “be more generous for such men to throw off the profession of Christianity, and openly to declare themselves heathens and atheists, as they are, than all this while to avow themselves Christians, as if they had no other design than to burlesque our profession, to throw the very blackest dregs of malice in the face of the Savior, and crucify him every day and every hour afresh.”<sup>109</sup>

People’s disinterest in the church service was indicative of a wider trend of irreligion. Society members were especially alarmed by the increasing number of individuals who they believed were not “professors” of the Christian religion at all. These men and women attacked religion with a stronger venom than indifference. They publicly proliferated “scornings and contemptible derisions against the Holy Spirit” through their speech, prose, and especially

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>109</sup> Disney (1708), 6-8. Years later, Leng (1719) wrote, “Though we live not among such as openly profess to be heathens and unbelievers,” they proclaim their brutishness and atheism through their actions, 20. See Bahlman, 26-27, for more on the decline of the church as an effective institution of reform. Tina Isaacs, among others, has argued that there was not just a perception of the church in decline, but by looking at church records there is evidence of an actual decline in the influence of the church in this period, 85.

through their actions. Reformers cried: “What revilings do men cast (with all the odium and backbitings they are able) upon Religion itself, and everything that looks like sobriety and godliness? What a spirit of bitterness, gall, and wormwood is there in them against the faint shadows of *practical holiness* or *reformation*?”<sup>110</sup> It seemed that “the noble system of religion” was every day being “wretchedly martyred and disguised in the behavior of most men.”<sup>111</sup> Reformers were convinced that a “universal corruption and degeneracy” had overspread the Church. “Religion,” they insisted, “has received almost her mortal wound, at the heart, with respect to practical piety.”<sup>112</sup>

### **Targets of the Societies**

The societies targeted men and women who behaved badly. However, their actions were influenced by what they perceived as an alarming number of irreligious ideas being discussed, published, and performed on stage. Reformers thought that confederacies of atheists were attempting to undermine the Christian religion by circulating irreligious and obscene literature. Matthew Heynes told reformers, the fact was that “deism, and downright atheism too, has gained ground” in England.<sup>113</sup> Anxieties of pious individuals were intensified when, following the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695, an onslaught of skeptical and heterodox pamphlets were printed, and they circulated throughout the nation. Dangerous ideologies, reformers thought, were persuading men that written revelation was founded on faulty premises and had been handed down by corrupt authorities. Such philosophies maintained that Scripture could not guide human

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<sup>110</sup> *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners* (1694), 8.

<sup>111</sup> Disney, *A Second Essay upon the Execution of the Laws against Immorality and Prophaneness* (1710), 2.

<sup>112</sup> *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners* (1694), 6.

<sup>113</sup> Matthew Heynes, *A Sermon for the Reformation of Manners, Preached at St. Mary-Le-Bow, March the 15<sup>th</sup>, 1700* (London, 1701), 21.

actions; only Nature could reveal the true order of things and provide a source of knowledge, and thus a foundation for human action.<sup>114</sup> “These Bold and Daring Wits, or Brave Resolute Minds, *Les Esprits Forts*, as they compliment one another,” Mapletoft said of atheists, “by fantastick, airy, inconsistent Schemes of Nature, they either try wholly to thrust God out of the World he made, and leave us nothing but Eternal Matter and Motion instead of the Creator; or to elude his Providence and Concern in governing Humane Affairs; or at least to scoff out all Reveal’d Religion, as an Artifice or Trick to serve the Interests of the Church, or State.” He complained that not only did these men “wallow in Sensuality, and muddy Atheism, but they so far approve and justify those who are openly guilty of Impiety and Debauchery in any kind, as to choose their Company and Conversation.”<sup>115</sup> Atheism, thus, had become a mark of civility. And although it was mostly noblemen who openly scorned religion, this attitude was quickly spreading within the larger population, so that a disregard for religion and morality had become a commonplace. Hancocke said, “We are boldly told by some, they look upon the great Things of our Religion but as idle Tales.” Common people might not profess such complicated notions themselves, but they were just as guilty: “a great many others, though they do not speak out, yet plainly live, as if they had the same Opinion of them.”<sup>116</sup> Ultimately, how men and women lived was what interested reformers above all else. But if they did not respect the principles of Christianity, they were hardly likely to behave like good Christians. Religion, thus had a utility: it protected virtue, morality and good manners.

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<sup>114</sup> For more on radical thought, see Margaret Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (2003); Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford, 2001); and Justin Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696-1722* (Manchester, 1998).

<sup>115</sup> Mapletoft (1701), 16-17; 20. He complained further that pious members of society were made to suffer “Men of Atheistical Principles, and Prophan, Brutal, Villainous Lives, to pass with us for Men of good Sense, and of more than ordinary Penetration, and such as understand the World and Human Nature better than others do,” 20.

<sup>116</sup> Hancocke (1698), 12-13.

## Parallel Fears: Atheism and Immorality

The anxieties of the society members—specifically anxieties concerning the relationship between atheism and immoral behavior—paralleled similar fears held in the more learned circles of England, which stemmed from the spread of materialist philosophical texts. The latitudinarian, Samuel Clarke, in his *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God: More Particularly in Answer to Mr. Hobbs, Spinoza, and their Followers*, explained that there were three categories of atheists: those who, like pagans of antiquity, are ignorant of the “most obvious truths;” those who, like Hobbes and Toland, have adopted philosophical principles against the attributes of God; and thirdly, those people who, “being totally debauched and corrupted in their Practice...have, by a vicious and degenerate Life,...accustomed themselves only to mock and scoff at Religion; and, being under the Power of Evil Habits, and the Slavery of Unreasonable and Indulged Lusts” assume justifications so that they do not have to “forsake their beloved Vices.”<sup>117</sup> While it was to the philosophical atheists that Clarke turned his attention, it was against this last type of atheist that the societies turned theirs.

In this tradition of latitudinarian thought, reformers viewed atheism as a philosophical justification for bad behavior. People who had become slaves to their vices, reformers thought, “sometimes invent to themselves miserable Excuses, or take up the most senseless and absurd Opinions, only to hide the ugliness of their Vices.”<sup>118</sup> Hancocke explained that when men had become so lost in sensuality that they renounced all judgment, they would begin to defend vice,

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<sup>117</sup> Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God: More Particularly in Answer to Mr. Hobbs, Spinoza, and their Followers* (London, 1716), 2.

<sup>118</sup> Barton, *A Sermon Preach'd at St. Mary-le-Bow, to the Societies for Reformation of Manners, October 2, 1699* (1700), 12.



and “come to sin upon Principles.”<sup>119</sup> Similarly, Woodward wrote that irreligious ideas were “merely contrived by lovers of Sin to be a Shelter and Subterfuge for Vice and Profaneness.”<sup>120</sup> A rational, good-mannered person would recognize the benefits of religion to himself and to society.

According to reformers, good manners, control of the passions and discipline of the body, liberated rational men, while bad manners enslaved them. In his sermon preached to reformers, Talbot described the passions as exercising a “tyranny” over men. When vice “subjugated” them and bound them in “fetters,” men became “Vassals to their own brutish Appetites and Affections.”<sup>121</sup> Vices suppressed men’s reason, the only characteristic that distinguished them from animals. Thus, bad behavior rendered men rude and uncivilized—mere brutes. Howe complained that “when Reasonable Creatures should be so degenerate,” it was “hardly accountable why they are called so!”<sup>122</sup> Bradford described vicious man as having “so far discarded Humanity, as frequently to render himself a beast.” Woodhouse said vicious man had “sunk into British Sensuality.”<sup>123</sup> Thus bad manners, as Sylvester put it, were “rude” and

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<sup>119</sup> Hancocke (1698), 7. In order to justify their bad habits, men “scoff at religion, and attempt by pouring the utmost Contempt upon it, to drive it out of the World.”

<sup>120</sup> Josiah Woodward *The Duty of Compassion to the Souls of others, in endeavouring their Reformation. Being the Subject of a Sermon Preached December the 28<sup>th</sup> 1696. At St. Mary-le-bow, before the Societies for Reformation of Manners in the City of London, published at their request* (London, 1696), 18. Many other reformers made similar points. For instance, Shower (1697) said, “[Men] admit Principles of Atheism, before they can venture to commit some great Crimes.” Alsop (1698) said, Atheists “teach the Art and Mystery of Sinning as if it where a science to be prophane.” And Barton (1699) explained that Atheism was meant “to darken and hoodwink their Understandings, so that they do not clearly discern the Folly and Unreasonableness of their own Practices.”

<sup>121</sup> William Talbot, *A Sermon Preach’d at Bow-Church, London, on Monday in the Passion-Week, 1702, before the Societies for Reformation of Manners, publish’d at their request* (London, 1702) 52.

<sup>122</sup> John Howe, *A sermon preach’d February 14, 1698, and now publish’d, at the request of the Societies for Reformation of Manners in London and Westminster* (London, 1698), 2. Men, he continued, “are said to be Constituted and Distinguish’d by Reason, but disdain to be govern’d by it, accounting their Senses and their Vices, their better and wiser Directors.”

<sup>123</sup> Bradford (1697), 36. Woodhouse (1697), 44. Hancocke (1698) described this kind of man as having “sunk into the deepest moor with the very worst of Heathens...not only in spite of Reason, and Religion, but of Nature too,” 5-6.

“debasement,” not worthy “of Education, of improved Parts, of exquisite Learning, or of endearing Principles and Dispositions.”<sup>124</sup> This idea—that vicious men were not civilized men—prompted reformers to take their cause across the Atlantic, where they hoped to instill reason and discipline in the settlers, Indians, and slaves there. Sylvester asked rhetorically, “can you think it orderly and accountable that Men should brutify themselves? That rational Souls should prostitute their noble Faculties and Powers, which might so commendably exert and illustrate its own Authorities and Vigours in the due Management of its so very useful Body?”<sup>125</sup> Men had been created by God to be rational, orderly creatures. To yield to sensuality was to revoke being a man. In fact, for reformers, giving in to passions and senses was a type of madness. For Woodward, “Passion hath put him out of his right Mind.” He referred to vicious man as a “mad Person” in a state of “Lunacy.” One aim of the societies, then, was, as Woodhouse put it, “to recover men from Madness.”<sup>126</sup> Rational man understood what was in his best interest, and determined his choices based on that knowledge. Everlasting happiness was of course, for reformers, the greatest interest of every man. Therefore, to choose not to be a good Christian (after having knowledge of Christianity) was the mark of a truly insane individual.

### **Materialist Affinities**

Like the Latitudinarians, reformers adopted some of their opponents’ language—especially words such as “reason” and “nature”—in an attempt to redefine it, to make it serviceable to the cause of religion. They claimed that what they were defending was true natural religion. The obligation to moral behavior, for instance, could be known from reason

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<sup>124</sup> Sylvester (1697), 56.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.

<sup>126</sup> Woodward (1696), 32; Woodhouse (1697), 44.

alone. Vices, Moses Lowman said, were “against the plainest light of reason and the voice of nature, as well as the most express declarations of God’s revealed will.”<sup>127</sup> Good manners, reformers insisted, were just as essential to life in the material world as they were consequential to life in the spiritual world. Shower declared that virtue “concerns us as we are Men, under the Obligation of the Law of Nature.”<sup>128</sup> Building on the Natural Law tradition from Grotius to Locke, but especially drawing on latitudinarian philosophy, reformers saw the laws of nature and of God as identical. Thus, even pagans had been careful to keep those laws. The *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* pointed out that “Profaneness and debauchery have, in truth, been ever infamous in the opinions of the wise and good men in all ages of the world, and treated as such by the religion and laws of heathen nations, as well as by the Christian religion, and the laws of our own country.”<sup>129</sup> Atheists may have rejected Scripture, vowing to take their counsels from Nature alone. However, reformers argued, if these atheists truly followed the dictates of natural reason, their outward behavior would in the end appear no different from the behavior of the most devout Christians. For this reason, it was clear that heathens were in fact overall much more virtuous than English atheists and libertines, who were indeed unreasonable.<sup>130</sup> Decent conduct, then, was something that individuals ought to embrace regardless of their acceptance of the Gospel; it was an integral component of correct reasoning,

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<sup>127</sup> Moses Lowman, *A Sermon Preached for the Societies for Reformation of Manners, at St. Mary-Le-Bow, June 27, 1720* (London, 1721), 14. Hancocke (1698) wrote, “The great Things of Religion are such as are apt to work on Reasonable Men,” 14.

<sup>128</sup> Shower (1698), 16. Burgess’ sermon (1697) drew specifically from Grotius.

<sup>129</sup> *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701), 116.

<sup>130</sup> Heynes (1701) said of atheists, “tis not to be denied that from acting as if there were no God, many begin to take up principles suitable to their practice; and sometimes openly scoff at, and make a jest of those fundamental articles, not only of Christianity but even of natural religion, which they have long since given the lie to by their scandalous behavior,” 21.

and could be extracted from the voice of nature, as well as the voice of God, which were ultimately one and the same.

Reformers also attempted to fight libertinism in its own language. Again like the Latitudinarians, they appropriated a materialist view of nature—especially as represented in the works of Thomas Hobbes—that human action was driven by pleasure and pain. Edmund Calamy described man, referring to Hobbes’ ideas directly: “*Personal Interest* [is] the Governing Principle, and the Spring of all their Motions.”<sup>131</sup> Appealing to the mechanisms of pleasure and pain, reformers argued that vicious behavior brought physical pain to the body, while virtuous behavior brought pleasure. Disney observed that “the *fear of man* prevails much more generally than the *fear of God*.” Although God’s eternal judgment was a concern “of infinitely greater weight” than the fear of human laws and penalties, he acknowledged that few people “give themselves the uneasy entertainment of such thoughts.” In contrast, a punishment—such as a fine or prison sentence—inflicted by human laws was “a matter of *present sense*,” so that men and women “see and feel it actually upon them, and have no power to shuffle aside the apprehension or consideration of it.”<sup>132</sup> It was plainly evident to reformers, then, that those things which could be experienced physically and in this world, that could inflict immediate pain, possessed a weightiness strong enough to move individuals to action. Shower admitted that “There is very much reason to think, that ‘tis not *Conscience*, so much as the Dread of Temporal Punishment, that makes you safe in your Houses, and quiet in the Possession of what you enjoy.” This kind of logic served to justify the prosecution of moral crimes in the civil courts. But the

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<sup>131</sup> Calamy (1699), 12-13. He described Hobbes’s view: “*Hobbs* indeed supposes all Men in a *State of Nature* [*De Cive*.], to be Free and at Liberty to do what they please; to be under no other Engagement than to mind their own Interest; to be at Enmity, and in a *War* with each other; to have no Rule of Duty, no Obligation to their brethren; and to have nothing to do, but to secure their own Satisfaction and Repose; having no Reason to be concern’d, who is overlook’d and disregarded, or oppos’d and prejudic’d,” 12.

<sup>132</sup> Disney (1710), 76-78.

fact that reformers engaged with a materialist rhetoric also reveals their deep fears of the growing influence of that philosophical position. Calamy confessed, “to talk at such a Rate as this, is strange and monstrous. For the Temper which such Language bespeaks, would if given way to, at once extinguish *Humanity, Piety, and Civil Society.*”<sup>133</sup>

According to materialist philosophy (at least as it was understood by reformers) men did not behave according to any standards of morality or sociability. But reformers argued against this Hobbesian picture of man as naturally selfish and unsocial; for them, man was indeed a social animal.<sup>134</sup> Shower expressed this opinion, shared by all reformers, that “no man is made for himself alone, we are Members of Society.”<sup>135</sup> This was known from experience: there was not a man born who did not immediately require the assistance of others to survive. It did not end there. Men mutually depended on one another for the rest of their lives. Woodward affirmed, “Man is absolutely insufficient to supply his own wants of himself, but must crave the helping Hands of many others.” Calamy agreed, “we all stand in great need of one another.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Shower (1697), 26; Calamy (1699), 13.

<sup>134</sup> See Aristotle, *Politics*, I: man is political animal; Spinoza (*Ethics*, IV, prop 35, note). Arguing against a Hobbesian view of human nature, Calamy (1699) said that if men were only selfish, “the World would become a Desert; Who could desire, nay, who could bear to live in it? For Love, Trust, and Converse would be universally banish’d. How soon must we be forc’d to bid adieu to all Order, Regularity and Sobriety!” 3.

<sup>135</sup> Shower (1697), 17. Russell (1697) said similarly, “we are not designed by our Creator for our selves alone, but made for Society,” 28. And Disney (1708) argued that this was a universal notion: “The Moralists of the Heathen World could tell us, that we are not born for ourselves,” 4.

<sup>136</sup> Woodward (1696), 27; Calamy (1699), 25. Calamy explained that “God hath plac’d Men in that Posture towards each other, that no one is or can be Self-sufficient; and therefore we must live by mutual Kindness, and an Exchange of suitable Offices. Every Man’s Necessities oblige him to a regard of others,” 25. Woodward agreed: “Our good and wise Creator has so ordered the state of Humane Life, that no Person (of what rank or Condition soever) can subsist without the Help and Assistance of others. We are born naked, destitute, and impotent, and should not survive our Birth many Hours, except some Eye pitied us, and did the common Offices of suitable Ministration to us. And thus we live many years by the Kindness and Charity of others; being in our Infancy not only unable to provide our own necessary Food and Raiment, but even incapable of feeding or dressing our selves, tho the Means of both be provided to our hands,” 26. Hayley (1698) wrote, “As we were not made *by*, so neither were we made *for* our selves, but it has pleased our All-wise Creator so to mold us, as to incline us to Society and fit us for it: He has given every Man Faculties and Powers not only to Preserve and Support himself, but to be Helpful also to those about him: *Self-love* he has implanted in us, which is generally active enough to exhort the one; and *Humanity* and

Man had a natural affinity to man, it was argued, because the one recognized his own nature in the other. Calamy explained, “We have a tie to all of the Humane Race; who had all the same Rise and Original with us, are all of the same Blood, Children of the same Common Father, of the same Make and Frame.”<sup>137</sup> Reformers also commonly claimed that men had a natural sympathy for one another.<sup>138</sup> The fact was, that man’s sociable nature was a main source of his own happiness as well as the happiness of the entire community. It made social life possible. This was not only known through revealed religion, but also through natural religion.

The very frame of human nature not only caused man to care about others, but caused him to care about the public good.<sup>139</sup> Daniel Burgess described the entire natural world as ordered for the public good: “Sun, Moon, and Stars, and whatever is noble, all things do work for Publick Good. Naturalists observe [this in] Animals,...with contemptible, as Mice and Rats, Worms and Weasels: or formidable, as Lions and Wolves, Leopards and Tygers. And, no otherwise is it with Men.”<sup>140</sup> Thus, according to reformers, human nature was nothing like

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the Love of our Neighbours, is as really rooted in our Nature to quicken us to the other; if *Interest* make us love our selves, *Reason* and *Conscience* will tell us that we ought also to love our Brethren,” 5-6.

<sup>137</sup> Calamy (1699), 24. He pointed out that this “hath been observ’d by Sundry, even of the sober Heathens.” Woodward said much the same: he explained that “Next to our own Welfare, we are to have a kind and charitable Concern for our Brother’s. Our Brother; that is, every Person who having the same Nature, and deriving it from the same God,” 3.

<sup>138</sup> Calamy (1699) said, “*Selfishness* is really its own Torment. A Generous Spirit which is bent for the Good of others, as there is Capacity and Opportunity, is widen’d and enlarg’d; Shares with others in their happiness and Welfare, bearing a Part therein by a sort of natural Sympathy,” 18. Woodward (1696) described a feeling of pity: “thou canst not but feel a painful regret when thou beholdest one of thy own Kind going in the way of Destruction.” Of course, Woodward was referring to damnation, but the point still stands that such a condition in one man provokes a feeling of empathy in another. Calamy: “*As Men*, we are bound to Honour the Rational Nature wherever we see it. Whatsoever tends to blur and deface it (as all Vices do most certainly, whether they be British or Devilish) should draw forth our Compassion, and Abhorrence,” 26.

<sup>139</sup> Hayley (1699) said, “the first law of all humane Society, which every Man is supposed to know, and consent to, and which every particular Law is but a branch of, is the *Publick Good*,” 10.

<sup>140</sup> Daniel Burgess, *The Golden Snuffers or, Christian Reprovers, and Reformers, Characterized, Cautioned, and Encouraged. A Sermon Preach’d unto the Societies for Reformation of Manners, in London, Feb. 15, 1696/7* (London, 1697), 8-9. Here Burgess is using Newtonian language to describe the well-ordered and good natural world. That men are sociable, Howe said, “there is sufficient Indication by the very Law of Nature,” 16.

Hobbes had described it. Woodward asked reformers, “Can you find in your Heart any tendency to verify that severe Reflection upon Human Cruelty which some have made, namely, that *one Man is many times a Wolf and Fury to another?* This is a Carriage worse than that of Barbarians. Yea, it is worse than the savage Brutes; for the fiercest of them seldom prey upon their own Kind.”<sup>141</sup> What this meant to reformers, was that human beings, by their very nature, were invested in the welfare of others. Thus they had to monitor them. As John Russell put it, “since there’s a principle of Love and natural Compassion in all Mankind, every Man will become a friendly Monitor unto his Neighbour.”<sup>142</sup> Because men were social animals, because every day they came into contact with other men, because they relied on the advantages of living in society, they had a responsibility to make sure that every member of their community was behaving in the interest of all. This was one rationale of forming voluntary societies in the first place—to improve each individual in society, so that in the end society at large would be improved. Woodward stated that “It is a part of the Law of Nature, as well as a Statute in Israel, that...we are to live by the mutual kindness of each other; this is the end of our incorporating into Societies.”<sup>143</sup> There is a purposeful ambiguity here: was Woodward speaking of societies in general or the societies for reformation of manners?

### **The Common Good and the Body Politic**

Since men were social animals, reformers reasoned, they cared about the common good. If men were not social, if they had no concern for their brothers and neighbors, if they always put

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<sup>141</sup> Woodward (1696), 29.

<sup>142</sup> John Russell, *A Sermon Preach’d at St. Mary-Le-Bow, to the Societies for Reformation of Manners, June 28, 1697* (London, 1697), 34. He clarified that “this is a Duty which we owe to Mankind, both as we are of the same Nature, and as we are commanded by the Divine Word,” 35.

<sup>143</sup> Woodward (1696), 25-26.

their own interests before the common interest, if they did not follow the natural laws, then society would disintegrate, and Hobbes' State of Nature would become a reality.<sup>144</sup> Disney depicted such a state: "we could have no security of whatever we propose to enjoy; no comfort in our estates, no relish in our diversions, no safety in our retirement, but must be always upon the defensive, against the repine and malice of our Neighbours."<sup>145</sup> But the fact was, men did care about the common good. And it was in their interest to do so. As Hayley made clear, "our *own* Interest and that of our *Families* and Dependencies is concern'd in it [the common good]. We all rest under its Protection; and share in its Peace, its Happiness and its Misfortunes. We are but Members of the same common Body, and must have our Part in whatever befalls it."<sup>146</sup> Hayley thus argued for the utility of public good will.<sup>147</sup> But nothing promoted morality, and a concern for the common good more than religion.

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<sup>144</sup> Calamy (1699) warned: "were all for themselves, in Defiance of others, Societies were Dissolv'd, and there would be nothing left by the Notion of a *Common Good*," 19.

<sup>145</sup> Disney (1708), 4. Calamy also described a Hobbesian state of nature in much detail: "For suppose any particular Persons Stock to be ever so large, should he cast off others, he'd be unavoidably Distress'd and Miserable, for want of Supplies and Assistance from them whom he rejected and slighted, in a Thousand Instances, wherein he could not afford himself any Relief. That Man that would mind none but himself, could reasonably expect no other than to be cast off by all, who have as much right to demand from him, as he from them. He'd have all the World against him, be always insecure and uneasie, eaten up with Jealousies and Suspensions, Troublesome to himself, and to all about him, and be incapable of ever being Safe or Happy. The sense of this was the Natural Foundation of Societies; the bands whereof are broken by an indulged Selfishness," 25-26.

<sup>146</sup> Hayley (1698), 8. He continued: "Since therefore we are our selves embarqued in the Publick, since we are sending our Posterity, for which all Good Men have a natural tenderness, into it, and since all our Friends, and Relations, and those we wish well to, fail in the same Bottom, we do but consult our own Interest when we study and promote its Prosperity," 9.

<sup>147</sup> Calamy (1699) also offered a utilitarian argument: "Whereas they whose Care and Concern reaches not beyond themselves, are left to stand alone; they have none to assist them, nothing to expect by Universal Disregard and Contempt. So that they who neglect their Brethren, do at the same time neglect themselves; and undermine their own Comfort, Peace and Safety," 19. Shower (1697) explained how the common interest was in each person's particular interest: "by the Law of nature we are bound to do good to all Men, as we have Opportunity, and to promote the Good of the Place where we live, and of the Community whereof we are Members. From a Principle of Love to the Society and to our selves also: for I my self and mine shall be involved in the Common Ruine. This is so Evident, that many honest Heathen would have condemned him as unworthy the Name of a Man, who should prefer his Estate, his Reputation, or Life, before the Common Good" 5. Calamy, an exception, did make civic republican arguments. Calamy: "We are also *Politically* obliged to be concern'd for our Brethren, consider'd as Members of the same Civil Societies. The Community is concern'd in the Conduct of every Member. It Flourishes,



Reformers emphasized the material disadvantages of vice for individuals and for the entire nation. In the first place, vice was one of the main causes of poverty. John Disney exclaimed, “how many families have been brought to beggary, by the mere expensiveness of vice!” Poorer men, who spent their time and money in taverns and alehouses, were in no condition to support their families or pay taxes. Disney calculated that “Three Parts in Four of the poor Families in this Kingdom have been reduced to want by haunting Taverns or Ale-Houses.”<sup>148</sup> The poor were not the only members of the community who were in danger of financial ruin, however. Vice could impoverish all members of the social hierarchy. As Disney observed, “the laborer consumes his time and his wages in tippling and drunkenness, the tradesman his profits, the officer his salary, and the gentleman his estate, in taverns or lewd houses, in gaming or keeping whores.” In nurturing their bad habits, men who made a decent living soon squandered it. The poverty of individuals had consequences, not only for their families, but for the whole community. It came as no surprise to Disney “that Poverty over-runs the Nation; that Taxes are so generally complain’d of, and with so much difficulty paid; that Trade is neglected, Markets fail, our Gazettes are fill’d with Commissions of Bankrupt, and our Prisons with Debtors.”<sup>149</sup> Secular government was responsible for securing men’s estates and advancing the wealth of the nation; to attend to that, reformers argued, secular government must

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if each keeps his Place, and seeks the Good of the whole; it is undermin’d by any ones Licentiousness: Which calls upon all to further his being bro’t to Condign Punishment, in Defense of the Publick Safety, lest he spread his Contagion to others. But the Common Peace and Safety is Establish’d and Secur’d, by the hearty Furtherance of each others Weal, in Conjunction with, and Subordination to, the Good of the Body Politick,” 28-29.

<sup>148</sup> Disney (1708), ix; 55. He continued: “Especially labouring Men, who very often consume there on the Lord’s Day what they have gotten all the Week before, and let their Families beg or steal for a Subsistence the Week following. ‘Tis much the same with too many Tradesmen, who dissolve the Profits of their Trade in *Tippling* and *good Fellowship*, which ought to be laid out in necessary Expenses at Home, or laid up to make Provision for their Children; and by this Means either they, or their Posterity, or both, must fall into Decay,” 55-56. Also, *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701), 49.

<sup>149</sup> Disney (1708), 94.

prosecute those moral crimes that led to wasted estates and ruined trade. And since individuals had an interest in protecting these things, they had good reason to become informers.

In the second place, reformers argued that vices ruined men's reputations and damaged their businesses. Men who were addicted to bad habits were not in control of their lives; they were unpredictable and untrustworthy. John Shower, in his sermon to the societies, asked, "As to the Business of Trade, Would you not sooner trust a sober honest Man, than a lewd Debauchee?" The latter might one day be flushed with money, and the next without a morsel of bread to eat. Such a person could never be trusted to pay his debts or satisfy his business obligations.<sup>150</sup> Gilbert Burnet confirmed that indeed "few care to deal with such lewd Persons, or put any confidence in them." When vicious men were inevitably brought to lying and "many base methods" to sustain their bad habits, they could not be surprised when their reputations suffered as a result. Vices such as drinking, gambling and uncleanness made men lazy, they led men to slacken their care and industry, so that, as Burnet put it, "they have no reason to hope that they can succeed in their business."<sup>151</sup> But it was not only vicious men whose businesses suffered by their vices; others were affected as well. Shower blamed the undoing of countless tradesmen on "the Lusts and Debauchery of their Partners, their Customers, and their Debtors." He exclaimed, "How many a worthy Citizen had been bankrupt by other Men's Crimes, and not by his own?"<sup>152</sup> For reformers, vice hurt individuals and the community; unless there was a

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<sup>150</sup> Shower (1689), 28. Disney similarly said: "How many debauched lewd gentlemen have we seen under a splendid figure and appearance, who have suddenly been so broke as to be worse than nothing. Their port in the world, and the reputation of their estates, have brought the mercers and makers to give them credit, till being no longer able to keep their ground, they are unexpectedly blown up, and are nowhere to be seen but in the bookshops or a goal. This is the natural effect of extravagance, as that is of vice; and therefore the suppression of vice must constitute very much to set a tradesman easy: for where temperance and good order preserve a fund of wealth, the law will find him a way to recover what is justly owing him; his debt is not to be accounted desperate," xvi-xvii.

<sup>151</sup> Burnet (1700), 19.

<sup>152</sup> Shower (1689), 29.

reformation of manners, personal and national wealth, trade and industry would suffer. On the other hand, good manners in a man were a mark of his industriousness, dependability, and honesty—virtues that would only enlarge his reputation and expand his business. So that by the suppression of vice, Disney said, “we shall be better able to trust Mankind,” which in the long run would “secure public commerce and credit.”<sup>153</sup> Again, we see the idea that social bonds created through good manners could promote business.

Lastly, reformers explained how vice was destructive to the human body. Vices made men susceptible to every disease. Shower described how drinking and fornication brought “languishing, painful Sickness, Fevers and Dropsies, Gouts and Cholicks, Consumptions, and worse Distempers.” The sickly body became a symbol of the immoral life. Woodhouse mused, “How oft have the Diseases of a macerated Body, told the World, of these Sins?” For reformers deterioration of the body was not merely a reflection of the damnation of the soul. These men constantly emphasized how bad habits were destructive to the material composition of the human body. On the other hand, they extolled the virtues of self-discipline. It was what enabled men to rationally follow their interests and promote their happiness. Bad habits, however, caused men to lose control over their own bodies, and their lives. Shower imagined the many mischiefs a drunk man might get mixed up in, “when once the Wine has filled him with more Spirits than he is able to govern.” Disney described the risk of drinking on Sundays: “If Company meets together in a Public-House on the Sunday-Evening, when there is no Danger of other Business that shall call them away, *who* shall tell them the critical Minute when they are *sufficiently refreshed*? They sit very contentedly Hour after Hour, and call for Pint after Pint, and make

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<sup>153</sup> Disney (1708), xvi.

themselves Judges of their Refreshment, till they're able to judge of nothing at all."<sup>154</sup> Men, with no other pressing business, lose all sense of time and order when what began as a small indulgence turns into an all-consuming bad habit.

The key to a happy life was to be moderate in everything—religion, politics, and especially pleasures. Burgess recommended “Moderation in the Use of *Sleep, Recreation, Meats and Drinks, and Apparel.*” To give in to excess was to destroy the body. Barton warned against “the Mis-government of our selves.” He continued: “That *Epicurism, Voluptuousness, with Excess in eating and Drinking*, seldom fail to bring great Miseries upon Men in this Life, in their Bodies, Estates and Reputations.”<sup>155</sup> Thus, reformers tried to show that when it came to bad manners, the losses—poverty, a damaged reputation, and sickness—outweighed the gains. Shower, offering a utilitarian argument, asked men to add up the advantages of a vicious life. “Let them bring in their Account, and let us view the *Sum Total*. What Fruit have they had? But so many Sorrows and Calamities; an ill Name, an empty Purse, a diseased Body.” So, religion and good manners made men happy, they had utilitarian value. The *Account* could say, “Of such consequence therefore religion and virtue seem plainly to be to a nation, abstracting from the consideration of a just God that rules in the kingdoms of the earth.”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Shower (1697), 51, 52; Woodhouse (1697), 45; Disney (1708), 58.

<sup>155</sup> Burgess (1697), 23; Barton (1700), 22.

<sup>156</sup> Shower (1697), 54; *Account for the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701), 83. Many sermons reiterated the three downsides of vice: poverty, loss of reputation, and disease. Shower continued: “Need I mind you of the Routs and Riots, the Quarrels, and Contentions, and Murthers, occasioned by *Drunkenness*; of the Poverty and Ruine of a Multitude of Families, by that, and other expensive Vices: Whereby Men not only undo themselves, but rob those for whom they ought to make Provision. Can you be ignorant of the horrid Confusion in Families, and the sad Train of other ill Consequences, as to Health, and Life, and Honour, and Estate, which is the Fruit of Lewdness and Uncleaness?” 27. Butler (1697): vices “impair their Health, and waste their Estates, and blemish their Reputation,” 7. The *Account* explained that when men and women and “generally grow obstinate in [their vices], they often bring on themselves...the ruin of their estates, families, health, a sudden or scandalous death; all which the timely and wholesome punishment of them by the magistrate might have been a means of preventing,” 46-47.

Many opponents of the reformation of manners thought that the civil government had no business in punishing moral offences. Vice was a private transgression, and the civil government had jurisdiction over matters that had public repercussions. The difference between civil crimes and moral crimes was this: that crimes such as theft, assault and murder encroached upon “the safety of mens *lives* and *estates*,” whereas drunkenness, swearing, and trading on Sundays had no further harm in them bringing the offender closer to damnation, which really was a man’s private concern.<sup>157</sup> Thus, many people were sure that in cases of moral crimes “which do not immediately affect the public peace, but only by long-winded consequences,” civil punishments were not required. “Let every man look to himself,” critics contended, “as he only shall answer for himself, at the Day of Judgment.” A magistrate, indeed, was thought “very impertinent, that should take much notice of these things.”<sup>158</sup> It was not just magistrates who were seen as overstepping their boundaries: informers themselves were called busybodies. The minister Thomas Reynolds told informers that they were often accused of “meddling with matters beyond your Sphere, and needless disturbing of your Neighbour.”<sup>159</sup>

In response, reformers showed the various ways in which vice was destructive not only to the individual, but also to the entire community. They explained that debauchery led to the effeminacy of nations, rendering them weak opponents to their enemies, and it chipped away at the stability and authority of the government. Reformers resisted the idea that moral crimes were “passions or affections of the mind, and not so mischievous to the public.” Disney thought no claim to be more false. He insisted that moral crimes “do not terminate only in a private damage

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<sup>157</sup> *Account of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners*, 51-52.

<sup>158</sup> Disney (1708), 7-8. Disney expressed this criticism in another way too: “it is properly the minister's business to check such immoralities. The clergy will say, we [the magistrate] encroach upon their office,” 14.

<sup>159</sup> Thomas Reynolds, *A Sermon Preach'd to the Societies for Reformation of Manners, in the City of London and Westminster, February 19, 1699, published at their request* (London, 1700), 47.

to the offender himself,” but rather, the consequences of moral crimes most certainly “follow upon them to the public.”<sup>160</sup> Reforming rhetoric is filled with discussions of the public good. Punishing vice, reformers said was for the good of all. Calamy told reformers, “Regular attempts to Reform a Vicious Age, have such a Tendency to a Publick Good.”<sup>161</sup> John Spademan made it clear that vicious persons do not only hurt themselves—if that were the case, “there might be some pretext for indulging them”—but in fact, “they do a real harm to the *Community*, of which they are Members.”<sup>162</sup> Woodward similarly said, “A publick Sinner does not only sin against his own Soul, but against the Community of which he is a Member.” So that Howe could say that the point of prosecuting the laws against vice was “for Good, the Good of each Individual, and of the whole Community, as comprehending all the Individuals.”<sup>163</sup> Their point was that society was the sum of its individuals—if the parts were debauched, so too was the whole.

Just as vice could ruin the estates of individuals, it could likewise ruin the wealth of the nation. “Now,” reformers advised, “secure but the virtue of a nation, and you make it rich: for industry, temperance, and frugality are the most inexhaustible mines, and make the certainest, if not the most ample returns to the public: whilst luxury, prodigality and idleness are continually preying upon it, and daily tending to enervate by impoverishing it.”<sup>164</sup> Thus, reformers argued that the very wealth of England depended on the good behavior of its inhabitants. Disney said that with virtue, “Trade shall Flourish.” Reformation was therefore necessary, according to the minister Heynes, if England were to maintain its wealth, which was an essential safeguard to its

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<sup>160</sup> Disney (1708), 6.

<sup>161</sup> Calamy (1699), 1.

<sup>162</sup> John Spademan, *A Sermon Preach'd November 14, 1698, and now Publish'd at the Request of the Societies for Reformation of Manners, in the Cities of London and Westminster* (London, 1699), 36.

<sup>163</sup> Woodward (1696), 2; Howe (1698), 6.

<sup>164</sup> Heynes (1701), 7-8.

security. He explained: “the riches of a nation are none of the smallest strengthenings of it, money being the sinews of war, and that nation being ordinarily the likeliest to end a war with advantage, which is able longest to maintain it.”<sup>165</sup>

Reformers also argued that vice made a nation weak and vulnerable to the attacks of foreign nations. Borrowing from classical republican language, they blamed vice for producing effeminate citizen-soldiers, who would be unable to defend their country in a time of war. Vice, as Heynes put it, “enervates men’s bodies, and dispirits their minds.”<sup>166</sup> When soldiers had become “effeminate, debauched, diseased, and incapable of bearing Arms,” Shower said, they were “fitter for an Hospital, than an Army; to be under a Physician, or Surgeon, rather than a General; who instead of being able to use a Sword or Musket, need a Crutch.”<sup>167</sup> After 1688 and throughout the eighteenth century, England was in and out of war with France, and reformers exploited fears of a French invasion to show the necessity of an immediate reformation at home. *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners*, for instance, pointed to England’s present situation when it said that because of vice, “the natural vigor and manliness, prowess and valor of our kingdom (for which Brittany formerly was in much renown among all nations) is hereby in a manner wholly (or very much) lost, and effeminate pusillanimity bred and cherished hereby.” The *Proposals* claimed that since such unchecked vice “mollifies and effeminates the English valor,” the nation must expect military failures. It warned Englishmen that their country

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<sup>165</sup> Disney (1708), vi. Heynes (1701), 7.

<sup>166</sup> Heynes (1701), 7. Alsop (1698) similarly said that “Debauchery makes a people Cowards, Effeminates, Enervates, Dispirits them,” 34. Calamy (1699) said that vices “Dispirit, Effeminate, and Debase us.” And Howe (1698) said that “Vices, tend to make us an Effeminate Mean-spirited, a Desident, Lazy, Slothful, Unhealthful People, useless to the Glorious Prince, and excellent Government we live under, neither fit to endure the Hardships, or encounter the Hazards of War, nor apply our selves to the Business, or undergo the Labours that belong to a State of Peace,” 29.

<sup>167</sup> Shower (1697), 49.

would “be broken in pieces when our martial neighbor nation [France] shall invade us.”<sup>168</sup>

According to reformers, not only did vice enervate a nation’s citizen-body, but it also made the nation look infantile and backwards in the eyes of other nations. It was not a mark of advanced civilization. As Alsop put it, “Wickedness makes a nation little, foolish, silly, and ridiculous, and to make no Figure in the World.” Conversely, he pointed out, “Righteousness infuses Courage and Gallantry into a People.”<sup>169</sup> A virtuous nation was esteemed by the whole world.

Even if a vicious nation avoided invasion from outside, it was still in danger of conflict from inside. Reformers argued that vice was a main cause of rebellion and civil war. In his sermon, Matthew Heynes noted that “the virtue of a people unites and cements them; while vice makes men giddy, and weakens them by dividing.” Since vice often resulted in poverty, reformers said, it tended to increase the number of poor people in the state, which in turn increased feelings of discontent that led to the outbreak of rebellions and civil wars. “When drunkenness, uncleanness, and profane swearing have effectively debauched men’s minds and ruined their fortunes,” Lowman explained, the result was “not only the ruin of many others in their estates and credit, their bodies, and their souls,” but also in instigating “disorders of robberies, riots, and rebellions.”<sup>170</sup> In other words, vice made men dissatisfied with their social

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<sup>168</sup> *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners* (1694), 15-16. Shower (1697) agreed this was likely: by vicious habits, “the very Genius of a Nation is changed, a generous and brave People dispirited: They are softened and dissolved into Cowardize: They lose their Reputation abroad, and have no strength at home; and are an easie Prey to Foreign Enemies.” He concluded: “they must sink under their own Burden, and in a little time will undo themselves,” 49. And Francis Hare (1731) said that a nation that allowed vice “will be divided within itself, weakened by an infinite variety of domestic evils, and become as easy prey to every invader from without,” 4.

<sup>169</sup> Alsop (1698), 34-35. Heynes (1701) said that virtue made a nation “courageous, and the courage of a nation tends to make it feared abroad, and consequently more secure at home,” 22.

<sup>170</sup> Heynes (1701), 7; Lowman (1721), 19. Disney (1708) wrote that poverty from vice “cuts the very sinews of government, when that which should support it, is drained before hand into the private channels of luxury by the subject, and little or nothing remains to bear the charge of its defense against the common enemy; and not only so, but it stands further exposed to tumults and rebellions at home; for poverty breeds discontent amongst the people, who are ready enough to charge their hardships upon bad times and the government; though in truth they proceed from their own undoing vices; discontent puts them upon affecting change, and sows the seeds of every great



conditions; it made peace, stability and order impossible. It is clear that reformers were still haunted by the upheavals of the past, and they nurtured anxieties about future social unrests, mostly due to growing poverty in the cities.

Perhaps even more alarming, if vice continued unchecked, weakening and dividing people, it could lead to their eventual political enslavement. Vice, reformers argued, was the greatest threat to a nation's liberties. That was because, as John Woodhouse said, only virtue secured men's "Properties and Liberties, and Religion and Lives."<sup>171</sup> Without it, a nation was in danger of sinking into tyranny. Vicious men, who only pursued their own debauched interests, were more fit for Hobbes' state of nature, where there was no end to violence and insecurity, than a free nation. For reformers, when men had become so weakened in their minds and bodies, they were no longer in a position to govern themselves. They were suited only to be slaves—subjects to a Leviathan, King James II, or Louis XIV. John Howe warned that vices, "do tend to infer upon us (which all will pretend to abhor) Slavery at length. For they are most unfit for an Ingenuous, Free sort of Government, or to be otherwise governed than as Slaves or Brutes; who have learnt nothing of Self-Government, and are at the next step of being Slaves to other Men, who have first made themselves Slaves to their own Vitious Inclinations. Thus are such liable to all sorts of Temporal Calamities and Miseries in this World."<sup>172</sup> Some sermons even attributed growing vice to a popish plot to bring England under tyrannical rule.<sup>173</sup>

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disturbance to the public," ix-x. Shower (1697) warned that "a People would soon undo themselves by their own Vices: Which must necessarily weaken, divide, dishonor, impoverish, and destroy them," 49. Russell (1697) said similarly: "the Nature of Vice, which enervates and softens those that are its Vassals, takes away their Courage, brings on Fear, and creates those Jars and debase the genius of a people Jealousies among People, which makes 'em divide, and become an easy Prey to the next bold Invader," 5.

<sup>171</sup> Woodhouse (1697), 51.

<sup>172</sup> Howe (1698), 29.

<sup>173</sup> William Tong's (1703) sermon is an example: "We have reason to believe this deluge of profaneness that had overspread the nation did not merely proceed from the incogitancy of men's minds and the impetuosity of their lusts,

Drawing on civic republican language, reformers said that a lesson could be learned from the examples of ancient heathen nations. When they were virtuous, nations rose to great heights, became great empires, and flourished; when they were vicious, they fell. John Russell told reformers that “all flourishing Kingdoms are established by Virtue: And that when People depart from that, they cut down the Props, and remove the Pillars that support their own Strength and Felicity.” So, that, he said, anyone, who would “look over the Histories of the most famous Kingdoms and Governments of the World, will find that they have been rais’d and carried on to their most exalted Heights by the Rules and Practices of Moral Virtues: And that when the Babylonian, the Persian, the Grecian and Roman Monarchies fell to decay, it was Luxury and Vice that open’d the Door to let in their Ruin.”<sup>174</sup> This was not just a fate shared by ancient nations. Russell concluded: “this is not only historically true, in respect of the Ages that are past and gone, but actually so in respect of our selves, and the very Age and Day in which we live.”<sup>175</sup>

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but that there was a most pernicious design at the bottom of it, formed and fomented by Rome and France, to prepare the way for popery and tyranny,” 24. This rhetoric was complementary to Whig rhetoric, and the rhetoric of William III’s court. See Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution*, and Hayton, *Moral Reform and Country Politics* (Cambridge, 1990).

<sup>174</sup> Russell (1697), 4, 3. He continued: “For as long as they kept to their Ancient Virtue, which laid the Foundation, and also built up the Edifice of their Strength and Grandeur; they maintain’d their Power, they continu’d their Empire: but as soon as they grew loose and vicious, when Bribery and Corruption, Softness and Flattery seiz’d upon the Court, and Debauchery and Fraud, and contempt of Religion (altho a false one) had infected the People,” they fell, 3-4. Disney wrote, “The temperance, frugality, and other virtues of the Romans, were the support of their commonwealth, and raised them to the empire of the world: But as soon as the lewdness and luxury of Greece got footing among them, ’tis wonderful to observe how their power declined abroad, and factions and civil wars distracted them, and in course of time, their state was entirely subverted by the more virtuous (though withal the more barbarous) nations of the north. The reason is easy to conceive: for luxury and debauchery (as their natural effect) debase the genius of a people, dissolve them to effeminacy and cowardness, by changing them down to their pleasures, and diverting them from that generous spirit which is necessary to the preservation of the public. Or if it leave them anything of bravery, ’tis that of a bully rather than a soldier, the mere force of wine, and not a humane courage, but a brutal madness,” vii-viii

<sup>175</sup> Russell (1697), 4. Woodhouse (1697): “If you respect the Good Welfare of the Nation, and of this great City, of which you are Members. If you had never seen your Bibles, had read only the *Roman* Histories, you might see to what a glorious Height, severe Vertue advanced them; and how soon their Prowess, Courage, Success, and Grandeur, sunk to nothing, when they let loose to the Debaucheries, so long countenanced, and practiced amongst us. By Vertue they advanced, ‘till hey were the Envy of the World; by Vice they sunk, ‘till they became the Contempt of all,” 46. Howe (1698): “And if such gross Immoralities be somewhat generally Redrest, as more directly fall under the Magistrates Animadversion, how great a Common Good must it infer, inasmuch as those

Reformers did not on the whole, however, emphasize a cyclical passage of time. The decline of England was not predetermined. With a real reformation of manners, England might continue to flourish forever. Reformers remained optimistic about the possibility for improvement. They increasingly became interested in the burgeoning British Empire, approving of the wealth, stability, and religion that imperialism would preserve in their own country and impart to the rest of the world.

Of all the vices, the one that was considered most directly destructive to the welfare of society was swearing oaths. Oaths secured contracts, which sustained all law, order, justice, and trade. Thus, the very foundations of society depended on the legitimacy of oaths. According Gilbert Burnet, oaths were particularly important to law and order in England, which he described as “the Nation of the whole World that has studied the most to secure it self by Oaths. All Employments are entered upon by peculiar Oaths. How great is the extent of the Oath of a Grand Jury? Does not all matters of Life and Death, as well as of Property, turn upon the regard that Jurors have to their Oath?”<sup>176</sup> Swearing, by nullifying the power and reverence of oaths, destroyed all assurance government had of its citizens’ allegiance to the state and all assurance an individual had of his neighbor’s honesty. Without oaths, justice could not be served, and trade could not be carried out. So that, as Disney put it “When common use has sullied oaths,

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Evils, in their own nature, tend to the detriment, decay, and ruine of a People where they prevail? They darken the Glory of a Nation which how great a Lustre hath it cast abroad in the World, from the Romans and Spartans, and other civilized People! when their Sumptuary, and other Laws, were strictly observed, that repress undue Excesses; And when Temperance, Frugality, Industry, Justice, Fidelity, and consequently Fortitude and all other Vertues excell'd, and were conspicuous among them,” 27-28.

<sup>176</sup> Burnet (1700), 22. Disney (1708): “What is there which our Age with greater Reason complains of, than the Growth of Perjury? And the general either *Ignorance* of the Nature, or *prophane Disregard* of the Solemnity of Oaths in Courts of Justice, and upon entrance into public Trusts and Offices. How many Juries are there that give in a just Verdict, and Witnesses that speak the Truth, rather by *Chance* than *Principle*; or if by *Principle*, rather by that precarious one of common Honesty, than from any Sense of particular Obligation from the Oaths! How many others who, without any regard to the Fidelity they are Sworn to, do, thro’ Malice, Favour, or Interest, give in false Evidence and false Verdicts! How many Constables, Church-Wardens, &c. are (*willfully* as well as *ignorantly*) forsworn in the Execution of their Offices!” xi.

and every Minute's repetition has made them cheap and vulgar, their Esteem wears off, that Reverence, which is a natural Guard to their Authority, is lost, and Men harden against all Restraint or Obligation from them." Under such circumstances, witnesses could never be trusted to tell the truth.<sup>177</sup> Burnet exclaimed, "When Men are once corrupted to such a degree, there is an end of all Justice and Order!"<sup>178</sup> Disney said it would be "the end of all security and faith amongst men." Howe remarked, "When Profane Swearing gradually takes away the Reverence of an Oath, what becomes of Humane Society?"<sup>179</sup> The fear that England might fall once again into disorder remained always a matter of concern for reformers. To avoid those fears becoming a reality, oaths had to be more than empty words. Thus, Disney could claim "how necessary it is to the Peace and Safety, and the common Interests of men, that we should vigorously put in Execution the Laws of the State against Swearing."<sup>180</sup> Oaths, then, were important because they had utility in society. Scholars have suggested that oaths were part of "the world we have lost," a primitive world, where men really believed God could punish them for blasphemy.<sup>181</sup> Reformers, however, were not claiming that God would strike down those who did not keep their

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<sup>177</sup> Disney (1708), xi. Disney, who wrote more directly, "*Custom and Levity in Swearing* introduces Perjury," also said that when citizens "have habitually worn out (by using it upon all trifling occasions) the solemnity and awful apprehension of an oath, 'tis more by chance than principle if they don't go on to perjury," 74. Also see Shower, who said that there could be no trust of witnesses if oaths carried no weight, 27-28.

<sup>178</sup> Burnet (1700), 23. He continued: "How far are we got into this? What loud complaints do we hear every where of Sets of Suborned Witnesses, and of Partial Juries? The Obligations to Justice and Equity ought to be strong of themselves, nothing can force them more than these sacred Bonds of a solemn Appeal to God. But can Men, whose common Dialect is made up of Oaths and Imprecations, consider an Oath so much as to be under any deep Impressions of dread and horror from it?" 23.

<sup>179</sup> Disney (1708), 6; Howe (1721), 28. Disney also wrote: "is not this a Practice notoriously destructive to civil Government, scandalous to the Common-wealth, and dangerous to Society?" xi. Burnet (1700) similarly said: "what dismal consequences arise from the habit of common Swearing: Nothing tends more visibly to the perverting the course of Justice, and the dissolving our whole Government, which turns much upon Swearing, than a vicious habit that takes away the fear of an Oath," 22.

<sup>180</sup> Disney (1708), xii.

<sup>181</sup> See John Spurr, "A Profane History of Early Modern Oaths," *Transactions of the Royal Society*, 6th Series, vol. 11 (2001), 37-63.

oaths; rather, they argued that in order to maintain the authority of oaths, a culture of reverence for oaths had to be maintained. In other words, it was custom that could either secure or undermine oaths as an effective social mechanism.

### **Laws: “the very Bonds and Ligaments of Society”**

Reformers drew on fears of growing crime, especially in cities. Men and women who committed moral crimes, they said, often went on to commit worse capital crimes against persons and possessions. As Shower put it succinctly: “lesser Crimes make way for greater.”<sup>182</sup> So that the best way to stop capital crimes was to first put a stop to moral crimes. Shower said in his sermon, “‘Tis the Interest of any Government, to have ill Manners corrected, as a proper Means to prevent greater Crimes, where the Punishment is Capital.” Reformers further cautioned that a disregard for moral laws, rendered all laws contemptible. Shower explained that “tho’ such Instances of Immorality have not such an immediate Tendency, as Murder and Treason, to bring publick Confusion and Ruine; yet not only doth the one prepare for the other, but there is as manifest a Contempt of Authority in these, as in the most Capital Offences.”<sup>183</sup> Compared to the punishments administered for capital crimes (death), those for moral crimes were relatively minor (small fines), signifying the lesser direct consequences those latter crimes

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<sup>182</sup> Shower (1697), 8. Williams (1698) also made clear that lesser crimes “will, if indulged, dispose Men to return to such as are more Atrocious,” 61. Shower continued: “it is by the Commission of lesser Crimes, that Men are prepared and hardened to venture upon greater. If the Laws, that threaten only Correction, Imprisonment, or a Fine, be neglected and Despised; such as threaten Death, will in time have little Power: For he that will Swear and Curse, and be Drunk, and commit Adultery, and matters not the Hazard of his health and Life, by a Course of Debauchery, will in a little time be hardened, so as to despise Death by the Sword of Justice,” 9. And Disney said similarly: those who “disregard their own health and life, estate and reputation, for the enjoyment of their beloved debaucheries, are in a fair way to bid defiance to the gallows, to venture upon capital crimes, and such as are immediately destructive to common peace and honesty; as robbery, murder, and the like, either to relieve the poverty which their vices have brought upon them, or to open their way to new opportunities of lust; or because they have hardened themselves beyond the fear of death, and resolve, according to their own lewd proverb, upon a short life and a merry one,” x.

<sup>183</sup> Shower (1697), 9, 10.

had for society.<sup>184</sup> But nevertheless, reformers insisted, the magistrates had an equal duty to prosecute moral crimes as they did civil crimes. Both kinds of laws had to be upheld, otherwise the whole system of law and order was undermined.

Following the natural law tradition, they saw laws—natural, scriptural, and human—as essential to society. The *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* declared that “Laws are necessary to the very being of communities.” In his sermon, Spademan pointed out, “There never was a civiliz’d People destitute of Laws.” Laws were so important to civilization because, as Disney put it, they maintained “the peace and safety, and the common interest of men.”<sup>185</sup> Bradford insisted that laws “are the very Bonds and Ligaments of Society, which at first unite, and afterwards hold men in one Body; they are plainly the Conditions upon which Countries agree and oblige themselves to act.” Reformers described an intimate relationship between laws and manners—by punishing moral crimes, laws safeguarded good manners; by fostering respect for the law, order, and public welfare, good manners in turn safeguarded the law. Both were necessary for the peace, stability and prosperity of the nation. Luckily, according to reformers, England had good laws. Bradford affirmed that “we live under wise and wholesome Laws,” which he said were “very agreeable to the Light of Nature and the Dictates of Right Reason.” These included many laws directed against vice.<sup>186</sup> In his sermon, Hayley emphasized that “our Laws are not Tyrannical;” the punishments for disobedience, he said, were

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<sup>184</sup> Punishments for moral crimes included: “Twelve Pence on a *Prophane Swearer*, Five Shillings on a *Drunkard*, Ten Shillings on the Public-House *that suffers Tippling*.” From Disney (1708), 28-29.

<sup>185</sup> *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701), 2; Spademan (1698), 21; Disney (1708)xii. Bradford (1697) agreed that laws “preserve the good order, the peace, and the safety of the whole Body,” 27. And Shower (1697) said that “Publick Security” is maintained “by upholding the Honour of the Law,” 10.

<sup>186</sup> Bradford (1697) 24-25. Hayley (1698) wrote, “Our Government has...furnished us with many good *Old Laws*, and some *New ones*, for suppressing Prophaneness and Immorality,” 22-23. For a list of some of statutes against vice, see *A Help to a National Reformation of Manners* (1699 and 1702).

humane, and were not meant “as *torture* or to *undo* [the criminal].”<sup>187</sup> Reformers always insisted that moral laws were translations of natural law. So that men were bound to follow them by both “Natural and Positive Law.” This was not just true in Christian civilizations, but in all civilizations. Burgess told reformers that moral law was “reasonable in it self...and it appears, as well unto the Pagan as the Jew and the Christian. Insomuch, that to neglect it, is to break the positive Band asunder.”<sup>188</sup>

Again and again, reformers argued that law only became meaningful when it was executed; otherwise it remained a dead letter. As Reynolds put it, “To have a Law that shall never be executed, is all one as to have no Law.” And the *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners* similarly stated that “as execution is the life of laws, their non-execution renders them useless.”<sup>189</sup> No matter how many good laws a nation had, if those laws were not put into effect, the welfare of the body politic could not be preserved. Bradford warned reformers, “nothing can be more imprudent or dangerous to a Community, than wither to make Laws that are not fit to be executed, or not to see to the Execution of those that are made.”<sup>190</sup> If laws did not convey power and demand respect, English constitutional rights and liberties, protected by those laws, became threatened. Shower told reformers that “The publick Interest of the Community is

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<sup>187</sup> Hayley (1698), 37.

<sup>188</sup> Burgess (1697) 9-10. Moral laws were also, of course, as Bradford (1697) said, “founded upon the eternal and inalterable Rules of Justice and Equity...which we can never transgress, without contradicting the Reason and Sense of our own Minds,” 21. The *Account of the Societies fro Reformation of Manners* argued that the civil laws of nations such as England conformed to the laws of God and Nature. Spademan (1698) said that human laws that truly conform to natural law carry “so unchangeable Obligation, that nothing can justify the forsaking of it,” 5.

<sup>189</sup> Reynolds (1700) 44; *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners* (1694), 23. Disney (1708) said the same thing. And so did Russell (1697): “our Laws are nothing but dead Letter, and Justice holds but a wooden Sword without execution, for ‘tis that which is the life of the Law it self, and the Honour of that People which enjoy such wholesome Constitutions,” 36-37.

<sup>190</sup> Bradford (1697). Also see the *Account*. Spademan (1698) wrote, “I know not a Nation in the World, which has so abundant provision of Excellent Laws against Sin and Impiety as our own: But if the Law should sleep, it loses its force, can’t reach its end, and the worst Crimes will prove insolent.”

maintained by the Execution of good Laws. The Welfare of Society, and its Publick Peace, cannot else be preserved. The very Constitution, by which you enjoy your many Blessings in a private Capacity, must otherwise sink.”<sup>191</sup> If laws became impotent to preserve men’s lives and estates, then, society faced total dissolution.

Neglect of the civil laws against vice was also detrimental to the stability of society because it made government seem feeble. Only an impotent magistracy, reformers argued, would overlook the execution of the law. Disney wrote that “By the neglect of putting laws into execution, the authority of the magistrate is rendered contemptible.” He went on to explain the dire results of this: “we could have no security of whatever we propose to enjoy; no comfort in our estates, no relish in our diversions, no safety in our retirement, but must be always upon the defensive, against the repine and malice of our neighbors.” Moreover, all social hierarchy and order would crumble. For example, he wrote, “the soldiery will break through all the discipline of war, and fall to mutiny and disorder, when they have learnt to despise the officers that should command them.”<sup>192</sup> Enforcing virtuous behavior, on the other hand, not only conferred due respect to laws, but, as the *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* said, “instills in subjects such principles and dispositions as in their own nature tend to make a government strong and prosperous, as well as themselves happy.”<sup>193</sup> In his sermon, Shower even went so far as to claim that punishing moral crimes “is not so much because a Law is broken,” but was rather, “if it be not punished, the Authority of the Law, and Lawgiver, can never be upheld; and

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<sup>191</sup> Shower (1697), 47.

<sup>192</sup> Disney (1708), xiv-xv, 4. He continued: “A short sighted person may easily see to the end of government, when the laws are neglected, the magistrate has lost his authority with the people, and every man's own discretion is to be his chief restraint. The only medium of government, is the prescribing of laws; and that which makes a law to be regarded, is the punishment it threatens; if therefore you neglect the penalty, you disarm the law, and doing that, the power of government dissolves, and by consequence the state is in danger of being broke to pieces in confusions,” xv.

<sup>193</sup> *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701), 80.



that is necessary, or the Community can never be preserv'd."<sup>194</sup> Punishment of moral crimes therefore had the greatest utility to the welfare of the community.

### **“The Magistrate’s Eye”**

What reformers wanted to show was that men and women had a responsibility to assist the magistrate in the execution of the laws. Judges could not prosecute crimes without witnesses to testify against criminals. Thus, reformers hoped to encourage regular men and women to report to the civil magistrate any moral transgressions that they observed during their daily lives. Reynolds directed reformers to turn informers “by taking notice of those who break the Laws, and proceeding against them in order to a legal Conviction.”<sup>195</sup> Justice could not be served if there were no willing witnesses. Disney explained that “the best Laws in the world being no Manner of Purpose, if no body will inform against those that break them.”<sup>196</sup> Informers must act as witnesses in the courts of law, because, as Woodward said, “For every Body knows, that without Legal Evidence, there can be no legal Punishment.”<sup>197</sup> England had earned a reputation abroad as “having the best Laws to the least Purpose of any Nation under Heaven” because men

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<sup>194</sup> Shower (1697), 14-15. To magistrates, Disney said, “there will be always Need of Laws and Magistrates to *discountenance* and *punish* such Vices as, if let alone, would quickly make this World a most uneasie Dwelling. Whoever aims at the Peace and Happiness of the Public, ought to make Use of all his Authority to punish Vice. Not to draw the sword of justice against vice, is to contribute to our country's ruin,” 6.

<sup>195</sup> Reynolds (1700), 25. Hancocke (1698) said the same thing, 17.

<sup>196</sup> Disney (1708), 172-173.

<sup>197</sup> Woodward (1696), 18. Alsop (1698): “for if there were no Witnesses, it would be the same as if there were no Laws, no Penalties,” dedication. Hayley (1698): “That if there be none that will *detect* Offenders, and bring them to the Magistrate, the Laws against Vice are utterly in *vain* and to no purpose; ‘tis as good have no *Laws*, as no *Execution* of them; and executed they cannot be, if there be no *Accuse* to Prosecute, and no *Witness* to prove the Offense,” 35. Shower (1697): “It will signifie little to have never so many good Laws or good Magistrates: For Offenders will be as no Offenders, if there be none to witness against them: And the wisest and Best Laws will be as none if they be not executed. And how can they be put in Execution by the Magistrate, if there be none to acquaint him by whom they are transgress’d, *i.e.* if none will *call for Justice*,” 7.

and women were reluctant to act as informers.<sup>198</sup> According to reformers, this had to change. Thus, informers—regular citizens—would play a crucial role in maintaining law, and therefore, play a crucial role in maintaining the peace and stability, the justice and liberties of their society.

Reformers were careful not to upset the social hierarchy by usurping the role of magistrates, ministers, or constables.<sup>199</sup> At the same time, though, they remained adamant that the role of informer was a role reserved for lay people. Williams assured reformers that “the meanest among you have a Right and Ability to Convict Criminals.” Informing was the duty of “common people,” Bradford said, because they, “being themselves innocent, yet are frequently conversant with Transgressors.”<sup>200</sup> In other words, men and women had to police their own society, otherwise all the good laws and institutions of government would be for naught. To inspire these men and women to accept the job of informer, which was almost always portrayed as low-down and crooked, reformers emphasized the many ways that informers served the public good.<sup>201</sup> The informer, they claimed, was *the* virtuous citizen. Calamy said that informers “value the Welfare of the community they belong to.” Alsop told informers, “you desire, and pursue in this good Work the Prosperity and flourishing Estate of your Native Country.” Spademan said

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<sup>198</sup> Disney (1708), 174.

<sup>199</sup> Butler (1697), like many of the ministers preaching to the societies, explained that informers should not overstep the limits of their role: “Private persons must not usurp the Office of the Priest or Magistrate; but move exactly in their own Sphere, towards that god End they have before them,” 19-20.

<sup>200</sup> Williams (1698), 18; Bradford (1697), 32. Woodhouse (1697) said that informing was “not a Work of Magistrates, or Officers only: But ‘tis a Work in which all the People of the Land should engage, as one Man [one body politic],” 13. Woodward wrote, “as to the Case of publick and scandalous Sins, the whole Community is concern’d to bring the Transgressor to due Punishment,” 34. And Russell (1697) clarified that “Not only Magistrates and Ministers, but every Private Christian, by the Ties of Humanity, and the Obligations of Religion, is bound to this Work,” 33-34.

<sup>201</sup> Shower (1697) said that it was the duty of men to inform the magistrate of violations of the moral laws “as Members of a publick Society, and from the Principles of natural Religion,” 4-5. He also said that witnessing benefited the whole community when justice was served: “by the Light of Nature, it is his Duty to assist his Neighbour, as a Witness or otherwise, that Right may take place, and Justice be administered,” 6. The *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701) said that “a common obligation lies upon all men...as members of the community, to use their sincere endeavours for a general an national reformation,” 90.

that by informing, “the most eminent Love to our Country, is acted and signaliz’d.”<sup>202</sup> And Sylvester described as the true selfless act: “*Self* is here laid aside, and melted down into the Interest and Order of the Publick.” Lilly Butler said in no uncertain terms: “This is endeavouring, in the best, and most effectual manner we can, to promote the Publick good of our Country.” So much so, he thought, that no other employment “would more conduce to make us a flourishing and happy People, than all other our wisest Counsels, our strongest Armies, and our most liberal expense of Treasure and Blood!”<sup>203</sup> For the good of society, it was not enough that men and women watch their own behavior; they also had to keep an eye on their neighbor.

Reformers often employed the language of “watchfulness” in their sermons and texts. Watchfulness meant, from its Puritan origins, a monitoring of the self.<sup>204</sup> However, reformers were interested in also monitoring others. Common citizens were described in the reforming literature as the “eye” of the government. Disney wrote, “It’s true, the Informer is the Magistrates *Eye*, as the Constable is his *Hand* in punishing.”<sup>205</sup> Along similar lines, Reynolds said to informers, “You are to be as Eyes to [the magistrate] in bringing criminal matters under his cognizance, and he to be as Hands to you in correcting and punishing them.” And Hayley said that “in Government the Magistrate is indeed the *Hand* of the People, but the People are the

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<sup>202</sup> Calamy (1699), 2; Alsop (1698), 33; Spademan (1698), 34. Spademan continues: ““This noble Disposition has prevail’d against the strongest Objections: When the Roman *Brutus* Condemn’d his own Sons to an infamous Death, and was a Spectator of the Execution; this Act is resolv’d into this Principle. *Vicit amor Patria*. Wicked Men are certainly Enemies to the Publick Good,” 34-35. The *Account of the Societies fro Reformation of Manners* said that informing “is however a high service to the community, for...the community, according to the sense of the civil law, is injured by the contempt that is flung upon it, by the open affronts and violations of it, which every man, as in a common cause, is therefore concerned to prevent,” 66-67.

<sup>203</sup> Sylvester (1697); Butler (1697), 6-7. Even pagans knew it was important to prevent vice by punishing transgressors: Howe said, “How laudable an Excellency among noble-minded Pagans was Love to their Country! And even In this way to serve the Common Good was reckon’d by them a Praise-worthy Thing. He (saith one of them [Plato]) that doth no harm is Honourable, but he is worthy of double Honour that prevents it. And he that assists the Magistrate in Punishing it, is most Honourable, and far excels all his other Citizens,” 46.

<sup>204</sup> See Margaret Jacob and Matthew Kadane, “Missing, Now Found in the Eighteenth Century: Weber’s Protestant Capitalist,” in the *American Historical Review*, 108 (2003), 20-49.

<sup>205</sup> Disney (1708), 171.

*Eyes of the Magistrate*; and if they will not be watchful, they are as much to blame as he, if he be not vigorous.”<sup>206</sup> Ideally, informers, as ordinary people going about their business, would be in all places in the community at all times. Everyone was supposed to watch everyone else. Thus, policing and surveillance would be, in a sense, dispersed throughout society. Men and women would think twice before committing vicious acts in the open, if they thought they would be handed to the authorities by any person who should happen to walk by. In the end, reformers hoped that people would internalize public pressure against bad manners, and in doing so, would ultimately adopt better habits. Reformers, of course had to monitor themselves as well, so as not to be hypocrites. Sylvester cautioned them, “seeing so many Eyes may be fix’d upon you, what strict Self-discipline and exemplary Blamelessness ought you to have!” Here we have the beginnings of the kind of discipline which would become ubiquitous to modern life, as described by Foucault.<sup>207</sup>

### **Education: Instilling Good Habits**

Reformers almost always referred to vices as bad habits, not as original sins. Rarely portraying man as fallen, they much more often emphasized man’s capabilities for improvement. Burnet, for instance, referred to “the cursed habit of common Swearing.” He said it was “a Custom of thinking and speaking.”<sup>208</sup> This vice was not innate. Following Locke’s famous description of man as a *tabula rasa*, Russell claimed that “Every Man by Nature is a barren ground.”<sup>209</sup> The problem, of course, was that man developed his character in a particular

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<sup>206</sup> Reynolds (1700), 38; Hayley (1699), 36.

<sup>207</sup> Sylvester (1697), 43. Here, “watchfulness” turns into Foucault’s “gaze.”

<sup>208</sup> Burnet (1700), 24; 21.

<sup>209</sup> Russell (1697), 27.

environment. If society was debauched, so too would the men and women who grew up in that society. Disney explained that a man could not shake off his vices when they had “become habitual to him by Education and many years practice.” Sylvester said that “through long custom” men became “hardened” in their vices. Woodhouse said that when vices were “rooted and strengthened into Habit” they became “a second Nature.”<sup>210</sup> But since they were not a first nature, a good education, especially in youth, was absolutely vital to the process of instilling good manners and habits in men and women. Hancocke blamed parents for not raising their children with better manners. “As to Parents, their Neglect in the Education of their Children, is one, at least, of the most universal Causes of that Impiety that reigns among us.” He expected that if parents instilled good habits in their children at a young age, “the work of the Civil Magistrate would be in a great measure done, and we should need fewer Laws.”<sup>211</sup> This view inspired many reformers to form other societies, such as the Society for Promoting of the Christian Knowledge, which focused more specifically on education as a means of instilling better manners and habits in the next generation.<sup>212</sup>

Whether imbibed through fear of punishment, or through a good education, the acquisition of good habits in individuals would ultimately change society for the better, which would in turn serve to produce more good individuals. It was a feedback relationship. The more people behaved a certain way, the more socially acceptable it would become. Spademan called for “an habitual Observation” of good manners, “so that it becomes the Measure and Rule of Conversation.” This was also true of the practice of punishing vice in the civil courts. Disney

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<sup>210</sup> Disney (1708), 70; Sylvester (1697), 35; Woodhouse (1697), 32. *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701) warned that if bad, “Custom and example” could become a “tyranny,” 43.

<sup>211</sup> Hancocke (1698), 18-19. Like Locke, Hancocke thought that “Families are the Elements of the Body Politick,” 18. Hayley (1698) predicted that if good habits were instilled in the young generation, “the Lesson may spread, and many in the present, and more in the next Age will be better for it,” 33.

<sup>212</sup> See chapter 3 of this dissertation.

explained that “Custom makes every thing familiar; and why then may we not conclude, that by a general Practice of putting the Laws in Execution for some Years, it will be accounted consistent enough with Civility (if not an establish’d Article of good Manners) so to do? Things more unlikely have obtained by Use.”<sup>213</sup>

What alarmed reformers was “open” and “visible” vice.<sup>214</sup> Private deeds and thoughts, no matter what they were, were of little concern to reformers. It was public behavior that had to be watched and disciplined. Spademan said that vice could not be tolerated when it “appears in Noon-day, and in the places of Concourse.” Similarly, Disney condemned vice when it “appears in the streets, in the face of the sun;” Burnet condemned it when it was “publick.”<sup>215</sup> We can see that reformers were not primarily interested in saving individual souls from damnation; rather, they were interested in establishing good manners and habits in the public arena. They wanted to put a stop to bad examples before they began to influence the habits of others. Lang explained that “the open practice of those vices have so pernicious an influence on the public” because they “corrupt the minds and manners of others.” The *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* said, “bad examples are almost everywhere to be seen in our commerce with the world, there being but few that we meet with that do not recommend one vice or other by their example to our imitation.”<sup>216</sup> Open and visible vice threatened to devastate *places* as much as souls. The *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners* exclaimed, “if we cast our eye on the looser parts of our nation, or within this city, what shall we say? Are not all these places full of

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<sup>213</sup> Spademan (1698), 14; Disney (1708), 118.

<sup>214</sup> Hancocke (1698), 13; Spademan (1698), 2; Russell (1697) 36.

<sup>215</sup> Spademan (1698), 2; Disney (1708), 24; Burnet (1700)5. The *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701) said vices were a problem when they “walk publickly in the streets,” 44. Alsop (1698) said that it was when they “face the Sun, and defy the Mid-day,” 7.

<sup>216</sup> Lang (1719), 22-23; The *Account of the Reformation of Manners* (1701), 41.

vomit?”<sup>217</sup> In other words, open and visible vice was so dangerous precisely because it so quickly became integrated into the shared customs of the community. “Custom,” Alsop said, “takes away the shame of it before Men.” Here we see a dichotomy between custom and shame: the first made things socially acceptable, the second unacceptable—good and bad manners were therefore socially constructed. Therefore, Woodward explained the ultimate aim of reformers when they called for the prosecution of moral criminals in the civil courts: “to brand those impudent people with publick shame and correction, who dare their impudence in the very streets, and before the sun.”<sup>218</sup>

Reformers had their work cut out for them. Vice and irreligion had already become fashionable. “Does anything promote a louder laugh than citing scripture to profane it?” Disney asked. “Is not lewd obscene discourse, the very thing which, in the account of most men, gives all the *spirit* and *point* to that *wit* which they are pleased to call *the life of conversation*?”<sup>219</sup> Reformers blamed the Restoration for making vice *la mode*. In 1705, William Wake recalled that during the Restoration “it was reckoned good Breeding to Swear, Gallantry to be Lewd, good Humor to be Drunk, and Wit to despise Sacred Things.”<sup>220</sup> But even after the moral revolution of 1688 that brought William to the throne, vice remained fashionable. It was hard to break old habits. The *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners* claimed that vice had become “so deeply habitual (for these 30 years last past) unto the constitution of our English nation.”<sup>221</sup> Heynes said that virtue and religion still “are at so low an ebb among us, that they

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<sup>217</sup> *Proposals* (1694), 8.

<sup>218</sup> Alsop (1698), 7; Woodward (1696), 21.

<sup>219</sup> Disney (1710), 7.

<sup>220</sup> Wake (1705), 13. Also see Wesley (1698), 28.

<sup>221</sup> *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners, Humbly Offered to the Consideration of Our Magistrates & Clergy*, 15. Disney (1708) said that since English society had become so lax about vice in the past, the demand now

skulk and are ashamed to appear: They are so unfashionable, that even those, who have conscience enough to be virtuous, have hardly courage enough to appear openly to be so.”<sup>222</sup> On the other hand, vice and impiety “have gained that credit” and “have obtained a sort of reputation in the world, as if they were genteel; and are consequently much more infectious for being thought so.”<sup>223</sup> Everyday instances of swearing, for instance, provided undeniable proof that the vice was socially acceptable. Heynes claimed that swearing—“which by applying that Holy Name to things trifling and ridiculous, does in effect make a jest of God himself”—is “a crime which is now grown so universal among us, that scarce any rank of men is wholly free from it.” Equally, he said, “curses are grown scandalously common among us” so that “they are made by modish persons the ordinary expressions of indignation; and seem so incorporated into our language, that one who would write an exact grammar of it, as it is now spoke by those who would be reputed persons of fashion, must range curses among our common interjections.”<sup>224</sup> Here, then we can point to, in very broad strokes, a clash between two views of politeness: in

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to censure vicious behavior had “made it an *unusual* thing, or in other Words, what Gentlemen have not *been bred up to* the Notion and Experience of, and therefore they cry out against it as ill Breeding,” 118. The *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701) said that the enfeebled English people would have great difficulty throwing off the shackles of corrupt customs when temptations to sin had been “made stronger by the bad and eminent examples which are almost everywhere to be seen in our commerce with the world, there being but few that we meet with that do not recommend one vice or other by their example to our imitation,” 41.

<sup>222</sup> Heynes (1701), 12. He further pointed out, that if an individual “will be true to his virtue and conscience in all places, he shall hardly escape the censure of an ill-bred person; and probably shall have his piety, though unexceptional, styled bigotry or fanaticism,” 12. Disney (1710), in a similar vein, asked: “Is not a sober virtuous man (especially if he is devout and pious too) despised by almost all about him?” And also: “Does anything make a man more ridiculous with some, than seriously to quote a text of Scripture, except it be in the pulpit, and there they have brought themselves to disregard it as a thing of course?” 7.

<sup>223</sup> Heynes (1701), 12-13. Mapletoft (1701), Woodhouse (1697), and Hancocke (1699) said that vice had become “fashionable,” “modish,” and “in vogue.” The *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701) said that vice “becomes so general and fashionable, that it presses upon us, with a kind of publick authority,” 41.

<sup>224</sup> Heynes (1701), 13, 14. Mapletoft (1701) gave other examples of vices which had become fashionable: “Custom of making intemperate Drinking, and vying with one another who shall be most Fool, or most Beast, or Madman, the Recreation or Pastime of some, the Civility of others, and the daily Business of too many: Living in, or committing Adultery, which passes under the fine Name of Gallantry with some, or avow’d Inconsistency of any kind whatever: Using Oaths and Imprecations, not in Passion only, but as Fringes to their common, silly Chat,” 21.



one, it is a mark of the gentleman—witty, good-natured, refined but morally lax. In the other, it is a mark of the middling sort—pious, sober, moderate, and morally upright. Reformers were hoping to effect a change in the fashions of the age—to substitute one from of politeness for the other.

Bad manners, then, were not confined to the individual, but like a contagion, they spread through society, destroying the entire body politic. The *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners* stated that bad habits “have infected all places with a universal contagion.” The *Account of the Society for Reformation of Manners* called vice “an epidemic,” “plague,” “disease,” “distemper,” and “infection.”<sup>225</sup> John Shower said that bad examples “spread the Infection through the whole Neighbourhood, Street, and City.” Hancocke warned that when vices “are omitted openly and often repeated, they spread and grow infectious.” The goal for reformers, then, was to stop the contagion by making vice unfashionable. “Vice is grown fashionable, and while it continues so, it will not easily be restrained,” Heynes explained. But, if men and women “universally discourage vice, it will grow out of credit; and when it hath lost the countenance of custom, it will slink into that darkness that best becomes it.”<sup>226</sup> This would have the most immediate good affect on the youth, who were the most susceptible to the contagion. Disney mused: “How many young and inconsiderate creatures are debauched, who might otherwise have proved good and virtuous, and made an honorable figure in the world!” And, he continued, “How many others would never arrive to a habit in those hellish practices, if they had

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<sup>225</sup> *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners* (1694), preface, 19; *Account of the Society for Reformation of Manners* (1701), 44. Among the many sermons and pamphlets that described vice as an infection or contagion were ones by Williams (1698), Spademan (1699), and Disney (1708); Alsop (1698) depicted bad habits as an old obstinate ulcer destroying the political body, 7.

<sup>226</sup> Shower (1697), 14; Hancocke (1698), 29; Heynes (1701), 27.

not the vogue of fashion and custom in the company they keep!”<sup>227</sup> In order to cure society of this disease, reformers turned to the civil law.

Habits were so strong, reformers reasoned, that only the pain of legal punishments could break them. Reynolds recommended that vicious men and women “be compel’d and forc’d into [good behavior] by mulcts and bodily punishments.”<sup>228</sup> Russell agreed that “nothing but the terror and punishment of the Magistrate can restrain them from the open violation of the Law.” And For Hancocke, “common Swearers, notorious Drunkards, Adulterers, and other such like, are mostly got beyond all milder Methods,” so that “there is no other way to deal with them, but by touching them in their most sensible part” — “their Bodies and Estates.”<sup>229</sup> Reformers hoped that no matter how deep-seated bad habits were, when men suffered from them in their pockets and in their pride, they would do their best to forsake them. Disney asked with his typical rhetorical flourish, “do you really *believe* these Gentlemen, that they cannot forgo their ill Habits? Would they be willing to run the Expense of Five Shillings every Day for being Drunk, and to repay their Money for their Excess in the Face of their Neighbour? ‘Tis not to be doubted but they would find a Way to *restrain themselves* rather than undergo the Shame, and pay so dear for a Drunken Habit.”<sup>230</sup> Reformers argued that, although “people love their vices, yet generally

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<sup>227</sup> Disney (1708), xxi, xix. Francis Hare (1731) said that there was of course a time “when the most profligate might have proved quite other creatures, and perhaps had been so, if a strict hand had been held over offenders, which would have discouraged others from treading in their steps,” 28.

<sup>228</sup> Reynolds (1700), 27. Bradford (1697) made similar argument. Shower (1696) said that vicious men had to “come under the lash of the law,” 50. Hancocke (1699) and Willis (1704) said much the same.

<sup>229</sup> Russell (1697), 35; Hancocke (1699), 30. It is therefore, the duty of the magistrate, Russell further explained, “to discover all such persons who are the Open and Notorious Opposers of Piety, and endeavour to bring upon them legal Infections.” By making these people “publick Examples,” others may turn from vice too, or at least be less open about them, 36.

<sup>230</sup> Disney (1708), 72. He also wrote, “When men are afraid of being overheard in every oath they swear, of being discovered in every act of lewdness, of being seen and informed against for every drunken debauch, and having the penalties of the law exacted from them again, and that they will thereby be rendered infamous by these accounts, they can enjoy themselves no where with that security, reputation, and pleasure they propose in wickedness, and this takes off all the gust of sin. For this reason they will soon be ashamed and weary of the practice, and leave it off; and

they love their money better, or at least they will grow weary of them when they find them so very expensive.” Punishment was thus the surest means to inspire new habits. In the case of blasphemers, for instance, “they will soon learn to set a guard upon their tongues, when they perceive their pockets bound for their behavior.”<sup>231</sup> Reformers, then, presented a secular notion of sin: at bottom, sin was no more than a bad habit. Habits were inclinations of the body, acquired by repetitive motions. They could change. Most often, men and women were driven by their passions, especially by fear. They might be moved by fear of God, but when that wasn’t effective, they could be moved by fear of civil punishment. The *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* summed up the goals of the societies: they hoped to make vicious men “feel the strokes of justice” so that “though never so stubborn,” these men would be “bowed in some measure to discipline, and punished into a better outward behavior.”<sup>232</sup>

### **Changing Behavior, Changing Beliefs**

But even reformers realized the limits of this kind of reformation. Physical punishments could never effect real spiritual change. They might successfully modify people’s behavior; but what about their beliefs? Willis admitted, “It is true indeed that Human Laws and Punishments are not proper means to *Convert* Souls, and to make Men sincerely Good; *that* requires a higher Principle, and other sorts of Motives.” These moderate Anglicans and Presbyterians wanted to make clear that, in contrast to Roman Catholic, Anglican or Puritan churches at various points in history, they had no intention of forcing men and women to adopt new beliefs. Howe was the

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when they have done that, they are in a great measure armed against the most dangerous prejudice in favor of vice, that it gave them daily pleasure without any disgrace attending it,” 45-46.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

<sup>232</sup> *An Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners in England and Ireland* (1701), 93.

first to state that, “the practices which expose a Man to suffering, Mulcts, and Prisons, Gibbets, and Faggots, are very improper means of Illumination.”<sup>233</sup> But at the very least, as Hancocke pointed out, “If the Terrors of the Lord will not prevail with Men to become good Christians, the Terrors of the Law my make them tolerable Men.”<sup>234</sup> The societies for reformation of manners wanted to make tolerable men.

In other words, reformers were interested in forming good manners, not converting souls. They were looking for outward, visible change. Disney made this clear when he wrote, “suppose that reformation, in the most instances, goes no further than a man's outward behavior; yet even this is so great a decency, so vast an advantage to the world.”<sup>235</sup> Reformation aimed only to purge public spaces of bad behavior. What was hoped for was that vicious men and women would “keep to themselves, within their own proper Sphere, in the dark and in private Corners.”<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Willis (1704), 32; Howe (1698), 23. In fact, Howe said, “the Sincerity of that *Conscience* is much to be suspected, that is ever altered by such Methods. But no Man will pretend it is against his Conscience, *not to be Drunk, not to Debauch*, or to be *Sober, Chaste and Vertuous*,” 23. And: “No external means do any good to the Minds of Men otherwise than as they themselves are engag'd, drawn in and made Parties, in some sense, *against*, but (as we are compounded, in an higher and nobler sense) *for* our selves,” 22.

<sup>234</sup> Hancocke (1699), 13-14.

<sup>235</sup> Disney (1780), 48. He continued: “it is so great a means to retrieve the reputation of virtue and religion, which is now so sunk and even brought into contempt by the impunity and insolence of vice and profaneness, to prevent others falling into such scandalous practices,” 49. Hancocke (1699) claimed that even if men are hypocrites—behaving piously on the outside, but having dissolute thoughts inside—it were better that they were “Pretenders to Religion” than religion be “openly affronted by Loose Men,” 25. Bisset (1704) said in his biting sermon: “They may be as secretly wicked, lewd, and worldly as they please; we won’t force them (they need not fear it) to an heavenly mind, much less to Heaven against their liking. But we would oblige them (if possible) to be civil upon Earth and let their neighbours live by them a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty,” 28.

<sup>236</sup> Barton (1699), 34. Reynolds (1700) said similarly: “you will at least drive Sin into corners; and tho men should not cease to commit it, you will no longer behold it,” 62-63. And, Howe (1698) said: “When they feel the smart and cost of open Wickedness, it will, no doubt, become at least, less open, and seek closer corners,” 27. Butler (1697) explained this logic: “When Wickedness is forced to hide its Head, and to creep into Corners, for Fear of it. The Habits of Sin will lose their strength, when they are restrained from exercise; and it cannot spread its Infection so wide, when the Examples of it are not suffered to be Common, Publick, or Secure; when it is forced out of current use and Fashion: When Men cannot combine, in such Numbers, for the practice and Countenance of it, to aid and hearten one another in it,” 9.

Without public examples of vice, new norms of acceptable behavior could be established. In this way, the reformers hoped to mold social behavior.

Men and women were products of their environment and education, reformers said. Not only because they picked up the manners, habits and customs of those around them, but because they were incredibly sensitive to public opinion, especially when it came to praise and censure. Punishing men for their crimes did more than hurt their pockets: it hurt their pride as well. Shame went along with punishment.<sup>237</sup> Spademan claimed that “*Punishments* carry *Shame* and *Reproach* as well as Pain and Loss, by which [lawgivers] are more adapted to attain the end of Punishment, which is the maintaining of Moral Order in the World.”<sup>238</sup> Part of making vicious behavior socially unacceptable, then, was to make it shameful. “That Principle of *Shame* in the Nature of Man,” Howe made clear, “is a *tender Passion*, of quick, and most acute sense.” Shame affected the passions; it was a type of fear. Barton told reformers, “Shame has always a mixture of Fear with it; it implies a fear of Disgrace, and that curbs and checks Men... Men naturally love to have the good Opinions of others, and dread the being hated and abhorr’d by Mankind.”<sup>239</sup> Reformers showed man as governed by fear—a fear of social ostracism. And this fear drove men to change their ways. Thus it could be used as a tool of social improvement.

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<sup>237</sup> For more on the concept of shame in Britain, see David Nash and Anne-Marie Kilday, *Cultures of Shame: Exploring Crime and Morality in Britain, 1600-1900* (2010).

<sup>238</sup> Spademan (1698), 13. Butler (1697): “They that were Invested with Legislative Power, did judge it very necessary to make diverse Laws, for the exposing some Common and Scandalous Sinners, to Shame and Punishment,” dedication And he affirmed: “It must needs be a great Discouragement to Vice, to see it continually exposing Men to Shame and Punishment,” 8.

<sup>239</sup> Howe (1698) 30; Barton (1699), 11. He continued: “Things that are thought Opprobrious, have so sensible a pungency with them, that (tho all Tempers are not herein alike) many that can *feel* little else, reckon a *Disgrace*, an *insufferable* thing,” 30-31 Even pagans knew the beneficial impact of shame on the community, Howe said: “that Noble Pagan...[Plato] who enquiring whence Legislation had its rise, from some Man or from God; and determining from God, if we will give the most Righteous Judgment that can be given; doth elsewhere write to this effect, That Jupiter pitying the Miseries of Men, by their Indulgence to Vice, lest Mankind should utterly perish, sent Mercury to implant in them, together with Justice, Shame as the most effectual means to prevent the total Ruine of the World,” 31-32.

Reformers did hope that by changing people's behavior, they would change their beliefs as well. Men and women who were subject to the tyranny of their passions were in no position to consider their true interests in a rational way. But, reformers argued, if fear of punishment and shame broke their bad habits, these people would begin to reflect on their situation with a clear head, and perhaps come to a real religious conversion on their own accord. The punishment of a man for his vices, Willis said, "may bring him to Consideration afterwards, and by that be the beginning of a sincere Conversion."<sup>240</sup> Good behavior then, was an essential characteristic of a rational man. Discipline his body, and his mind became capable of apprehending the true nature of things. He would see that it was in his interest and happiness to be truly religious. Hayley explained that "when they see they cannot sin but they must suffer, they may first be sober for *Interest*, and by degrees, through God's blessing, may be so by *Choice*."<sup>241</sup> Since reformers thought that atheism was the philosophical justification for a life of vice, the power of atheism would diminish when bad habits did. Free these men from the tyranny of their passions by making them embrace good habits, and most likely they would come to recognize the truths of natural and revealed religion, which were clear to any rational animal. Howe said that a man who had been forced to give up his bad habits would soon come to think, "What a strange sort of anomalous Creature am I become; whom the *Law of mine own Nature* remonstrates against?"

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<sup>240</sup> Willis (1704), 44. Leng (1719): "Indeed where the fear of humane punishment, is the only thing that keeps men from the pursuing of their unruly lusts and passions, though the men are restrained, yet we cannot say they are reformed; but yet if by such means they can be brought to a cool and serious consideration, so that their natural conscience may have time to awake, they may, by the grace of God, be brought to a better mind, and at length be wrought upon by the motives of religion; and no doubt it may have become true penitents at the end by such steps," 24-25.

<sup>241</sup> Hayley (1698), 25. Shower (1697) wrote, "Tho' Punishment alone will not teach him how to amend his Life; it may convince him that it needs to be reformed. He knows by what he suffers, that he hath not done as he should, and so may next consider how to do better, and resolve upon it," 11. The *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701) explained how punishment would bring men to "consideration of it [their condition], which may have its beginning in the fear of the law, that they are driven to by the shame and punishment that is thereby brought upon them, may be a means of working the happiest effects, may end in their heartily embracing wholesome councils," 66.

How degenerate a thing! that have forsaken my *own Noble Order of intelligent Creatures, to herd with Brutes!* That have made my self unfit for *humane Society.*” Howe concluded, “And hereupon, may a vicious Person be so reclaimed, as to become of great Use in the World.”<sup>242</sup> The *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* best summed up this logic:

‘Tis true, as may be objected, that men are by no means to be supposed religious, who are restrained from their vices only by sense of shame, or fear of human punishment; but...by their being kept by human laws from an indulgence of their vicious inclinations, they may in time find the pleasure and the advantage of the restraint: And bad examples and temptations, that abound in most places, which are the great occasions of sin, being by this means taken away, vice will become scandalous, and virtue will be in proportion esteemed fashionable: and thus, I think, very great points are gained. ...Then may we hope that such men will begin to enquire into the nature and reasons of religion, and when they moreover find, by a sober advertence to its proposals, (which they will now make with less prejudice) and by some experience they will have of the happy effects, of it, by their endeavoring to imitate it, that it prohibits us those things that would be most highly injurious to us, and allows a satisfaction to our rational appetites; that it delivers us from the tormenting guilt and the cruel usurpation and outrages of our lusts and passions, and gives us in exchange the noble pleasure of the victory over ourselves, who are our worst masters, the joys of innocence, the triumphs of a good conscience, and the ecstasies of heavenly hopes.<sup>243</sup>

Society members hoped that an outward reformation of religious behavior would ultimately lead to a revival of religion in general. In order to make their cause more palatable and effective, they adopted secular justifications for their actions. Thus, we can see in their discourse a complicated transformation of religious attitudes: the rhetoric of faith and the

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<sup>242</sup> Howe (1698), 24. He explained that these were obvious considerations for a rational man. After punishment, “a Man's Way lies open to that Consideration which is most immediately to influence his Practice, to correct a lewd, and begin a regular good Course. He needs not be detain'd with any subtle Disputes, or be put to solve perplex Doubts, or answer specious Arguments and Objections,” 23-24. Disney (1708) explained that if men give up their vices because of fear of civil punishments, they will naturally begin to justify their new behavior by adopting better principles. “Again let an ill habit be broke, and they have time to think of what is said against it, and (generally speaking) ‘tis natural for men to gather arguments, and vent them too, against a practice which themselves have forsaken, if it be but to justify themselves for having forsaken it. Want of consideration is undoubtedly that which does the sinner to his fatal sleep of vice and profaneness: Now when the law has cupped and sacrificed him, and awakened him by severities, consideration enters, and by the blessing of God, recovery may follow,” 47.

<sup>243</sup> *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (1701), 42-43. Disney (1708) also described the way in which the civil punishments might induce a revival in actual religious feelings: “The first thought that naturally arises in the offender is, *What harm is there in the thing I'm punished for?* Perhaps at present he thinks, there is not much. But it will still run in his mind: when his reason is cool, and he debates it over again, perhaps he will reflect, that from his Bible and the pulpit, as well as from the bench, he has heard his practice more than once condemned, all good men disclaim it, and he finds, by dear experience, that the representatives of the nation in Parliament have branded it as an offense worth taking notice of by laws; and all these considerations laid together may possibly weigh him down to something more than an exterior gravity and decent behavior,” 45-48.

rhetoric of reason became deeply intertwined. A new vocabulary of interest, custom, and communal citizenship entered into the traditional language of religion and reason.

Many historians of early-modern Britain have tried to explain how a nation once concerned with codes of faith and duty became a nation concerned with codes of morality.<sup>244</sup> These historians have built their arguments on the insights of eighteenth-century intellectuals themselves. Famously, men such as Bernard Mandeville, David Hume and Adam Smith pronounced virtue—religiously and civically conceived—impotent as social glue. Manners, they insisted, served to secure communal bonds in the modern world: a culture of politeness had replaced a culture of virtue.

We might also say, however, that this process was not intentional or instantaneous; instead, an intricate processes of transformation generated the new intellectual and social landscape of the late eighteenth century. This process was moved forward by reformers who waged a battle against private vices in what traditionally was considered a public realm: the courts. Ironically, because Societies for the Reformation of Manners appealed to material explanations in order to combat vice, because they argued for good manners by drawing, not on God's Word, but on the benefits they bring to temporal welfare, they unintentionally set the stage for the ultimate victory of politeness, self-interest, and a secular understanding of society.

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<sup>244</sup> For instance, see: Bahlman (1957), and J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975).



### **Chapter 3 – Libraries, Charity Schools and Prison Reform: Thomas Bray and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge**

Thomas Bray (1658-1730) was the central figure in London's reforming movement. A minister in the Church of England, Bray frequented the latitudinarian circles in London, and he was an active member of the societies for reformation of manners.<sup>1</sup> For many years he was the church's representative in the American colonies, and he was responsible for the establishment of two significant eighteenth-century voluntary associations: the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), which organized the distribution of books and the formation of charity schools in England and abroad, and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), which organized the placement of missionaries in the colonies. Not least of all, Bray established some of the first public libraries on both sides of the Atlantic.

Like other members of the societies for reformation of manners, Bray was deeply troubled by "this irreligious age," in which atheism and vice were increasingly visible from the press and on the streets. For Bray, the making of a more moral society did not just require punishing vicious individuals in the civil courts. There had to be a way, he thought, to prevent individuals from acquiring vicious habits in the first place. An education—in the important ideas preserved in good books—might serve this end. For him, books were essential tools for the formation of well-mannered citizens. But books remained beyond the reach of the majority of parish priests, who were the teachers responsible for educating the public. Thus, Bray tirelessly worked to provide clergymen with libraries of books, and to establish lending libraries that would serve larger communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Bray preached two sermons for the societies for reformation of manners: *A Sermon preached at St. Mary-le-Bow, before the Societies for Reformation of Manners, December 27, 1708* (London, 1709), and *The Good Fight of Faith* (London, 1709).

Bray blamed the sad state of education on the poverty, and, what was related, the ignorance of the church's clergymen. As some of the most uneducated, ill-mannered men in England and Wales, clergymen could hardly convey the truths of Christian belief, or the virtues of a Christian life to others. This had serious implications for the progress of society. Especially in the poorer parishes, a clergyman was entirely responsible for the religious and moral education of his parishioners. Since clergymen shaped the thoughts and behavior of the next generation of men and women, it was important that clergymen were themselves knowledgeable, moral, and good-mannered. Yet they were often no match for the complex and learned discourses of the irreligious; they remained impotent to stop the relentless current of atheism.<sup>2</sup>

Bray was determined to improve the condition of the clergy. As teachers, clergymen needed to know more than the basic principles of natural religion—they needed to grasp the entire catalogue of divine and human knowledge. Besides offering a richer understanding of God, nature and moral duties, the sum of this knowledge conveyed the achievements of human thought and culture, providing a solid foundation to the aspirations of future men. Thus, with this kind of knowledge, Bray thought, clergy would become the indispensable promoters of civilization. Moreover, an increase in the clergy's knowledge might generate a reformation of

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<sup>2</sup> The poverty of clergymen in this period was a real problem. For an idea of what life was like for a poor clergyman in the seventeenth century, see J. H. Overton, *Life in the English Church, 1600-1714* (London, 1885). Bray thought clergymen should acquire knowledge in all kinds of subjects, so that they might be better positioned to counter atheism. See, Bray, *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (London, 1697): "And yet so far am I from assuming to Dictate what Books, it may be sufficient, even for the most Inferior Rank of our *English* Divines to read...that I do freely acknowledge it were much to be wisht that every one of the Clergy here in *England*, should *Launch out far* into the vast Ocean of Universal Learning." In particular, Bray recommended the study of "*Philology, Philosophy, Mathematicks, Antiquity*, or any part of useful Learning." He explained: "I say, the Business of a Divine is of that comprehensive extent, that good Skill even in Nature, Mathematicks and Laws, which my seem most remote from his Profession, but of exceedingly great use for the Explications and Proof of some principal Subjects he is to Discourse upon to the People, and also for the Defense of the most *Fundamental Articles* of Faith, that he is to maintain against the *Atheist*," 10.

their manners as well. The more knowledgeable the clergy became, the more capable they would be of disciplining their own passions, and reforming the manners of their flock.

England did not lack books explaining the reasonability of the Christian religion and the importance of moral duties in clear and simple terms suitable for general consumption. Many books had been written by Bray's predecessors, the latitudinarian churchmen of the Restoration. Often their ideas had been transmitted orally, through sermons, to a wider public. Yet, these ideas had only limited influence if they did not reach larger audiences. Ideas needed to travel further than the ears of the London parishioners. Books would help transmit these ideas, bringing them to new lands, across the sea even.

Thus, Bray set out to establish libraries throughout England and Wales, especially in the remote country regions. He thought people there lived no differently than England's primitive ancestors. In these places, progress was arrested. One of his main goals, then, was "to furnish...our poor Vicarages at home, with what may enable us to erase that Ignorance, and Barbarity, those Brutish Manners, and Paganish Vices and Customs," which still characterized so many people.<sup>3</sup> Bray often drew parallels between primitive peoples not only through time but also across space: the poor and ignorant in England could be compared to the heathen inhabitants across the Atlantic. Indeed, his target was not limited to parishes in England; there was hope for great progress to be made in America as well.

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Bray, *A Supplement to the Bibliotheca Parochialis* (London, 1697), 4. In his *Bibliotheca Catechetica* (London, 1702), Bray repeated that his goal was "to furnish such our poor Cures at home, with what may enable us to erase that Ignorance and Barbarity, those Brutish Manners, and Paganish Vices and Customs, which do to this day so hideously deform the greatest part of Mankind," 4. In both these texts, Bray also explained that libraries might provide encouragement to clergy going to remote parishes, like "Wales, the Isle of Man, and other Northern parts of this Kingdom," where, Bray said, "Nature is most unkind, and uninviting." He admitted that "it is a matter of sad Consideration to see how Barbarous, and Ignorant those places now mentioned, do still remain." A library would thus balance the inconvenience of those parts. "As ungrateful as is the Climate," Bray thought, "Men of Worth would follow books, it being natural for Persons who are Lovers of Knowledge and Religion, to value all Places alike where Religion and Learning do flourish," *A Supplement*, 9-10; *Bibliotheca Catechetica*, 9-10.

Bray expanded the scope of his project to include “the foreign Plantations.” Few parishes in America maintained a minister, and those that did, most often maintained a poor and ignorant one. The best of these parishes resembled their most impoverished counterparts in England and Wales. Typically, only destitute ministers accepted a living among the American settlers, Indians and African slaves. Bray explained that although, in England, some clergymen could afford their own set of books, these were not the clergymen who were likely to agree to go as missionaries overseas.<sup>4</sup> The question, for Bray then, was how to persuade learned and moral men to cross the Atlantic, establish a life in the American wilderness, for what would be very little material compensation. Perhaps a library of books would be sufficient encouragement; at the very least, it would furnish missionaries the means to further educate themselves and their parishioners, who were living at what seemed to be the edge of civilization.<sup>5</sup> “Men, addicted to Study,” Bray explained, “will hardly be induced to leave the expectation they may have of better Encouragement and Improvement in their Native Country, to go to remote Parts and Climates less agreeable, without such Advantages, as will over-balance all Considerations inclining them to stay at home.”<sup>6</sup> What they needed, then, was the promise of a well-stocked library.

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<sup>4</sup> Bray, *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697). The reason why only poor clergy went to America, Bray knew, was that “Men of Interests and Fortunes love their Native Country too well, to venture themselves abroad,” [xv].

<sup>5</sup> In *Proposals to the Reverend Parochial Clergy, being an Epistolary Supplement to a former Essay promoting Lending Libraries* (London, 1698), Bray wrote: “And it is but reasonable that this part of the nation which is so much under the blessed Influences of Religion and Learning it self, and wants no Supplies to promote both, should permit what may be advances in this way, to go towards the promoting the like in other Parts of the Nation with *Meridian Brightness*. The reason is, the poor Provision made for its Encouragement in those places, whereas in all reason the greatest Encouragement ought to be given there, where Nature is most unkind and uninviting, to balance the Inconveniences thereof. And I am verily persuaded, that if Books were more easie to be met with in those Parts, as ungrateful as is the Climate, Men of Worth would follow them, it being natural for Persons who are Lovers of Knowledge, to value all Places alike, where Religion and Learning do flourish,” [1].

<sup>6</sup> Bray, *Proposals for the Encouragement and Promoting of Religion and Learning in the Foreign Plantations and to Induce Such of the Clergy of This Kingdom, as Are Persons of Sobriety and Abilities, to Accept of a Mission into Those Parts* (London, 1697), 1.

Ultimately, through the establishment of public libraries on both sides of the Atlantic, Bray aimed to unite diverse peoples in uniform thoughts, manners and habits firmly grounded in Christian theology and practice. Indeed, he successfully sent sets of books with many missionaries to America, and established numerous libraries both at home and abroad.

### **Thomas Bray**

Most of what is known about Bray's life comes from an anonymously written biography of him, *Public Spirit, Illustrated in the Life and Designs of the Reverend Thomas Bray* (1746). That text is taken, almost word-for-word, from an unpublished manuscript—probably written by Richard Rawlinson, the eighteenth-century collector, antiquarian, and topographer—with the title *A Short Historical Account of the Life and Designs of Thomas Bray*, from 1730. For his account, Rawlinson had carefully consulted Bray's personal papers, including Bray's diary-like record of his travels to America. Rawlinson, an avid book collector himself, admired Bray's library work. He hoped his biography would adequately represent Bray's contribution to “the present & future Welfare of Mankind.”<sup>7</sup> Bray's personal papers and accounts are now held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. Extensive collections of documents relating to Bray's organizations, the SPCK, the SPG, and the Associates of Dr. Bray, are also at Oxford.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Rawlinson (1690-1755), worked to preserve significant manuscripts for posterity. His manuscript on Bray was printed in Bernard C. Steiner (ed.), *Rev. Thomas Bray: His Life and Selected Works Relating to Maryland* (Maryland Historical Society Fund Publication No. 37: Baltimore, 1901). *Publick Spirit Illustrated in the Life and Designs of the Reverend Thomas Bray, D.D., Etc.* (J. Brotherton: London, 1746) was reprinted in 1808. The author of this work may have been Samuel Smith, who preached a sermon to the societies for reformation of manners in 1738.

<sup>8</sup> Bray's personal papers are known as the Sion College Library Manuscripts. In his will, Bray had bequeathed his papers and books to that library, in London, where they remained until the library was closed in 1996. Almost all of these collections of manuscripts—Bray's accounts (from his years as Commissary in Maryland), as well as the Associates of Dr. Bray, the S.P.G., and the collections relating to the Church of England in the American colonies at the Lambeth Palace Library and the Fulham Library—were copied onto microform by the Library of Congress in the 1920s. The manuscripts of the S.P.C.K. were put on microfilm in 1976. Duplicate microfilms of all these collections are at UCLA's Young Research Library. Although I have consulted the originals, I have mainly relied on the

These resources, however, have mostly been overlooked by scholars. In the first decades of the twentieth century, there was some interest in Bray by apologists for the Church of England, who were keen to point to Bray as an example of Anglican piety in the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> However, since then, there has been almost no scholarship on him. It is now time to take a new look at this influential reformer, and the organizations he established. In his work, we can see how the movement to reform manners widened its scope to address problems of education. Bray and the SPCK created libraries and schools with the expectation that these institutions would convey knowledge and instill good habits in the next generation of men and women. Moreover, Bray can be credited as singlehandedly taking the reforming message across the Atlantic to the American colonies. Thus, by looking at him, we can see how reformers began to work to create a shared sense of community among diverse people, both at home and abroad. This chapter, then, connects the rhetoric of social and moral reform with a civilizing agenda.

Thomas Bray was born in 1658. His father was a farmer in the Welsh hamlet of Marton, in the parish of Chirbury. There, the vicar of the parish encouraged Bray's parents to send their son to grammar school. Bray excelled at school, and, in 1675, he was able to enter All Souls College, Oxford, where he worked as a servant in order to pay his way. He received his B.A. three years later, but when he failed to attain a fellowship to continue his studies, he left the

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microfilmed documents. For guides to the Lambeth and Fulham manuscript collections, see: William Wilson Manross, *S.P.G. Papers in the Lambeth Palace Library: Calendar and Indexes* (1974) and William Wilson Manross, *Fulham Papers in the Lambeth Palace Library: American Colonial Section, Calendar and Indexes* (1965). Further relevant documents concerning the Church of England in the American colonies are available in William Stevens Perry (ed.), *Historical Collections Relating to the American Colonial Church*, 5 vols. (1870-1878).

<sup>9</sup> Bernard C. Steiner, "Thomas Bray and his American Libraries," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 2, no. 1 (October, 1896), 59-79; Bernard C. Steiner, "Two Eighteenth-Century Missionary Plans," *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 11, no. 3 (July, 1903), 289-305; John Wolf Lydekker (the first archivist of the S.P.G.), "Thomas Bray, 1658-1730, Founder of Missionary Enterprise," *The Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the U.S.A.* (September, 1943); Samuel Clyde McCulloch, "Dr. Thomas Bray's Commissary Work in London, 1696-1699," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, vol. 2, no. 4 (October, 1945), 333-348; Samuel Clyde McCulloch, "Dr. Thomas Bray's Trip to Maryland: A Study in Militant Anglican Humanitarianism," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, vol. 2, no. 1 (January, 1945), 15-32.

university. In 1682, he was ordained a priest of the Church of England. Shortly after the revolution, in 1690, Bray took a position at Sheldon—a parish that served about 500 people at the time—where he remained for the rest of his life.<sup>10</sup>

In 1695, the bishop of London, Henry Compton, who was responsible for the English Church in America, invited Bray to join him in London. There, Bray became increasingly interested in the religious condition of the inhabitants in the colonies. He recognized that only the most destitute clergymen in England would risk the dangers of overseas travel and suffer the hardships of a settler's life for a position in a colonial parish. During his first year in London, Bray began to formulate what would become a lifelong project: the organization of libraries in America. The following year, Compton offered Bray a position as his commissary in Maryland.<sup>11</sup> Bray accepted this offer on the condition that the bishop lend his support to Bray's

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<sup>10</sup> The year of Bray's birth has been established by J. W. Lydekker in *Thomas Bray, 1658-1730: Founder of Missionary Enterprise* (Philadelphia: Church Historical Society, 1943). The vicar, Edward Lewis, who had promoted Bray's education, may have influenced Bray's later interest in public libraries and schools, for Lewis left his own library and a school house to his parish at his death in 1677. Bray attended the grammar school at Oswestry. He later received his M.A. from Hart Hall, Oxford, in 1693, when he was rector of Sheldon, and could meet the expense of further schooling. And in 1696, he received his D.D. from Magdalen College, Oxford, at the urging of Francis Nicholson, governor of Maryland, who wanted to boost Bray's position, now that he was commissary to Maryland. Bray was ordained by Thomas Wood, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield. He held several positions before acquiring the one at Sheldon, which had become available when its rector, Digby Bull, a non-juror, refused to take the oath of allegiance to the king. Sheldon is located in the West Midlands region of England, in the eastern area of Birmingham.

<sup>11</sup> When Compton became Bishop of London in 1675, he assumed responsibility for the church in the colonies. He first sent James Blair to Virginia in 1685, and then appointed him commissary in 1690. On the role of the commissary as the bishop's representative, with delegated authority, see: Lydekker, *Thomas Bray, 1658-1730*, 8-9; and Hawks, *Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of the United States of America*, I: 73-77. On the Church of England in the colonies, see: H. P. Thompson, *Thomas Bray* (London: S.P.C.K., 1954), 13-14; and A. L. Cross, *The Anglican Episcopate and the American Colonies* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1902). In 1695, the governor of Maryland, Francis Nicholson—a champion of the Church of England in the colonies—requested that Compton send to Annapolis a commissary who could assist in ongoing efforts to establish the Church of England there. Compton made Bray his commissary to Maryland in April 1696. For documents relating to Bray in Maryland, see Perry, *Historical Collections Relating to the American Colonial Church*, IV: 8, 26, 29. While he still remained in London, Bray set to work obtaining clergymen for the vacant parishes in the colonies (all clergymen had to be ordained in England or Ireland, since there was no bishop in the colonies). 20 pounds from William III supplied each missionary. It is uncertain how many missionaries Bray sent to the colonies in those years, but there were at least two: Thomas Clayton was sent to Philadelphia and Samuel Marshall was sent to Charleston. See *Publick Spirit*, 13-

own project, which he outlined in the first of many works on this subject, *Proposals for the Encouragement and Promoting of Religion and Learning in the Foreign Plantations and to Induce Such of the Clergy of This Kingdom, as Are Persons of Sobriety and Abilities, to Accept of a Mission into Those Parts* (1696).<sup>12</sup> This pamphlet outlined a plan for the establishment of libraries for clergy going to America. Bray, who as commissary was now responsible for sending clergymen to Maryland, became further convinced of the necessity of providing educational tools for these ministers: he found that only poor and uneducated men sought the position. And from travellers returning from the colonies, he heard of the ignorance of the clergymen there.<sup>13</sup>

### **Bray's Libraries Project**

Bray soon devised schemes more ambitious in scope than his first. In 1697, he published *An Essay towards promoting all necessary and useful knowledge...both at home and abroad*. He

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14. On Clayton, see Sion MSS, f. 230; and SPG MSS Journal C, January 1701/2. The establishment of the SPCK and later the SPG would greatly facilitate this work.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Bray, *Proposals for the Encouragement and Promoting of Religion and Learning in the Foreign Plantations and to Induce Such of the Clergy of This Kingdom, as Are Persons of Sobriety and Abilities, to Accept of a Mission into Those Parts* (London, 1696). Bray first circulated this pamphlet in 1695, and then published it in early 1696. It was reprinted with alterations and additions until 1698 when the SPCK was formed (and Bray was confident that this society would carry out his scheme). In 1697, many of the printed *Proposals* were earmarked for distribution among the Religious Societies. I have used the 1697 edition from the Huntington Library. For the date and correct authorship of the pamphlet, see, Lawrence C. Wroth, "Dr. Bray's 'Proposals for the Incouragement of Religion and Learning in the Foreign Plantations' — A Bibliographical Note," *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, LXV (October, 1932-August, 1936), 518-534. From 1697 and on, editions of the *Proposal* included *The Present State of the Protestant Religion in Mary-Land*, an essay that Bray had written in order to build support for the commissary's work in Maryland. The original text is in the Sion MSS.

<sup>13</sup> After Bray presented the manuscript of his *Proposals* to Compton in 1695, the bishop, pleased with the work, transmitted Bray's piece to Archbishop Tenison (who had founded a public library in St-Martin-in-the Fields), and to several other bishops, including Sharp, Stillingfleet, Patrick, Moore, and Lloyd, who expressed their approval of the design. The bishops wrote to Bray: "We look upon this design as what will tend very much to propagate Christian Knowledge in the Indies, as it will, in all likelihood, invite some of the more studious and virtuous persons out of the Universities to undertake the ministry in those parts, and will be a means of rendering them useful when they are there. And therefore, as we shall contribute cheerfully towards promoting these Parochial Libraries, so we hope that many pious persons will be found, who, out of love to religion and learning, will also contribute thereto." Sion MSS, f. 8. Bray attached this letter to the published *Proposals*.



now envisioned the establishment of lending libraries—for clergy and laymen—on both sides of the Atlantic. This plan came with an innovative program: that each lending library label and catalogue its books, and that it set specific borrowing times relative to the length and difficulty of each text. During his first years in London, Bray wrote two further works on the subject of libraries, his *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697), which he revised and significantly expanded in 1707, and *Bibliotheca Catechetica* (1699), which he revised in 1702. In these works, he described all kinds of libraries—ones for the private use of the clergy, ones for the clergy to lend books to their parishioners, and also larger public lending libraries located in town centers.<sup>14</sup> He also produced sample lists of books, each tailored to a different type of library. He designed collections of books worth 5 pounds, 10 pounds, 50 pounds. Each of these catalogues contained a selection of titles under subject headings such as natural religion, moral law, history, and geography, and even medicine and gardening.<sup>15</sup>

In 1707, when he revised his encyclopedic work, *Bibliotheca Parochialis*, Bray added an annotated list of books, over 400 pages long. This is a truly remarkable catalogue of what Bray considered to be the most important formulations of sacred and secular knowledge. Looking at it, we can get a sense of the early-enlightenment impetus to collect and rationally order human knowledge. On the subject of God, Bray recommended works by ancient authors like Cicero, Plutarch and Seneca, as well as works by seventeenth-century defenders of God—Matthew Hale and Ralph Cudworth on knowledge of God, Henry More against atheism, Robert Boyle on final

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<sup>14</sup> *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (London, 1697) was dedicated to Compton. The 1707 (second) edition, which was greatly expanded (412 numbered pages; 487 pages total), contained the impressive annotated list of books (see below). Bray planned a second volume, which he never completed. The *Bibliotheca Catechetica* is almost identical to the *Supplement to the Bibliotheca Parochialis* (London, 1697). It was completed in a hurry before Bray left for Maryland (1699), and revised and republished anonymously in 1702.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, in the *Essay* (London, 1697), Bray classified about sixty-three works: 6 church history; 4 general history; 11 geography and travel; 36 theology; 4 Latin classics; 1 medicine; 1 gardening.

causes, Richard Bentley's Boyle Lecture, Thomas Tension's refutation of Hobbes, as well as Lambertus Van Velthuysen's *Tractatus de cultu Naturali & Origine Moralitatis* and Matthias Earbury's *Examination and Confutation of Deism*, both attacks on Spinoza's *Tractatus*.<sup>16</sup> In his commentary to this section of the catalogue, Bray noted, "This being a Learned Age, and withal so extremely Skeptical, it seems now particularly requisite, that the Ministers of Religion should be well read in the book of Nature, in order to demonstrate from thence to the Conviction of Atheists, the God of Nature."<sup>17</sup> On reason, he recommended Locke's *Human Understanding*, and Stillingfleet's correspondence with Locke on this subject; on the passions, he cited Descartes.<sup>18</sup>

On the subject of the moral laws, Bray chose quite a few books from ancient philosophy—works by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch—and also pieces of literature—works by Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Ovid, Catullus, Virgil, Horace, and Aesop. In the 1707 edition, he added Confucius to this list.<sup>19</sup> On natural religion, he included Herbert of Cherbury, but cautioned against reading Charles Blunt, Spinoza and Hobbes.<sup>20</sup> He gave

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<sup>16</sup> Bray, *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1707), 30-35; 50. Bray remarked in his commentary: "And on this Head, particularly are to be read, with respect to the Atheistical Tenants of Hobbs, and Spinosa," 32.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 33. Similarly, Bray had written in his commentary, "the Belief of the Divine Existence and Providence, the Foundation of all Religion, as well Natural as Reveal'd, being in these days most fiercely attacked by *Atheists* and *Libertines*, it is very necessary in such an Age as this, abounding with both, and wherein the very Foundations of all that is Sacred, are tore up, that every Pastor of a Flock should not only be fully persuaded in his own Mind of these most Important Truths; but be also very able to give the most convincing Evidence to all others of the same; and in order to that end, that he should be supply'd with the Learned Writings of the best Authors, both Philosophers and Divines, upon these Points," 30.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 40. Bray insisted on the study of the human soul—the superior and inferior faculties (reason and passions)—"because the knowing in a Good measure the Superiority and Subordination, and the Counteractings of its several Faculties, will contribute very far to the subjugation of the Inferiour Operations of the Soul, the Passions, Appetite, and Affections, to the Superiour powers thereof, the Dictates of reason; in which, according to the Sentiments of the great Philosopher, and the unanimous, Consent also of all others, Moral Vertue does chiefly or rather solely consist," 39 [numbered incorrectly as 29]. See chapter 1 of this dissertation for the view of reason as an instrument of control over the passions.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-48.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49. In fact, he especially recommended "those Books, which have been particularly written to Antidote Men against the poison of Hobbs's Principles." He also listed works on morality that would "prevent or cure the

Wilkins's *Natural Religion* as the modern authority on this subject, and the works of Grotius and Pufendorf as main references on the laws of nature and anything "relating to the well-being of Animal and social life here upon earth."<sup>21</sup> He recommended scientific works by Aristotle, Galen, Harvey, and Boyle.<sup>22</sup>

For defenses of Christianity, Bray listed works by Grotius, Boyle, Malebranche, Glanvill, Stillingfleet, Patrick, Burnet, Fowler, Kidder and the Boyle lecturers. On religious "impostors," he suggested the Mishnah and Talmud, the Quran, Turner's *History of all Religions in the World*, and Prideaux's *Life of Mohamet*. Bray thought all clergymen should learn about "the Mahometans," because, although these "infidels" were "at so remote a distance," many clergymen would come into contact with them when they "go as Chaplains both to the Factories, and on Board of our Ships, into the Levant, to Africa, and the East-Endies."<sup>23</sup>

Next, Bray listed books on all aspects of biblical history—the age of the earth, geography, chronology, customs and laws of the ancient Jews, architecture, animal and plant life, diseases, weights and measures. He recommended books like Woodward's *Natural History of the Earth* and Whiston's *New Theology of the Earth*. He included books of maps, and dictionaries and grammars of ancient languages—Greek and Hebrew, Syrian, Arabic, and Persian. As to commentaries on the scripture, he suggested works by Hammond and Patrick.<sup>24</sup>

For examples of oratory, Bray advised reading Aristotle, Cicero, Livy, Erasmus, and "The Art of Speaking by Messieurs du Port Royal." He thought the sermons of Wilkins, Glanvill,

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pestilential infusions of antinomian hereticks, who would erase out of the Minds of Christians all sense of Obligations upon 'em to observe, even the Duties of the Moral Law," 73.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-65; quote at 64-65.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-144.

Barrow, Tillotson, Stillingfleet, Barrow and Calamy provided the best models for imitation. On preaching, he pointed to works by Erasmus, Wilkins, and Glanvill; on pastoral care, Taylor, Kidder, Burnet, Patrick, Stillingfleet, and Bray; on catechism and the education of children, Plutarch, Baxter, Burnet, and Bray; on the art of conversation, Plato, Cicero, Plutarch; and on prudence, Plutarch. He listed Wilkins and Patrick on prayer, Patrick and Hammond on baptism, Taylor and Baxter on confirmation.<sup>25</sup>

Bray also recommended some biographies: the life of Christ, Marcus Aurelius, Gassendi, King Charles I, and Boyle, “when it is published.” On holy living, he wrote down Taylor, Baxter, Kettlewell, Fowler, and the *Whole Duty of Man*. And on “the Reformation of Manners which,” he said, “it is a Duty incumbent on the Clergy, above all others, to labour in the World,” he suggested looking at the *Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners*, and the sermons preached before the societies. Bray listed books on England’s positive laws, such as canon law, and municipal laws of the country. He thought every person’s study of the civil law should begin with Hugo Grotius. Finally, he included books for the missionary: José de Acosta’s *De Natura Novi Orbis* and *De promulgatione Evangelii apud Barbaros, sive De Procuranda Indorum salute*; Johannes Hoornbeek’s *e Conversione Indorum et Gentilum*; Tirso González de Santalla’s *Manuductio ad conversionem Mahumetanorum*; and Morgan Godwin’s *The Negro’s and Indian’s Advocate*, as well as some other travel literature.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-21. Bray (p. 5) is referring here to the Port-Royal Grammar from 1660, which drew upon Cartesian ideas. See also, Bray, *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697), 92; 104-105. Here he justified his inclusion of a surplus of works by latitudinarians: “But especially I must insist upon having some of the Modern Sermons of our *English* Divines, which as they are (many of them) incomparably the Best, and the exactest Performances of the Nature, and there are scarce any of the aforementioned Subjects of Practical Divinity which have not been handled in ’em; so the best Discourses of that kind are doubly necessary for our *Indian* Pastor; namely, both to the farther Improvement of his own Understanding in those great Terms of Man’s Salvation, and also for his Imitation in his own Composure in that Nature for the Edification of his People,” 91.

<sup>26</sup> Bray, *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1707), 22-29. Bray quoted Tillotson, Vol. 10, Sermon X: “I do strongly hope...the Light of the Gospel shall be display’d in a glorious manner, not only in those vast Empires of Tartary, and China,

In his 1707 edition of the *Bibliotheca Parochialis*, Bray gave the contents for an intended second volume, which would offer an inventory of books of a secular nature.<sup>27</sup> He never completed this volume. Under the heading of history, geography, voyages and travels, Bray had plans to assemble a truly global selection of texts. For the ancient and medieval worlds, readers would have access to books on Egypt, Greece, the Roman Empire, Byzantium, and the “Mahometan Power.” For the modern world, Bray’s intended breadth was staggering: Italy—including the papacy, Lombardy, Milan, Venice, Florence, Sicily, Naples; Germany—including Bohemia, the Palatinate of the Rhine, Bavaria, Westphalia, Saxony, Hanover; France—including Burgundy, Normandy, Lorraine; England, Scotland, and Ireland; Spain, Portugal, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark, Hungary, Poland, and Russia. There would also be works on Arabia, Syria, the Persian Empire, “the Empire of the Great Mogul in the East-Indies,” China, the Tartars; Egypt, Ethiopia, Tripoli, Tunis and Algiers, Fez and Morocco; the Spanish Indies, and the English Plantations.

Also striking is the range of topics Bray was considering for inclusion. These were political histories, genealogies, memoirs and gazettes, relations of campaigns, embassies and treatises, plots and conspiracies, trials, journals of parliament, speeches and debates, letters of great men; the history of different national churches, “General Accounts of all Religions,” particularly Judaism, Paganism, and Islam; the history of universities and academies, catalogues of books and manuscripts, the history of learning and arts, accounts of recently published books; biographies of kings, statesmen, soldiers, philosophers, physicians, poets, rhetoricians, historians, printers, other famous men, famous women; topographical history, local history,

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and Japan, and Indostan, and other great Kingdoms of the East, but in the large and dark Regions of the New Discovered World,” 26. For Bray on Law, see *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697), 68-78.

<sup>27</sup> See An Analytical Table in *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1707).

antiquities, coins; “Secret and Scandalous history,” fabulous, legendary and romantic history, myths and satires.

Bray did not expect every library to acquire his catalogue’s exhaustive collection of books, acknowledging that “the Charges of such a Library for every Parish will amount to many Hundred, if not some Thousand Pounds.” Indeed, when his catalogue was read over, its ambitious design might have seemed impossible to accomplish. Eager to show the financial practicality of this scheme, he noted that each library did not need a complete collection of books, rather it should have a well-rounded one. The subject divisions of his catalogue created a unique model for the development of libraries: a curated approach whereby a collection could be formed that represented all fields of knowledge, by picking one or two seminal works from each genre. “Whereas there are sometimes a score of several Authors prescrib’d upon the same Subject,” Bray explained, “it is intended, that not above one or two upon every Point shall be allotted into each Private Library.” The point of making the catalogue in the first place was to create a scheme of all knowledge so that learning could be approached methodically. Compilers of previous catalogues of books, Bray noted, “do not seem to have design’d ‘em in any great Order, whereby the *Rationale* of their Catalogue may clearly appear.” This scheme would avoid “great redundancy” and “superfluities” of ideas through a rational organization of books.<sup>28</sup>

By arranging his catalogues according to this method, Bray presented the organization of knowledge as a kind of scientific endeavor. Christian truths in particular were clear and simple, best explained systematically like all sciences. This was especially relevant to work in the

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<sup>28</sup> “Letter to the Reverend, the Parochial Clergy of England and Ireland,” in *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697). Money was a real concern for Bray, who was practical, and did not just write schemes, but realized them. In the *Essay towards Promoting all Necessary and Useful Knowledge* (London, 1697), he wrote: “I presume, if the Foundation of a Library were once laid in each Deanery, the Stock by one means or other would soon increase to a complete Sett of all necessary Books: And that well-chosen Books to the value of 30 *l.* would lay a good foundation,” 2.

colonies, where these truths needed to be conveyed to peoples completely unfamiliar with them. Bray explained that “the very studying of ‘em in such a Method, may probably tend, not a little to the Improvement of our *American Clergy* in Christian Knowledge, and to enable ‘em the better to Edifie others.” On the other hand, “as the Studying of any Science incoherently, begets nothing but confus’d Apprehensions of things in our Minds; so it will render us incapable to give clear and adequate representations thereof to other Men.” Only if Christian principles were presented in a rational and methodical way, could they be convincing, he thought.<sup>29</sup>

Bray considered his to be an especially inquisitive age, one that valued the sorting and classifying of knowledge. “Every Age has its particular Humour,” he mused, “and that which the present seems most to run upon, is the Collecting into large Volume, the scattered Writings of Learned Men upon the same Subject.” Breakthroughs in the sciences by the likes of Boyle and Newton, and discoveries of new lands and peoples by explorers contributed to a sense that “all the Parts of Learning seem now to have arriv’d to the highest pitch.” Thus, it was critical, to Bray, to preserve the great works of learning in prominent locations, where they would be accessible to the public: “When therefore can Universal Bibliothèques be erected more advantageously than now?” His library project would rise to the challenge. This “cannot be more effectually done,” he said, “than by Collecting the most valuable Pieces of our most useful Authors; and printing them in such Volumes, as will not easily be lost, and placing them in Libraries, where they may easily be come at.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Bray, *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697), 7. Bray wrote in *Proposals to the Reverend Parochial Clergy, being an Epistolary Supplement to a former Essay for promoting Lending Libraries* (London, 1698): “And here the whole Scheme of saving Truths is to be laid down in an orderly Method, so that every Hearer of the Word of God may be able to refer what he shall at any time hear or read in a desultory manner, to its proper Head; for want of which Skill, Christianity (though the most rational System of Verities in the World) seems to many to be a mere huddle of incoherent Principles and Practices, whose end they know not, nor how wisely every thing in it is adapted to carry out that noble End,” [2].

<sup>30</sup> Bray, *Bibliotheca Catechetica; or, the Country Curate's Library* (London, 1702), iv-v.

Bray had visions of creating a vast network of scholars, who shared their books and their knowledge with each other. He imagined that, in a given region, the distribution of books in any one collection would differ from—and thus complement—the distribution of books in all the other collections. When a clergymen had exhausted the choice of books at his immediate disposal, he could exchange his own volumes for his neighbor's. Bray explained, "those who will not be satisfied without reading all that has been written by Authors of any Eminency upon every Theological Head (whose Noble Curiosity, Industry, and Thirst after useful Knowledge, I cannot but highly commend) those Worthy Persons may borrow of their Neighbouring Clergy the Books they themselves want, and they again of these." A happy consequence of this arrangement was that it would encourage an intellectual exchange among clergymen, when they borrowed, lent and returned their books: "hereby a mutual Correspondence with one another will be maintain'd by the Clergy; a Correspondence in *Re Literaria*, the most useful and noblest Correspondence in the World."<sup>31</sup> Here, then, we see Bray pushing for the formation of a kind of republic of letters, at least among the clergy.

In his *Proposal*, Bray sketched the first outline of his library plan for America. He imagined that a large room in the parsonage house would hold the collection of books, and that the minister would be its custodian.<sup>32</sup> Bray recommended that each minister make a catalogue of titles in his parish library, to be kept at the library, and a copy to be sent to the Bishop of London for review. He thought that catalogues of the libraries would help keep track of their contents, and help prevent the loss or misplacement of books. Libraries needed further oversight, and he advised that the commissary in each province visit the parishes periodically to inspect the

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<sup>31</sup> Bray, "Letter to the Reverend, the Parochial Clergy of England and Ireland," in *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697).

<sup>32</sup> Bray, *Proposals for the Encouragement and Promoting of Religion and Learning in the Foreign Plantations* (1697), 1-2. He considered the clergyman's right to this library "to be as Unalienable as any other the Rights and Duties of the Church, which are Ascertained by Law," 1.



libraries, making sure none of the books had been stolen or lost. Bray also recommended that each book be marked with the name of its host library on the inside of its cover. And finally, he made clear that the parish minister himself would be financially responsible for any missing volumes.<sup>33</sup>

Bray hoped to develop larger public libraries in America as well: “we could wish to have one Library of more Universal Learning, to have recourse to upon occasion, in every *Province*,” he wrote.<sup>34</sup> The preservation of books in lending libraries could be particularly problematic, however. He acknowledged that since “these *Lending Libraries* should *travel abroad*, it may seem that the Books will be in danger to be soon lost by passing through so many hands.” In response to this danger, he suggested that lending libraries be kept in the most central location—the local deanery, schoolhouse or market town—so that the books might be easily borrowed on one market-day, and returned on the next. Bray also came up with a way to calculate the length of borrow time: “a Month for a Folio, a Fortnight for a 4*o*. and a Week for an 8*o*.”<sup>35</sup> The advantage of a limited borrow time, he thought, was “that a Book will be read over with speed and care; which if one’s own, might lye in a Study without being quickly or very carefully perused, upon presumption that being one’s own it may at any time be read.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Bray, *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697), 12. Already there were plans “to have one in the College which is now Erecting in Virginia,” namely William and Mary.

<sup>35</sup> Bray, *An Essay Towards Promoting All Necessary and Useful Knowledge, Both Divine and Human, in All the Parts of His Majesty's Dominions, Both at Home and Abroad* (1697), 8-9. In the *Bibliotheca Parochialis*, Bray explained this again, using almost identical words.

<sup>36</sup> Bray, *An Essay Towards Promoting All Necessary and Useful Knowledge* (1697), 8. He added, “And whereas it may be objected, that the Books will be so often Borrow’d, that it will be hard for any one to have the Book he wants. I am so far from being much concern’d to answer it, that I heartily wish the great Use and frequent Borrowing of Books out of these Libraries, may make it a real Objection. But to reply as far as necessary; the Limitations mention’d above, will fetch home any Book a Person shall want, within a Month farthest; and indeed there being several Authors specify’d in such a Library, as I design, upon most of the Subjects, of one be not to be had, Satisfaction may be sought in the mean time from another,” 12-13.

Bray advised that each book be marked on its cover with the name of its library, and that it be stored in a “Book-Press.” He thought these measures would prevent the books from ending up in any person’s private collection, “or if they are, they’ll be as readily discover’d and own’d, as any living Creature by its Ear-Mark.” The minister or schoolmaster was to guard the key to the library and facilitate the lending of the books. Finally, Bray required that the minister or schoolmaster be responsible for keeping detailed records of the books’ movements. He explained the borrowing process: “That the Borrower having sent a Note desiring any Book, his Note be filed up, and his Name enter’d in a Book kept in the Library for that purpose, what Year, Month and Day he borrowed such a Book; and upon the return of such a Book, the Note be also return’d, and the Name of the Borrower cross’d out.” That was not all: Bray thought it prudent that for each library, a register of all the books be kept, updated, and a copy sent periodically to the appropriate bishop or archdeacon for oversight. Once a year, the archdeacon or his deputies would visit the libraries to see that the books were in good order.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, Bray did not just propose the establishment of libraries. He repeatedly raised money for collections of books, which he sent to clergymen in America. As commissary, he established at least 29 libraries in Maryland, and about another 20 in the other colonies.<sup>38</sup> He thought that besides the smaller, incomplete libraries he was sending to Maryland, there might be “one General Library in the Province, consisting but of the whole set laid down in the

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<sup>37</sup> Bray, *An Essay Towards Promoting All Necessary and Useful Knowledge* (1697), 8-9. Also see Bray’s same words in *A Supplement to the Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697), and *Bibliotheca Catechetica* (1702).

<sup>38</sup> On December 19, 1697, Compton held an ordination in Wren’s St. Paul Cathedral for missionaries headed to America. Bray gave his sermon, *Apostolick Charity*, which was published in 1698. He included a preface to that work, titled, “A General View of the English Colonies in America with Respect to Religion,” in which he described his successes to date, and what was still wanting in the colonies. According to that preface, Bray had filled 16 parishes in Maryland, and had established 29 libraries there. Acts were passed in Maryland and South Carolina to protect their new libraries. On his journey to Maryland, Bray set up libraries at sea ports for the clergy who ministered to sailors and merchants. He hoped the people there would use their time for reading rather than drinking and gambling.

Catalogue.”<sup>39</sup> In 1697, he succeeded in creating a general library in Annapolis. This library had over 1000 books. In all, Bray was responsible for sending more than 33,000 books and tracts to the colonies. Some details concerning these libraries are recorded in his manuscript, *Bibliothecae Americanae*. In parishes throughout England and Wales, Bray created another 61 libraries.<sup>40</sup>

### **Knowledge: the Fairest Ornament of the Soul**

Bray saw books as powerful reforming—and civilizing—tools because they transmitted knowledge to whomever read them. He assumed that human beings were capable of knowing the world and their duty in it.<sup>41</sup> While this knowledge certainly included clear and simple truths, it also included those facts acquired through experience, and by extension, through the collective experiences of society as a whole, preserved in books. Reading the canon of great works was how people developed an understanding of what had been thought about the world already, while writing new works was how they communicated ideas to the future. For Bray, this active engagement with the collective discussion of ideas across space and through time was crucial to the progress of civilization.

“Knowledge is the fairest Ornament of the Soul of Man,” Bray declared. Knowledge-acquisition set apart people who were fundamentally equal; it differentiated between those who

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<sup>39</sup> Bray, “Letter to the Reverend, the Parochial Clergy of England and Ireland,” in *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697).

<sup>40</sup> Bray had successfully encouraged Anne, then Princess of Denmark, to fund the library in Annapolis. See Sion MSS, f. 39. Governor Nicholson of Maryland tried to funnel some money to the library, but the Maryland Assembly ruled that the money would go to arming a militia instead. The books from this library are now at St. Johns College, Annapolis. According to his financial accounts, Bray became sorely in debt due to the expenses of collecting and sending libraries overseas. Bray’s accounts, mostly financial, are divided into three parts: 1696 (beginning of Maryland work) to the end of 1699 (when he set sail for Maryland); 1700 to March 1702; 1702 to June 1703 (when he resigned as commissary and returned to Sheldon). Besides these accounts, he kept a journal of his travels to Maryland.

<sup>41</sup> See chapter 1 for this view in latitudinarian thought.

were fully developed rational beings, and those who were not. Thus, for Bray, as a person became more knowledgeable, he became more recognizably human. Foucault famously described how knowledge classified individuals and formed identities in the modern world. We see the beginnings of such a notion in Bray's writings. "This is certain, Knowledge does more to distinguish the Possessors of it, than Titles, Riches, or great Places," Bray stated.<sup>42</sup> Books, by conveying that knowledge, played a fundamental role in shaping the human character: they formed men into pious, enlightened, and virtuous members of the community. People who read books were noticeably more civilized. The knowledge attained from reading books, Bray said, "will render our Society when we do meet together such as becomes Men of Education and Learning; will elevate our Thoughts and Discourse above the vulgar and usual Conversation; will supply us with those Notions and Matter of Discourse, as will render us venerable amongst those we shall happen to converse with." Thus, books ultimately had the power to progressively equalize society. Bray imagined future communities of educated men who could speak to each other as equals, who were rational, moral and sociable.<sup>43</sup>

Of course, this was possible only if the great books were made available to those people who needed them most—the ignorant and poor in England and America. Bray's interest in libraries was thus shaped by his assumption that books were tools of social improvement, and that books therefore needed as wide a circulation as possible. What Bray was calling for was the leveling of knowledge by making its sources accessible to all; he hoped this would contribute to

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<sup>42</sup> Preface of *An Essay Towards Promoting All Necessary and Useful Knowledge* (1697). Bray reiterated, "Knowledge is the fairest Ornament of the Soul of Man, and whosoever is endowed therewith, let it be of what kind soever, fails not of Respect amongst all sorts of Persons," in his Epistle Dedicatory to *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697). See, for instance, Foucault, "Discipline 'makes' individuals," in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1977).

<sup>43</sup> Bray, "Letter to the Reverend, the Parochial Clergy of England and Ireland," in *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697).

the improvement of the individuals that made up society, and ultimately to the progress of society as a whole.

Like other reformers of this period, Bray was especially interested in improving people's manners. He thought the knowledge contained in books not only impressed upon people's minds new ideas, but it also affected their bodies, changing their behavior. The power of knowledge, he explained, "[does not] terminate only in the Minds of those that receive it, but will also have a most happy Influence [on] their Bodily Comforts."<sup>44</sup> This was because knowledge gave people the tools to discipline their potentially destructive passions. It helped them to distinguish between good and evil. When people were fully rational creatures, they could govern their conduct according to moral standards of living; they were better positioned to work for their own interests as well as for the general community's interests. So that, knowledge, by making men polite, made men capable of living socially together.<sup>45</sup> Bray thought that ultimately knowledge could civilize entire communities. Access to books—those transmitters of knowledge—was therefore crucial to civilization. Bray explained that the ideas contained in good books "manifestly tend, not to Debauch the Manners, but to Improve the Morals of Mankind, to that degree, as to bring down a kind of Heaven here upon Earth, and to render the Inhabitants thereof Guardian-Angels to one another."<sup>46</sup> Libraries, helping to make social life possible, were thus essential instruments of a civilizing process.

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<sup>44</sup> Bray, *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697), 5. And he further wrote, "the tendency of Christian Books, as such, is to improve Mankind in all the Faculties and Powers of Soul and Body," 6. Knowledge, though immaterial, could have physical consequences.

<sup>45</sup> On this point, Bray was close to Locke. As we will see, for Bray, education was important to mold people into rational, and thus sociable beings. Moral knowledge, for instance, helped people avoid entering the condition of the so-called "state of nature" as described by Hobbes in his *Leviathan*.

<sup>46</sup> Bray, *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697), 6.

Certainly it was *Christian* knowledge that Bray had in mind. People had to limit their reading to books that “set forth the Principles of our Religion as the most forcible Motives to living according to the Dictates of Right Reason, and Revelation.” Only Christianity, in its true form, preserved in its adherents good morals and manners, which in turn, safeguarded rational, civilized society. He wrote, Christianity “takes off that Ferrety of Nature whereby Mankind becomes Beasts of Prey, even Wolves and Tygers, to one another, and renders ‘em Benign and Kind to all those who have to do with ‘em; and ready to do all manner of good Offices to their Brethren in Humane Nature.”<sup>47</sup>

It was no coincidence, then, that the inhabitants of the most civilized nations were also Christians. Bray wrote that, as Englishmen and women, “we owe our Security and Happiness at home, to the Influence that Religion has upon our Publick Laws and Private Actions.” Christianity could be evaluated at the marketplace of religions. “For instance,” Bray explained, “let any one compare the People of this Nation”—namely, the English—“with the Naked Indians, the African Cannibals, or rather with the Georgians, a Degenerate Race of Christians in Asia, amongst whom the Notions of God and Religion are in a manner quite extinct.”<sup>48</sup> After surveying the different corners of the world, Bray said he could conclude, “that proportionally as Divine Knowledge prevails in the World, in the same degrees do Barbarity, Rapine, Violence and Brutality decrease, and Humanity, Justice and Order gain ground amongst Men.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>48</sup> Epistle Dedicatory to *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697).

<sup>49</sup> *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697), 5-6. Bray wrote similarly, “Amongst our selves there are some tolerable degrees of Humanity, Honesty, and Goodness; whereas the others are so much more for Bloodshed, Lust, Cruelty, Revenge, and whatever Brutish and Savage Manners, than Wolves, Bears and Tygers.” He concluded that “in any part of the World we shall find that proportionally to the Increase or Decrease of Christian Knowledge, do Vice or Virtue make their Advances respectively; so that innumerable are the Barbarities, Cruelties, Perjuries, Murthers, Adulteries, and whatever other Violations of the Laws of God, Nature, and Nations, that proceed from the bitter Fountain of Ignorance of the true Nature of God and Religion,” in Epistle Dedicatory to *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697).

Drawing on latitudinarian ideas, then, Bray argued that Christianity was the religion that best maintained civil life. From knowledge of Christianity “alone [Englishmen] are distinguish’d from those Barbarous *Indians*.”<sup>50</sup> There was hope for the rest of the world, however, Bray thought. Christianity—and thus civilization—could be brought to these wild and remote places. “Were but the World thoroughly enlightened with the Knowledge of God,” Bray was sure, it would come to witness “Justice, Mercy, and Peace; and the well order’d Affections of our selves.”<sup>51</sup> A desire to discipline the lives of people throughout the world was one of the central motives of Bray’s work in spreading Christian knowledge.

Bray’s libraries could contain books of secular knowledge as well. Like the latitudinarians, Bray thought true knowledge of the natural world complemented Christian knowledge.<sup>52</sup> “Nor will the other parts of Knowledge I propose to promote by the following kind of Libraries, be Unuseful,” Bray explained. For instance, “From History we can take a noble

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Ignorance was also at fault for the superstitions of the Catholics: “It were enough to set Ignorance out as the most dreadful Evil, to say that it is the cause of all those Slavish Superstitions that are in the World,” *Ibid*.

<sup>50</sup> Bray, *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697), 1.

<sup>51</sup> Epistle Dedicatory to *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697). See also, Bray, *A Supplement to the Bibliotheca Parochialis* (London, 1697). Here, Bray argued that where Christian knowledge was absent, vices multiplied, and there could be no justice, no peace, only violence. This was a Hobbesian state of nature: “People... all of ‘em a sort of tolerated Banditry continually Preying, and being Prey’d upon by each other. Such, are the Violations of Just and Right, of God’s Laws, yea and of the very Laws of Nature.” This was equally a description of the primitive society of ancient England and primitive societies across the globe—“as was seen in our former Ages of Ignorance in this Nation, and is still the Constitution of Barbarous Countries elsewhere,” 6. In his *Bibliotheca Catechetica* (London, 1702), Bray repeated this.

<sup>52</sup> In *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697), Bray wrote: “The Knowledge of *Nature* affords the best, the plainest, and the most demonstrative proofs of the Existence, and Providence of God, to the Establishing of our Faith, and the Raising the Admiration and Devotion towards the Divine Majesty, both of the most Intelligent and of the Meanest of the People. *Mathematica* Knowledge is in some measure necessary, to enable one to give a rational Account of the Truth of the *Mosaick History* of the Creation and Deluge; and to answer the Cavils and Exceptions of the Superficial and Half-learned Atheist, (as has in the Instance of the Ark, been unanswerably done by Bishop *Wilkins*, and in the like Cases by other Pens.) And a competent Knowledge of the *Laws*, especially of the *Civil Laws*, and of the Law of *Nations*, enables a Divine with the most convincing Arguments and Reasons to Establish the Doctrine of Christ’s Satisfaction, one of the principle Articles of Reveal’d Religion. ...And indeed, many of the Social Duties of the Civil Life, are not likely to be so exactly stated by any, as by one well acquainted with the Laws and Customs of Nations. So that it is very requisite, that every Pastor of a Flock, especially in this Curious and Incredulous part of the World, should give himself up to farther Enquiries into Universal Learning,” 11-12.

view of all Mankind; and by our Observations from thence of the different Fates of Men, and their Causes, we may form to our selves most excellent Rules for the Conduct of Humane Life.” Bray was promoting the use of a kind of comparative anthropology as a way to discern practices most conducive to civilized life.<sup>53</sup> There were also practical reasons to read the travel literature—especially economic pieces—“Travels discover Commodities of Foreign Countries, to the great Enriching of our own.” Finally, secular knowledge was crucial to the progress of culture more generally: “By an Insight into Nature, Gardening, Agriculture, &c. All sorts of Persons will learn how to meliorate their Condition and manner of Living whilst on Earth. And if there may be added hereafter to our Libraries, the Best Authors in Mathematicks, Physick and Law, there will be no means wanting even in the most Uncultivated parts of this Kingdom, to render the Thinking, Reading, and the best part of the Inhabitants thereof both Intellectually, Morally and Civilly, as well as Divinely Happy.”<sup>54</sup>

This was not a limitless celebration of books, however; driving Bray’s mission to establish libraries was great anxiety over the lapse in the license act in 1695, and the ever growing circulation of heterodox ideas. Bray made clear that the knowledge conveyed through books was only acceptable “if the Authors from whence this Knowledge is deriv’d, are not corrupted with such Principles as undermine Morality (which is visible in the Writings of some sort of Men).” Good Christian texts had to be distributed to counter the flow of harmful texts. Bray never denied that irreligious ideas had significant powers of influence—namely, the powers to promote bad behavior. For him, men’s beliefs and actions often corresponded to the qualities

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<sup>53</sup> Preface to *An Essay Towards Promoting All Necessary and Useful Knowledge* (1697). It became obvious, however, which people came out on top after such a comparison was made: “by reading the Accounts of so many Nations of Men in the World, sunk down to the lowness of Brutes for want of Knowledge, [we] may see Infinite Reason to bless that God, who by an admirable Religion enlightening our Minds, has rais’d us above the Animal Life; and so vastly distinguishes us from the Barbarous part of Mankind,” *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*



of the books they read. Knowledge, Bray said, made men moral only “if the Authors from whence this Knowledge is deriv’d, be themselves good; for Men are generally such in their Principles, Tempers, and Dispositions, as the Books and Company are with which they Converse”; bad communications “do Corrupt good Manners.”<sup>55</sup> Thus Bray conceived his libraries as fortifications against the popular skepticism of this era. “This seems to be the very time,” he wrote, “for us to provide ourselves of *Magazines*, out of which we may be sufficiently furnish’d with that Panoply of excellent Learning and Knowledge.”<sup>56</sup> Libraries might potentially be the greatest weapons against growing atheism. However, they would have no affect on those men and women who could not read, or who were not familiar with more complex notions. Libraries of books were not enough; teachers were necessary too.

### **Libraries for Clergy: “Recovering Men from Ignorance, Barbarity, and Brutish Manners”**

For Bray, the importance of the clergy as conveyers of knowledge could not be overemphasized. He saw clergymen as responsible for translating difficult ideas for the general public. A growing popular opinion, however, maintained that clergymen were unnecessary for, even detrimental to the progress of society. Bray acknowledged, “some Persons are pleas’d to traduce the whole Order as useless, and a burden to the World.”<sup>57</sup> But, it was Bray’s belief that, owing to the clergy, “Mankind has been so happily recover’d from the Ignorance, Barbarity, and Brutish Manners.” This was evident, he thought, in the progress the clergy had already made

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<sup>55</sup> Bray, *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697), 6.

<sup>56</sup> Bray, *An Essay Towards Promoting All Necessary and Useful Knowledge* (1697), 6. Also see Preface to *Bibliotheca Catechetica* (1702), where Bray wrote, “amongst many Reasons which make this Provision [for Libraries] more necessary now than heretofore, this deserves our serious Consideration, that since the prodigious Growth of Atheism, Deism, Socinianism, and Quakerism.”

<sup>57</sup> Bray, *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697), 3. Bray was referring in particular to John Eachard’s, *The grounds & occasions of the contempt of the clergy* (London, 1672).

overseas: “Licentiousness, Rapine and Violence have given way to Purity, Justice and Humanity in those parts of the World where Pure and Genuine Christianity is taught.” Clergy were therefore not only instrumental to people’s salvation in the next world, but to the state of civilization in this world. Atheists opposed the clergy precisely because they opposed civilized behavior. Bray warned, “should a Nation...become destitute of a Learned and Pious Clergy, and be delivered up to the Malignant Principles of those who hate the Profession; Good God, to what Impurities, Rapines and Murders must such a wretched People be inevitably expos’d! Such an inestimable Benefit to Mankind, are Clergy.”<sup>58</sup> The ministers of the church, he emphasized, were the intermediaries between the people and civilization.

Although Bray never lost sight of his ultimate objective, which was to increase Christian knowledge in “all sorts of Persons,” he singled out the clergy as the bearers of his mission. He frequently emphasized the importance of the clergy in conveying sound thoughts and decent manners among ignorant and rude men and women everywhere, but especially in America. Any hope for improvement in the colonies was dependent on “the Abilities of the Clergy of those Parts, the Exemplariness of their Lives, and their Industry in Teaching others.”<sup>59</sup> The danger that Bray foresaw was that the educators might be as ignorant as those they wished to educate. Without a source of intellectual legitimacy, clergymen were ill equipped to carry out their purpose. Books, conduits of knowledge, he determined, were this source. In his very first pamphlet, Bray proposed that every parish in America be supplied with a collection of books, which would serve as a reference library for the clergyman there. His scheme had an added benefit: it would not only improve the knowledge of those missionaries already in America, but

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<sup>58</sup> Bray, *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697), 3.

<sup>59</sup> Bray, *Proposals for the Encouragement and Promoting of Religion and Learning in the Foreign Plantations* (1697), 1.

it would encourage new ones to go. This was because, according to Bray, the best way to persuade decent clergymen to accept a position in the colonies was to promise them the use of a well-stocked library.

Bray recognized that most clergymen, whether in England or in America, were too poor to purchase their own books. With no collection of books near at hand for their use, clergymen “should be ignorant to our own extreme Disgrace, and the infinite Prejudice of those Souls committed to our Charge.”<sup>60</sup> It was not surprising to Bray, then, that men and women had nothing but contempt for the ignorant ministers—“the poorer Clergy, without such Provision as I am soliciting for them,” he admitted, “must needs fall into the lowest Contempt.” This situation was especially notable “now that all Ranks of Men pretend to Letters: And what is worse, since the Liberty of the Press, now that all degrees of persons do freely Read the most poisonous Authors.” Bray concluded that the only course of action that would rectify the social status of the clergy was to provide all the parishes with libraries “consisting of some of the most substantially useful Books,” worth ten or twenty pounds each.<sup>61</sup>

Bray imagined that his lending libraries would serve as places of learning for the clergy. Ministers would no longer have a reputation for their ignorance, but rather for their erudition. “I am so fully perswaded of the Benefit to them, of these Lending Libraries,” Bray wrote, “that they seem to me to be the most likely means, and to be in a good measure sufficient, to restore even

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<sup>60</sup> Bray, “Letter to the Reverend, the Parochial Clergy of England and Ireland,” in *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697). Bray explained the poverty of the ministers: “for one third of the Livings of England come not up to 50 l. per Annum, which I am sure will afford but very little, if any thing at all, to purchase Books with, when Domestick Charges, and Publick Payments are satisfy’d.” And their contemptibleness: “As for Ignorance in our proper Calling, it must indeed of necessity cause the Contempt of those who are found to be such. In any Calling a person is valu’d proportionably to his Knowledge and skill therein; especially in ours. And yet I do not see how it is possible for most of us but to fall short of a complete Knowledge in the whole Body, even of Preachable Divinity, as the case stands with most of us,” *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Bray, *Bibliotheca Catechetica* (1702), vii.

those of the lowest Capacities in the Ministry, from both those Evils”—poverty and ignorance.<sup>62</sup>

Libraries might improve the economic conditions of the clergy because, Bray rather naively assumed, it would relieve clergy of their greatest expense—books. “For this I am very certain of,” he explained, “many of the Clergy in Poorer Livings, who are Bookishly given...can scarce keep themselves clear of the Booksellers Accounts, nor Money in their Pockets for their necessary Occasions, because of their Charges that way; which yet I think are as much their Necessaries as Meat and Drink, which give Nourishment only to the worser part of us.”<sup>63</sup>

Bray thought his library program would also promote a reformation of clergy manners both at home and abroad. If there were any truth to what was rumored about the clergy—“the scandalous Immoralities, which perhaps it may be too true that some may be guilty of”—then future scandal might be prevented, he hoped, by a provision of good books. Bray imagined clergymen would occupy their time with reading, rather than with activities like drinking and gambling.<sup>64</sup> He explained that men often “seek for Company and Diversion abroad, but for want of the better Society of good entertaining Authors at home.” He could not picture, “what Man of Spirit or Education, had he a *Justin Martyr*, a *Tertullian* or *Cyprian*; a *Sanderson*, a *Hammond* or

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<sup>62</sup> Bray, “Letter to the Reverend, the Parochial Clergy of England and Ireland,” in *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697). In the *Supplement to the Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697), Bray wrote similarly: “I know there is nothing a more common Jest than the Poverty, and Ignorance of the Poor Clergy in *Wales*, and the Northern parts of this Kingdom; but this Jest in my Opinion, is the Nations shame, who provide not better for ‘em. And provide ‘em but with Books, and they would be neither Ignorant, Poor, nor Scandalous; not *Ignorant*, for Books do by an immediate Causality remove that Imputation; not so very *Poor* as now, for I have known Good Men, and Lovers of Learning kept under hatches all their life time, chiefly by their being Bookishly given, and indebted to Book-sellers; nor *Scandalous*, for I know that many whose Immoralities are said to be a Reproach to their Function, who yet in all probability had never become such Men, if they had been possess’d of Good Books wherewith they might have employ’d their time in reading; for want of which it is, that some perhaps may have sought their Diversion in Ale-houses, and in a Sauntering way of Life,” 4-5.

<sup>63</sup> Bray, “Letter to the Reverend, the Parochial Clergy of England and Ireland,” in *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* He further wrote, in *Proposals for the Encouragement and Promoting of Religion and Learning in the Foreign Plantations* (1697), “Insufficiency and Scandal in the Clergy of those Places, in all probability, would be most successfully prevented, both in this and future Ages, should every Parochial Minister in the Plantations have a sufficient Library of well-chosen Books, in which he might spend his Time to his own Satisfaction, and with Improvement and Profit to himself and others,” 1.

*Tillotson*, come to visit him, would leave such Men of Sense for the Society of the Sons of Belial.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, Bray was sure that parochial libraries were absolutely necessary to the improvement of the clergy.

### **Libraries for Laity: “Filing off that Roughness, Ferrety and Barbarity”**

Bray argued that public lending libraries were as important for elites—“Gentlemen, Physicians and Lawyers”—as they were for the poor. Without the constant studying of good books, rich and educated men were in danger of regressing to a state of ignorance, idleness, and irreligion. Bray explained that after attending university, many of the gentry settled permanently in the countryside, where few books were available to them, and thus, the means for their further improvement in learning and culture was thereby limited. Bray thought the result of this was that the gentry, over time, picked up bad manners. “[They] do thereupon too commonly become not so conspicuous for their Excellent Knowledge, and Morals,” Bray observed. “And when they happen into one another’s Company, for want of Good Sense, are forc’d too often to fill upon their Discourse, and maintain a Conversation, in the Porterly Language of Swearing, and Obscenity.”<sup>66</sup> Access to good books, Bray thought, might cultivate good manners in these people, just as it would in the clergy. “It will very much keep ‘em from idle Conversation, and the Debaucheries attending it,” Bray said, “to have choice Collections of such Books dispers’d through all the Kingdom, and waiting upon ‘em in their own Parlors, as will ennoble their Minds with Principles of Virtue and true Honour, and will file off that Roughness, Ferrety and Barbarity, which are the never failing Fruits of Ignorance and Illiterature.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Bray, “Letter to the Reverend, the Parochial Clergy of England and Ireland,” in *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697).

<sup>66</sup> Preface to *An Essay Towards Promoting All Necessary and Useful Knowledge* (1697).

<sup>67</sup> Bray, *An Essay Towards Promoting All Necessary and Useful Knowledge* (1697), 12.

Thus, Bray advocated for lending libraries throughout England's countryside to serve this social group.<sup>68</sup> These libraries would, he expected, contain more general kinds of knowledge: "as for our Younger Gentry, I cannot think but it would tend extremely to furnish their Minds also with that useful Knowledge in History, Travels, Humanity, Agriculture, and all such Noble Arts and Sciences, as will render 'em serviceable to their Families, Countries, and will make 'em considerable both at home and abroad."<sup>69</sup>

Bray hoped that funding for his libraries would come in part from the gentry. He imagined that in each deanery in England, the clergy would pool their resources and raise at least a third of the cost of a lending library.<sup>70</sup> To take care of the remaining expenses, each clergyman in his respective parish would solicit from the gentry "some small Subscription towards this Publick Design, by which such Subscribers, whether Gentlemen, or Ladies, will be entitled to the Privilege of borrowing at any time a Book for their own Reading."<sup>71</sup> The money would then go to London, where it would purchase a collection of books, which would be sent back to the country deanery, and made available to the ministers and subscribers there. Bray promised the gentry "acceptable Books for them," including, "some of the most valuable pieces of History,

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<sup>68</sup> Bray, *An Essay Towards Promoting All Necessary and Useful Knowledge* (1697): "Amongst the many Laudable Contrivances for promoting Religion and Learning in the World, in which several Persons of a Publick Spirit have labour'd more or less in all Ages, there seem none to me would be of greater Advantages to either, would tend more to cultivate the Minds of our young Gentry, and can be more adapted to the present Circumstances of our *Parochial Clergy*...than if we could have *Lending Libraries* dispos'd, one in every Deanery throughout the Kingdom, for the Service of those who have occasion to borrow," 1-2. Bray thought the gentry needed lending libraries in particular: "*Standing Libraries* will signifie little in the Country, where Persons must ride some miles to look into a Book; such Journeys being too expensive of Time and Money: But *Lending Libraries*, which come home to 'em without Charge, may tolerably well supply the Vacancies in their own Studies," 11.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 5: "since very few are capable to furnish their Studies at their own proper Cost, it is therefore necessary that all should join their Forces; and what is impossible for 'em singly, would be easie for 'em jointly."

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 3. Bray thought through these means, "we might have 400 *Lending Libraries* fixt throughout the Kingdom," 10.

Geography, and Travels.”<sup>72</sup> For the libraries overseas, on the other hand, Bray appealed especially to the “Merchants and Traders to the Foreign Plantations,” who, Bray said, were “Persons principally concern’d to encourage this Design.”<sup>73</sup> This was based on the view that merchants and traders had become rich in the colonies, and therefore were responsible for improving the conditions there. Their charity, Bray thought, should be directed toward the people who had contributed so much to their own wealth. Bray reminded those men who sent their manufactures and commodities overseas, “that since the Discovery of the Plantations, their Rents have been advanced, and their Splendor increased treble to what their Noble Ancestors before ‘em were acquainted with.”<sup>74</sup> They should pay back the source of their success by helping to establish libraries in those lands.

Bray also appealed to living authors to donate copies of their books to the libraries headed overseas. He thought books should be offered below market price, and sometimes even gratis by publishers and authors.<sup>75</sup> As another way to encourage charitable donations to this

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4. Specifically, he proposed that the way the money is raised for the purchase of books is “by Subscriptions rais’d amongst both Clergy and Gentry; each Clergy-man subscribing at the Visitation some small matter proportionable to the Value of his Living, or Circumstances in the World; they Gentry, what in their Generosity they shall think fit. And the Subscriptions of both to be taken, and return’d to *London*; and the Libraries transmitted into the Country in the Method following,” 2. “That what is Subscribed by the Gentry, be brought in to the next *Michaelmas* Visitation, and enter’d down in a Book, together with the Subscriptions of the Clergy, to be kept in every Library: And if there be something wanting to make up the remaining Twenty Pounds, it be made up by the Clergy, if there be any over, it be apply’d towards paying for the Book-Presses and Carriage down, and the Surplusage be laid up in Bank against next *Easter* Visitation after this, towards purchasing another like quantity of Books, in order to complete a useful and sufficient Library in the respective Deanery,” 4.

<sup>73</sup> Bray, *Proposals for the Encouragement and Promoting of Religion and Learning in the Foreign Plantations* (1697), 2.

<sup>74</sup> Bray, “Letter to the Reverend, the Parochial Clergy of England and Ireland,” in *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697).

<sup>75</sup> Bray, *An Essay Towards Promoting All Necessary and Useful Knowledge* (1697): “That the Books shall be afforded to the Subscribers, something below the Prices at which the Clergy, or Gentry usually buy ‘em by Retail in the Booksellers Shops,” 4. Bray specified that books acquired gratis should be saved for the libraries meant for the colonies: “That what *Gratis*-Books will be obtain’d of the Bookseller, in consideration of so many bought of ‘em towards these *Lending Libraries*; that these be set apart towards making up *Parochial Libraries* for the *Foreign Plantations*. And it is found, that one Library in ten at least, will be obtain’d by this means towards the Publick Design,” 4.

project, Bray recommended that contributors be publicly honored: he promised that “a full Account shall be published what Books have been given, what Summs have been obtained,” and that “in Gratitude to the Benefactors towards this Pious Design, all those, whether they be Publick Societies, Companies, or Private Persons, who shall Contribute any thing thereunto, shall have their Names and respective Summs.”<sup>76</sup>

Bray was confident that his library scheme would rouse people’s sense of charity—he called on “men of a publick and active Spirit” to accomplish his design, namely, “that which is the chiefest of all Goods, the Cultivating the Minds and Manners of Men with Divine Knowledge, and Christian Virtues.”<sup>77</sup> Bray also considered how to promote the advancement of his libraries in the future. Through small subscriptions, he thought, every community “should continue to add the calculable new Books that shall come out hereafter.” Perhaps there would even be “sufficient Encouragement provided for the Learned Men of our Universities, to undertake the giving us some more such Editions of the Fathers, and other Ancient Writers, as that of St. *Cyprian*, *Thucydides*, &c.”<sup>78</sup> People might bequeath their own collections of books to

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<sup>76</sup> Bray, *Proposals for the Encouragement and Promoting of Religion and Learning in the Foreign Plantations* (1697), 2. He continued: “And the Authors shall have the Number of Books given ‘em, transmitted to Posterity, by being Registered in a Book kept for that purpose in each of the Libraries.”

<sup>77</sup> Bray, *A Supplement to the Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697), 1. Here he wrote, “That there are such even in this Frozen Age and Country, and who being of a Publick Spirit, are not only Able but Willing, to do any thing they can be made sensible will be for a Common Good, is to be hop’d, or at leastwise to be wish’d,” 1. Bray repeats this idea in *Bibliotheca Catechetica* (1702): “That there are those who are truly such; and indeed many Persons in this Nation of Publick Spirit, who are Willing to do any thing they can be made sensible will be for a Common Good, Sufficiently Appears by many Late Instances of Charity. But that which is the chiefest of all Goods, the Cultivating the Minds and Manners of men with Divine Knowledge, and Christian Virtues, seems not to be yet thoroughly thought of, however not to be promoted by such proper and immediate Methods as it easily might,” 1. And in *An Essay Towards Promoting All Necessary and Useful Knowledge* (1697): “the Design of these Libraries is not to serve a Man’s private, but the publick Interest of Religion and Learning,” 6.

<sup>78</sup> Bray, *An Essay Towards Promoting All Necessary and Useful Knowledge* (1697), 10. He went on to explain how England could, in this way England could compete with France: “which one thing, as it has in this Age so much contributed to the Learning and Honour of a Neighboring Nation, where, upon the Encouragement of the Monasteries taking off each of ‘em, one of every New Edition of a *Father*, or other Book of Value, the Learned of that Kingdom have been thereby encouraged, and enabled to give the World such Editions as they may justly glory



these small libraries, building them up even further. Bray imagined that his modest libraries would one day be truly grand repositories of knowledge: “the thing being once begun, I could easily propose, how the whole Course of History and Humanity may be added.”<sup>79</sup>

### **The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge**

Bray soon found out that the cost of establishing libraries was more than he could afford on his own. In need of money to finance his various projects, Bray first turned to the English government for support. When he was unsuccessful in getting it, he began to consider a new scheme. A corporation, he thought, authorized by charter—“as the Royal Society and the Sons of the Clergy are”—could finance and administer his projects overseas. He wrote up his idea as “the intended Congregation *pro propaganda fide et moribus Christianis* [for the propagation of Christian faith and morals].” A later version, which he showed to the Bishop of London in 1697, bore a new name: “A General Plan of a Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge.”<sup>80</sup> In it, he outlined three main goals for his society: to send missionaries to the colonies; to build

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in; so it would make exceedingly for the *Honour of our Universities*, and not a little for the *Interest of our Nation*: For as to the former, it would raise a Noble Spirit of Emulation in those Learned Societies, and would excite more of the Members thereof, to Exert themselves in being serviceable to the World in this kind; who now for want of Encouragement, cannot spend their time so much to their own, and the Publick Good on this way, as otherwise they might. And as to the latter, whereas some Thousand Pounds worth of Valuable Books, Printed in Foreign parts, have been Imported Yearly, we by reason of the better Editions of the Ancient Writers, which our more Learned Men are able to give the World, might be able to employ our own Paper-Makers, Stationers, Printers, Book-Binders, Book-Sellers here at home, to the maintaining many Thousand Persons amongst us, and might export so much of our own, and Foreign Paper Manufactured by our selves, as would turn the Balance of that part of Trade considerably on our own side,” 10-11.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>80</sup> Sion MSS, ff. 321, 342. Although Bray gave a manuscript version to Compton and others in 1697, he did not put his plan into action right away. In the meantime, he published *The Present State of the Protestant Religion in America* (1697), which described the attempts—made by Governor Nicholson, the Maryland Assembly, and Bray—to establish the Church of England in Maryland, and build libraries there. The “P” in the name of the SPCK could alternatively stand for “propagating” or “promoting,” but ultimately the organization determined to use only the latter term.

libraries both at home and abroad; and to found charity schools for the education of poor children in reading, writing, and the principles of the Christian religion.<sup>81</sup>

On March 8, 1699, Bray and four of his friends put this plan into action, forming the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, and held their first meeting in London.<sup>82</sup> In the first few years, the society gained the support of the latitudinarian churchmen, and quickly expanded, drawing members from the societies for reformation of manners.<sup>83</sup> It also established an expansive network of corresponding members located in various regions throughout England, Europe and America. The society raised funds—to support missionaries, libraries, and charity schools—through membership subscriptions.<sup>84</sup>

In its minutes from November 16, 1699, we find a circular letter, which the society sent to its members. The letter makes clear this new society's agenda: "The visible decay of Religion in this Kingdom, with the monstrous increase of Deism, Prophaneness and Vice, has excited the

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<sup>81</sup> Bray imagined that the members of such a society would be "empowered to meet and consult, as often as there shall be occasion, upon the best means and methods of promoting Religion and Learning in any part of His Majesty's plantations abroad." He specified that the society would send books abroad to the colonies—in part to help "persons in attempting the conversion of the Negroes or native Indians"—and establish libraries in small parishes and market towns at home. See, Sion MSS, f. 342.

<sup>82</sup> Besides Bray, the first members of the SPCK were Justice John Hook, Lord Gilford, Sir Humphrey Mackworth, and Colonel Maynard Colchester. See Allen, W. O. B. and Edmund McClure. *Two Hundred Years* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1898).

<sup>83</sup> Latitudinarian churchmen who became active in the SPCK included Edward Fowler, John Williams, White Kennett, Gilbert Burnet, Richard Kidder, William Lloyd, and Simon Patrick. Other significant members of the SPCK included Josiah Woodward (leader of the Societies for Reformation of Manners and Boyle Lecturer); John Chamberlayne (Fellow of the Royal Society in 1702, and future secretary of the SPG); Robert Nelson (famous non-jurist); and first Viscount Weymouth (member of the Royal Society). In 1699, Weymouth had given 500 pounds for Bray's libraries. Confusions concerning the various societies inspired the SPCK to write a small tract distinguishing itself from the Societies for Reformation of Manners. See SPCK MSS A minutes for February 3, 1698/9: "Resolved that Justice Hook be desired to draw up an account of the nature of this Society, and wherein it differs from other Societies." This account was published as *A Short Account of the Several Kinds of Societies, set up of late Years, for carrying on the Reformation of Manners, and for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge* (London, 1700).

<sup>84</sup> Most of the SPCK minutes take note of new members who have joined the organization, the charity schools that have been established in various locations, and sets of books that have been sent to an English parish or abroad. For example, the SPCK MSS A minutes from November 30, 1699 read: "Resolv'd that Dr. Bray may advance the sum of twenty pounds upon the credit of this Society towards the founding of Parochial Libraries in the Leeward Islands."

zeal of several persons of the best character in the cities of London and Westminster, and other parts of the nation, to associate themselves in order to consult together how to put a stop to so fatal an inundation.” The SPCK turned to education as an antidote to the rise of atheism and vice. The members of this society blamed atheism on “the barbarous ignorance observable among the common people, especially those of the poorer sort, and this to proceed from want of due care in the education of the Youth.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, the SPCK set out to establish schools, which would provide instruction in principles of religion, good manners, as well as reading and writing to poor children.<sup>86</sup> The hope was that in other parts of England, and even beyond, people would follow this program of establishing charity schools.

### **The SPCK and Charity Schools**

The SPCK focused on establishing and maintaining charity schools for the education of poor children in London, and it provided assistance to the formation of similar charity schools across England and Wales. At their very first meeting, the members of the SPCK developed a plan to create schools; soon they were also considering methods for employing the poor, and for instructing children to read in workhouses.<sup>87</sup> They thought that the education of children was necessary for maintaining “Piety, Virtue, and honest Livelihood” within the impoverished parts of the city. Education, they said promoted people’s happiness in this life and the next, as well as

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<sup>85</sup> SPCK MSS A minutes, November 16, 1699.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* The letter reported that already over 2000 poor children had been given an education so far.

<sup>87</sup> The SPCK’s first minutes, SPCK MSS A minutes, from March 8, 1699 read: “Resolv’d that we consider tomorrow morning how to further and promote that good Design of erecting Catechetical Schools in each parish in and about London, and that Col. Colchester and Dr. Bray give their thoughts how it may be done.” On March 12<sup>th</sup> they read: “Resolv’d that the Right Honble the Lord Guilford be desired to speak to the Archbishop that care may be taken that a clause be provided in the Bill for employing the poor, to have the Children taught to read and be instructed in the Church Catechism.” And on March 16, the members draw up orders, a form of subscription, and a form of insurance for charity schools. Finally, on April 19, 1699, they agree on the preamble to the orders that explains the need for charity schools on “the growth of vice and immorality.”

served the public good. An educated population would contribute significantly to the security and prosperity of the community.<sup>88</sup> This charity would be needed “till the Poor shall be reformed by a better Education.”<sup>89</sup> It could be hoped that in later generations, poverty and vice would be greatly reduced by these charitable institutions.

Beginning in 1704, the SPCK published yearly accounts of their progress with charity schools. These accounts described the method for establishing a school; they detailed the yearly expenses (for 50 boys in London it came to about £75, and for girls £60, including the cost of the school room, books, clothes, and the schoolmaster’s salary);<sup>90</sup> listed rules for trustees, school masters, parents, and children; provided a catalogue of useful teaching books;<sup>91</sup> presented tables showing the number of children in London charity schools to date; and gave the location and size of charity schools throughout England, and even in other parts of Europe and in the colonies. In 1705, 56 charity schools with a total of 1462 boys and 775 girls had been formed in London alone; £2,242 in subscriptions had been raised that year, and £1,071 had been collected at sermons. Another 60 charity schools were located throughout England. In 1714, 117 charity

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<sup>88</sup> *An Account of the Methods Whereby the Charity-Schools have been Erected and Managed, and of the Encouragement given to them; Together with A Proposal of Enlarging their Number, and Adding some Work to the Children’s Learning, thereby to render their Education more Useful to the Publick* (London, 1704), 31. It was first printed with Richard Willis’ *A Sermon Preach’d in the Parish-Church of St. Andrew’s Holborn, June 8, 1704, being Thursday in Whitson-Week, at the first Meeting of the Gentlemen concern’d in Promoting the Charity-Schools in and about the Cities of London and Westminster* (London, 1704). The Account was published every year, and later editions of it were printed with a modified title: for instance, *An Account of the Charity-Schools in Great Britain and Ireland: With the Benefactions thereto; and of the Methods whereby they were set up, and are governed. Also, A Proposal for adding some Work to the Children’s Learning. And an Appendix, containing certain Forms and Directions relating to these Schools*, 13<sup>th</sup> edition with enlargements (London, 1714).

<sup>89</sup> *An Account of the Methods Whereby the Charity-Schools have been Erected and Managed, and of the Encouragement given to them* (1704), 37.

<sup>90</sup> *An Account of the Methods Whereby the Charity-Schools have been Erected and Managed, and of the Encouragement given to them* (London, 1705), 10. It also detailed the cost of clothing, for both boys and girls, from buttons to gloves to stockings.

<sup>91</sup> This catalogue of books included many of the titles in Bray’s catalogues—Grotius, Hammond, *The Whole Duty of Man*, Patrick, Burnet, and works by Bray himself. It also included books on the Reformation of Manners; after it was published, John Disney’s *Essay upon the Execution of the Laws against Immorality and Prophaneness* (1708) appeared on the list. Finally it included dictionaries, spelling books, grammar, and a books on arithmetic.

schools with a total of 3077 boys and 1741 girls had been established in London; £5,580 in subscriptions had been raised that year, and £3,450 had been collected at sermons. 2474 children had been made apprentices.<sup>92</sup>

To these accounts the SPCK attached helpful forms, like one for raising subscriptions—with spaces left blank—for the use of those who wanted to establish their own charity school.<sup>93</sup> The accounts claimed that it would only take about seven or eight months for a school to be set up. Usually this process started when the minister of some parish, with the cooperation of a few members of the community, recommended forming a charity school. These men would then agree to subscribe a certain amount of money yearly, and solicit subscriptions from others as well. Once the finances were settled, the subscribers set down rules for the governing of the school. They would meet quarterly, and they would choose from among themselves a treasurer and a few trustees, who along with the schoolmaster, would be responsible for the administration

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<sup>92</sup> *An Account of the Methods Whereby the Charity-Schools have been Erected and Managed, and of the Encouragement given to them; Together with A Proposal of Enlarging their Number, and Adding some Work to the Children's Learning, thereby to render their Education more Useful to the Publick* (London, 1705), 8-9; *An Account of the Charity-Schools in Great Britain and Ireland: With the Benefactions thereto; and of the Methods whereby they were set up, and are governed. Also, A Proposal for adding some Work to the Children's Learning. And an Appendix, containing certain Forms and Directions relating to these Schools*, 13<sup>th</sup> edition with enlargements (London, 1714), 11-14.

<sup>93</sup> *An Account of the Charity-Schools in Great Britain and Ireland* (1714), 82. The form declaring the establishment of a charity school read: "Whereas Prophaneness and Debauchery are greatly owing to a gross Ignorance of the Christian Religion, especially among the poorer Sort: And whereas nothing is more likely to promote the Practice of Christianity and Virtue, than an early and pious Education of Youth: And whereas many poor People are desirous of having their Children Taught, but are not able to afford them a Christian and useful Education: We whose Names are under-written, do hereby agree to pay yearly, at Four equal payments (during Pleasure), the several Sums of Money over against our Names respectively subscribed, for the setting up of a Charity-School in the Parish of \_\_\_\_ in the City of \_\_\_\_ or in the County of \_\_\_\_ for teaching poor Boys, or poor Girls, or poor Children, to Read, Write, and Cast Accounts, and instructing them in the Knowledge and Practice of the Christian Religion, as profess'd and taught in the Church of England; and such other Things as are suitable to their Condition and Capacity."

of the school. The treasurer would document all financial accounts, which would be made available for the public to view.<sup>94</sup>

To fill openings at the charity school, children from among the poor of the community were chosen by lot. Some schools accepted only boys or only girls, others accepted both. When a school was in need of extra funds, the minister was encouraged to preach a sermon on charity to his parishioners, and afterwards collect from them contributions for the school. In some cases, the school children were put to work—for instance, some spinning wool, others mending or making shoes, others sewing or knitting—and the income made from that went to pay for their food, lodging, and other necessities.<sup>95</sup>

The SPCK specified certain guidelines for all charity schools. Schoolmasters or mistresses should be 25 years of age or older, a member of the Church of England, “one that hath a good Government of himself and his Passions,” an able teacher, and someone who could write in a good hand and knew the basics of arithmetic. Teachers were encouraged to consult with their colleagues in other parishes, to seek advice on “their Art and the divers Methods of teaching and governing their Scholars,” and even to observe each other in the classroom. The schoolmaster was required to teach his students to spell, read and write, and to do some basic arithmetic. Even in the all-girls schools, the students learned these skills, along with “how to knit their Stockings and Gloves, to Mark, Sew, make and mend their clothes, and some to spin their Cloaths.”<sup>96</sup> Perhaps most importantly, schoolmasters were ordered to discipline the conduct

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<sup>94</sup> *An Account of the Methods Whereby the Charity-Schools have been Erected and Managed, and of the Encouragement given to them* (1705), 2.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 6. See M. G. Jones, *The Charity School Movement: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Puritanism in Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938).

<sup>96</sup> *An Account of the Methods Whereby the Charity-Schools have been Erected and Managed, and of the Encouragement given to them* (1705), 2-4. George Stanhope, in his sermon to the SPCK, *The Danger of Hard-heartedness to the Poor. A Sermon preach'd in the Parish-Church of St. Sepulchers, May 31, 1705...at a Meeting of*

of their students: “take particular Care of the Manners and Behaviour of the Poor Children,” the SPCK told the schoolmaster. “And by all proper Methods discourage and correct the beginnings of Vice, and particularly, Lying, Swearing, and Cursing.” Above all else, the SPCK hoped that students would “learn to govern their Lives.”<sup>97</sup>

Parents were required to do their part to maintain appropriate manners in their children. The society asked that parents “correct their Children for such Faults as they commit at Home, or inform the Master of them; Whereby the whole Behavior of their Children may be the better ordered.”<sup>98</sup> Parents were reminded “to take particular Care of sending their Children clean, wash’d and comb’d to School, lest otherwise they be offensive there: and lest they be frequently exhorted to give them good Examples, and keep them in good Order when they are at home.” So that their children could be easily recognized in public, parents were told to dress them in “Caps, Bands, Cloaths, and other Marks of Distinction every Day, whereby the Trustees and Benefactors may know them, and see what their Behavior is abroad.”<sup>99</sup> The school provided the appropriate clothing for each child, and the community was asked to monitor their actions.

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*the Gentlemen concerned in Promoting the Charity Schools in and about the Cities of London and Westminster. At which time and place the several Masters and Mistresses of the said Schools appeared with the poor Children under their Care: In Number above Two Thousand* (London, 1705), wrote on the education of girls: “A Design at least as useful, at least as necessary, for Them, as for the Males. For this will guard such against those Vices, which are the greatest Reproach to their Sex... And, of how great Consequence this must be, a little Reflection may serve to satisfy us. Since in all Families a considerable part, and in those of meaner Condition, almost the whole Care of the Children cannot but lie upon the Wife. ...The Beginnings of Virtue and Vice in Children, and their early Growth in either, are chiefly proportioned to the Piety and Capacity, or to the Neglect and Ignorance, of the Mother and Mistress of the House,” 24-25. Virtuous mothers would raise virtuous citizens.

<sup>97</sup> *An Account of the Methods Whereby the Charity-Schools have been Erected and Managed, and of the Encouragement given to them* (1705), 3.

<sup>98</sup> *An Account of the Charity-Schools in Great Britain and Ireland* (1714), 8. Also see Richard Willis, *A Sermon Preach’d in the Parish-Church of St. Andrew’s Holborn, June 8, 1704...At the first Meeting of the Gentlemen concern’d in Promoting the Charity-Schools in and about the Cities of London and Westminster. At which time and place, the several Masters of the said Schools appear’d with the Poor Children under their Care: In Number about Two Thousand* (London, 1704).

<sup>99</sup> *An Account of the Methods Whereby the Charity-Schools have been Erected and Managed, and of the Encouragement given to them* (1705), 5.

Thus the aim of the charity schools was not only to educate students, but to instill good habits and manners in them while they were young.<sup>100</sup> Schools required bodily discipline as well as mental discipline. One sermon explained that the schools intended “to bend and fashion their Mind to Virtue; and to keep them straight and steady, till we come to the full Stature of our Understandings, and are able to guide and conduct our selves.”<sup>101</sup> It was important to create habits in people at young age while they were still malleable, having not yet fully developed their rational powers: “in the Years of Infancy and Youth..is then the most proper time to inlighten and fortify the Understanding, and to curb and restrain all our sensual Appetites and Desires: which being tamed at the first, will afterwards submit themselves, without much Struggle, to the Guidance of Reason.”<sup>102</sup> In his sermon to the charity societies, one preacher told parents, “watch over them [their children], observe their Ways and their Tempers,..let them see that they must be governed.”<sup>103</sup>

If poor children were not given a good education, or the means to make a living, the members of the SPCK thought, it was likely these children would grow up to become beggars,

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<sup>100</sup> Francis Gastrell, *The Religion of Poor Children Recommended, in a Sermon preach'd in the Parish-Church of St. Sepulchers, June 5, 1707...at the Anniversary Meeting of the Gentlemen concerned in Promoting the Charity Schools lately erected in and about the Cities of London and Westminster: And the Poor Children educated in said Schools: In Number about Three Thousand* (London, 1707): “But Knowledge alone, tho’ never so well and carefully instilled, is not sufficient to preserve us in our Youth... The best Way then to render our Knowledge fruitful in good Works is, to guard and fence it in from those three main Springs of Corruption and Vice, *Want, Idleness, and Ill-Examples*. And this is particularly provided for in the Way of Education we are now considering,” 9.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. White Kennett said that children should be “well formed” in his sermon, *The Charity of Schools for Poor Children, Recommended in a Sermon preach'd in the Parish-Church of St. Sepulchers, May 16, 1706...The Anniversary Meeting of about Three Thousand of the Poor Children, Boys and Girls, with their Masters and Mistresses, and many Gentlemen engaged in promoting the Charity Schools in and about the Cities of London and Westminster* (London, 1706), 8.

<sup>102</sup> Gastrell, *The Religion of Poor Children Recommended* (1707), 5-6. He also wrote: “What a happy State then must they be in, who, when they come to take upon them the Government of themselves, have the Pleasure to find their Understandings replenished with proper Knowledge, their Passions tractable and obedient to Reason, and the State of their Souls regular and orderly?” 8.

<sup>103</sup> Willis, *A Sermon Preach'd ..At the first Meeting of the Gentlemen concern'd in Promoting the Charity-Schools* (1704), 12-13.



thieves, or prostitutes.<sup>104</sup> Education in youth determined people's characters later on. Children had to be socialized among other well-behaved children so they could fortify each other's good habits. "There must be right Breeding to form the regular Company and Society of Mankind" one reformer explained.<sup>105</sup> The necessary environment would be maintained in the charity schools. A good education would raise good citizens.

The society came up with numerous methods to regulate the behavior of the students in the charity schools. It circulated a form called a "Monthly fault-Bill," which the schoolmaster used to keep the "Daily Account of the Behaviour of the Children under their Care." He was supposed to take attendance twice a day, making a particular mark on this monthly chart to indicate the tardiness or absence of each student. Those caught swearing or stealing or behaving in an unacceptable way, received a different set of marks beside their names.<sup>106</sup> This chart was

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<sup>104</sup> Gastrell, *The Religion of Poor Children Recommended* (1707): "How many Persons, well disposed by Nature, have been engaged in vicious Courses before they had learn'd to distinguish between Good and Evil, between Inclination and Reason? ... How many Instances do we meet with, of such as lament the Misfortune of a vicious Education? ... And how wretched is the Condition of those, who being resolved to break through all the Difficulties into which a misguided and ill-spent Youth hath plung'd them, are forced to imploy the latter part of the Lives un Learning and undoing whatever they have learnt and done in the former? who are at more Pains to correct one vicious Habit, than was requisite at first to confirm them in all manner of Virtue? ... This is the most natural and most likely Effect of a Religious Education: And this is the chief Aim and Design of this charitable Institution, to infuse the true Principles of Religion and Virtue into the Minds of those Children, who, for want of such a particular Care, would, in all probability, have been bred up in gross Ignorance, and abandoned to all the vicious Consequences of it," 7-9.

<sup>105</sup> Kennett, *The Charity of Schools for Poor Children* (1706), 11, Also see Gastrell, *The Religion of Poor Children Recommended* (1707): "Great therefore is the Benefit of such an Education as this; where Children are not only bred up for several Years under the Eye and Direction of discreet Persons, who are always shewing them what is good, and are never seen to depart from their own Lessons; but where, by learning the same Rules, and practicing the same Duties together, their Minds are more easily bent the same Way; and they are, by a mutual Emulation, excited, not only to imitate, but to excel on another. And when every one of them hath so much innocent Company to converse with in their Schools, the loose Examples they meet with, out of them, will not be so apt to lease or infect them," 13.

<sup>106</sup> *An Account of the Methods Whereby the Charity-Schools have been Erected and Managed, and of the Encouragement given to them* (1705), 4. Here, the Account specified: "The names of the Children shall be called over every Morning and Afternoon, to know whether they come constantly at School hours: and if any be missing, their Names shall be put down with a Note for *Tardy*, and another for *Absent*. Great Faults, as Swearing, Stealing, &c. shall be noted down in monthly or weekly Bills to be laid before the Subscribers or Trustees every time they meet, in order to their Correction or Expulsion." The sample chart was attached to the Account, or circulated on its own (*The Orders of Rules of Charity Schools*), with blank spaces for students names, and corresponding squares for each day of the week. In each square the school master could record "a" for absent, "sw" for swearing, "st" for

then put before the trustees of the school, “whereby they see at one View the whole Behaviour of each Child since the last Meeting: And by comparing one Account with the other, do better know what Directions to give the Master or Mistress, and more easily see the Improvement of the Childrens Manners.”<sup>107</sup> In this way, the schoolmaster and trustees could keep track of each child’s progress.<sup>108</sup>

The SPCK set up public examinations for students in each school. These exams tested students’ spelling and reading abilities, and knowledge of scripture. Students were also examined privately before the trustees on a more regular basis.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, the public was encouraged to visit the charity schools and witness the students at their lessons: “Some of them are spelling the hardest Words with more Exactness than many adult Persons can do, who yet think themselves Masters of the English Tongue,” declared one sermon preached for the charity schools. “Some are reading with such an Emphasis and clear Pronunciation, as may instruct, if not shame, those Men and Women who come to hear them. Others are making Speeches, or holding Dialogues, or by Turns rehearsing some choice Parts of Scripture, or likewise reciting some particular Clauses in the Acts of Parliament restraining Vice and Immorality.”<sup>110</sup>

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stealing, and so on. The Account from 1712, for instance, explained: “And when the Mark is placed on the upper or lower Part of the Square, it denotes that the Fault (it signifies) happen’d in the Forenoon or Afternoon. And the Square wherein the Marks are set denotes the Child, whose Name is over against it in the Table to be guilty of such Crime as that Mark signifies at the Time,” 30.

<sup>107</sup> *An Account of Charity-Schools Lately Erected in England, Wales, and Ireland* (1707), 29.

<sup>108</sup> Foucault described these kinds of methods—“micropenalties”—as characteristic of the forms of discipline in the modern world in *Discipline and Punish* (New York, 1977): “The workshop, the school, the army were subject to a whole micropenalty of time (lateness, absence, interruptions of tasks), of activity (inattention, negligence, lack of zeal), of behavior (impoliteness, disobedience), of speech (idle chatter, insolence), of the body (‘incorrect’ attitudes, irregular gestures, lack of cleanliness), of sexuality (impurity, indecency),” 178.

<sup>109</sup> *An Account of the Charity-Schools in Great Britain and Ireland* (1714), 10.

<sup>110</sup> Kennett, *The Charity of Schools for Poor Children* (1706), 6.

The charity school children were marched through the streets once a year in a spectacle to catch the eyes, and hearts, of potential benefactors.<sup>111</sup> Then they were brought to a church, where they listened to a sermon, usually on the topic of the benefits of charitable organizations. In his sermon to the charity schools, White Kennett described the procession of school children: “among all the delectable Sights that can fill the Eyes of Men; I believe none is more entertaining, more ravishing, than what we have before us and around us. A dear and pretious Sight! Some Thousands of poor Children, arm’d with their own Innocence, adorn’d with your Charity, and above all, illustrated with the first Rudiments of Learning, Virtue and Religion!”<sup>112</sup> He explained how “these poor Children, come from every Quarter of our two Cities and their larger Suburbs, to walk in decent Couples thro’ the Streets, led by the Ministers.” It is a remarkable sight, he said, “to see them Cloath’d with Neatness, and set off with good Manners.”<sup>113</sup> The point of the procession was to stir the viewer’s sympathy for the children, and persuade viewers to contribute their money to the charity schools. “My Brethren,” Kennett addressed the listeners of his sermon, “There is an innate Force in some Objects of Pity and Compassion, that does attract our Eyes and very Hearts towards ‘em. This attractive Force and Virtue is in no other deplorable Creatures, so much as it is in poor Children.”<sup>114</sup> In a sermon

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<sup>111</sup> The examination and spectacle are also key forms of modern discipline according to Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (1977): “Discipline makes possible the operation of a relational power that sustains itself by its own mechanism and which, for the spectacle of public events, substitutes the uninterrupted play of calculated gazes,” 177.

<sup>112</sup> Kennett, *The Charity of Schools for Poor Children* (1706), 4. He exclaimed: “O what Christian Entertainment is this! A spectacle far beyond the Vanities of the Stage or Musick House, or any worldly Pomp whatever!” 5.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 6. See also Gastrell, *The Religion of Poor Children Recommended*, (1707): “Now the publick Processions of these Children, with all the other Methods made use of by those who are chiefly intrusted with the Care of Propagating Christian Knowledge this way, must needs excite the Curiosity of all sorts of Persons; and there are very few, I believe, so lost to all Sense of Goodness, as not to be pleased with such an unaffected Appearance of Religion as This: ... Whoever is Ready to distribute, or willing to communicate, will hardly be able to pass by so proper an Occasion of doing Good,” 18.

given at a similar occasion, Francis Gastrell remarked, “It was the Saying of a Learned Heathen, That, ‘If Virtue could be rendered visible, it would attract the Eyes and charm the Minds of all Beholders.’”<sup>115</sup>

The SPCK often made the case that charity schools benefited more than just poor children; they would plainly improve the condition of communities as well. Charity school students were taught not to swear and curse, loiter, disrupt the peace, steal, pickpocket, shoplift or housebreak—which, it was said, were the usual activities of the poor. The manners of most of the poor were so uncivilized, White Kennett exclaimed at his sermon, “I have heard of some poor Families, almost Heathenish.”<sup>116</sup> Thus, an education bringing knowledge and manners would also cultivate civilization in these people. When the children were clean, well fed and clothed, the SPCK said, they would not spread disease. When they learned a trade or were placed in an apprenticeship at the end of their schooling, they would become self-sufficient, so as not to be a further burden on the community. In fact, as honestly employed members of society, former students might even become public assets: “being put into a State of honest Industry, which, with good Instruction going before, is very likely to make them honest, industrious, and useful Men.”<sup>117</sup> And, the SPCK claimed, through this design, greatly needed workers for London’s growing industry would be supplied: “The great Riches of any Nation flow from the industrious and working Hands in it; ‘tis these that carry on the variety of useful Arts and Manufactures, that make Riches flow in upon any People; and therefore whoever takes People out of an idle, vagrant State, or prevents their being in such a State, and puts them in a way of

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<sup>115</sup> Gastrell, *The Religion of Poor Children Recommended* (1707), 19.

<sup>116</sup> Kennett, *The Charity of Schools for Poor Children* (1706), 10.

<sup>117</sup> Willis, *A Sermon Preach’d . . . At the first Meeting of the Gentlemen concern’d in Promoting the Charity-Schools* (1704), 26. Stanhope wrote in *The Danger of Hard-heartedness to the Poor* (1705) that the education in the charity schools imparts “a Knowledge tending to make them just and Peaceable, useful and industrious, necessary to qualify them for getting their daily Bread,” 22.

Work and Industry, is a great Benefactor to the Publick.”<sup>118</sup> The SPCK also considered an education the most effective means of social mobility: some of these children, it could be hoped, might one day become distinguished members of the community. Perhaps even, they would provide charity to others.<sup>119</sup> Thus, the SPCK argued, the charity schools would contribute to promoting the order and prosperity of the community.<sup>120</sup>

### **The SPCK and Prison Reform**

The SPCK also focused on reforming prisons in London. The minutes of the society show that in January and February 1700, its members were actively considering “some means for the better Instructing & Regulating the manners of the poor Prisoners in the severall Prisons of this city.”<sup>121</sup> The society sent Bray and a few others to investigate two of London’s most notorious prisons, Bridewell and Newgate. Bray had already been interested in prison reform. In 1698, he had written in manuscript, *A General Plan of a Penitential Hospital for Employing and Reforming Lewd Women*. With this plan, he had intended to reform women who had taken to thieving and prostituting from want of decent employment. Bray described how these women should be put in a special prison, where they could learn practical skills and receive some

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<sup>118</sup> Willis, *A Sermon Preach’d . . . At the first Meeting of the Gentlemen concern’d in Promoting the Charity-Schools* (1704), 26. Thus, he continued, “this will be a great Charity to the Publick, as well as to the Particular Persons.” Gastrell, *The Religion of Poor Children Recommended* (1707): “The Children that are here educated, will afterwards be distributed into many Families; they will be entered into several publick Societies, and by Reason of their various Employments, and the different Success that may attend their Labours, they will come, in time, to mix in most of the Business and Conversation of the World; and consequently, they will have many Opportunities of giving publick Proofs of their virtuous Behaviour, honest and upright Dealing;” 14-15.

<sup>119</sup> Kennett, *The Charity of Schools for Poor Children* (1706): “For I doubt not, but some one Charity-Scholar will arise into a Figure in the World, and will have a grateful Soul, and he or she will remember and reward the Place of their Birth and Education;” 11.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*; and Gastrell, *The Religion of Poor Children Recommended* (1707): “Here therefore, not only the Ignorant are instructed, but the Poor are also relieved;” 10. The SPCK made clear that its charity schools would benefit “Temporal Welfare.”

<sup>121</sup> SPCK MSS A minutes, January 25, 1699/1700 and February 8, 1699/1700.

education. When they had been suitably reformed, Bray imagined they would be placed in domestic service in England or in the colonies.<sup>122</sup>

Although reformers pushed for the imprisonment of London's worst moral offenders, they also recognized that prisons often exacerbated the vices of the prisoners in them. Wardens were corrupt and the living conditions within the prisons were appalling. On February 22, 1700 the SPCK reported the results of its investigation of the prisons, and put forward some recommended reforms in *An Essay towards ye Reformation of Newgate and the Other Prisons in and about London*.<sup>123</sup> In this report, the wardens of the prison were blamed for "their confederacy with prisoners in their vices," and for corrupting the prisoners, especially the women, by demanding sex from them. The SPCK took note of how wines and liquors were easily accessible in the prisons, how gambling had become the main pastime, and swearing and cursing the common forms of conversation. The report recommended a variety of measures for reforming the prisons. It thought that an oversight committee should be formed, perhaps from "some members of the Society for Reformation," which would appoint prison officers, and require them to report back once a week on the state of each prison. The committee should also have the power to license any alehouses or taverns near a prison, and to collect and dispense charity to the prisons. Officers of the prison should be ordered in a clear hierarchy, "as to be made checks upon each other." A table explaining the respective duties of all the officers and prisoners, and "shewing the mulcts and punishments of ye several offences," should be hung in every prison for all to see. These duties should be read in front of officers and prisoners once a month.

To stop men and women from "keeping company" with one another in the prison, and so that old-time prisoners did not corrupt new-comers, the report suggested "that, if possible,

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<sup>122</sup> Bray, Sion MSS., ff. 65-66; 107-108.

<sup>123</sup> SPCK MSS A minutes, February 22, 1699/1700.

provision may be made to keep every prisoner in distinct cells,” or at the very least, “women be kept in separate apartments by themselves,” and any prison officer who allowed a man to visit a woman, unless his wife, would be punished. Women should be employed in some work, should not be able to remain idle, and should not be allowed to use pregnancy as an excuse to escape the punishment of the law. Officers should be absolutely forbidden to take bribes for ignoring the vices of the prisoners. Wine and liquor should be prohibited within the prison, and “all customs which promote Drinking,” like card games, should be prohibited as well.

Just as the SPCK used records as a way to keep track of and further discipline students in charity schools, it thought records would also be useful for disciplining prisoners. The report suggested “that a Register Book be kept of all the Officers’ and Prisoners’ Names, with the time of the Prisoner’s commitment, and an Alphabetical Direction to each Name.” And it expected that “to each name a mark be affixed, with the date of all their Oaths, Curses, Intemperance, &c.” A mark next to officers’ names should be made if any of them neglected their duties. For the well behaved prisoners, “some mark of commendation be set to their names who shall be of good Behaviour.” When a prisoner went to trial, this register of behavior should be brought and used as evidence of the accused’s character. When prisoners were released, they should be put in workhouses, and then found honest employment. To give extra support to those who behaved virtuously while confined, the report suggested that their names and occupations be listed in some public notice or paper, so that people in the community might be encouraged to help them find employment. If all these measures were taken, reformers were confident that there would be a great improvement in the public welfare.<sup>124</sup> This plan, the SPCK explained, was recommended especially to the city of London, where there were more prisoners than anywhere else.

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<sup>124</sup> SPCK MSS A minutes, February 22, 1699/1700: “Considering the Reformation of Prisons may much contribute to the Reformation of the Publick; for Prisons are one great part of our Correction for Criminals, and, if they are well

## SPCK and the Circulation of Books

Soon, the SPCK expanded its work in several additional directions: it now translated books into foreign languages, distributed books to British seamen, assisted the Protestant communities in Germany and France, as well as worked for local prison reform.<sup>125</sup> In 1701, when Bray formed another society—the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts—which focused on improving the condition of life in the colonies, the SPCK gave up its work across the Atlantic.<sup>126</sup> Above all else, the SPCK published and circulated books, many of these on manners—*Seaman’s Monitor; A Kind Caution against Swearing, and against Drunkenness; A Rebuke to Uncleaness*, and many other similar tracts.<sup>127</sup> On February 29, 1700, the SPCK’s minutes show that a packet of books was sent to correspondent members. These included works on the Societies for Reformation of Manners (Josiah Woodward’s *Account of the Religious Societies, History of the Societies for Reformation*, the Black Lists, *Help to a National Reformation*, and *A vindication of informers*); works on libraries (Bray’s *Proposals*); works on the Charity Schools (*Account of the Charity Schools, Proposals for Raising and Ordering the Schools, the Form of Subscription*); and latitudinarian works (Tillotson’s *Sermons*).<sup>128</sup> The SPCK was clearly interested in assisting with the reformation of manners—but it did so by circulating books, rather than seeking civil justice. On September 8, 1701, a corresponding member, Dr.

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managed, may prove effectually to their amendment; whereas for want of discipline, it now generally happens that Prisoners are made much worse by them.”

<sup>125</sup> The SPCK was interested in making connections with other Protestant groups in Europe. It maintained a close relationship with a charity school in Halle run by August Hermann Francke, a corresponding member of the SPCK. See, August Hermann Francke, *Pietas Hallensis: or a Publick Demonstration of the Foot-Steps of a Divine being yet in the World: in an Historical Narration of the Orphan-House, and other Charitable Institutions, at Glaucha near Hall in Saxony* (London: Downing, 1705).

<sup>126</sup> For more on the SPG, see chapter 4 of this dissertation. In SPCK MSS A minutes, March 8, 1689/1699, Bray is asked “to lay before this Society his Scheme for Promoting Religion in the Plantations.”

<sup>127</sup> Many of these tracts were written by Josiah Woodward for the Societies for Reformation of Manners, but published and distributed by the SPCK.

<sup>128</sup> SPCK MSS D correspondence, February 29, 1700.



Todd from Cumberland, wrote to the Society, “[from] the many Thousand Books distributed in that Diocese...there is a visible Reformation of Manners everywhere.”<sup>129</sup>

Until 1703, the society printed books at their own expense, and handed them out for free. After that, they charged their members a small fee for the packets of books. In 1706, the society published its first catalogue of books, with prices; individually, most tracts were 1 pence each. This catalogue was appended to subsequent annual reports of the charity societies.<sup>130</sup>

The kinds of letters received by the society revealed the concerns of reformers in other parts of England. A letter from Archdeacon Booth in Durham, complained of a group of townsmen who were meeting regularly at taverns to drink and swear.<sup>131</sup> Several months later, Booth reported that the bishop of Durham had “sent lately for all the Constables in Town and gave y<sup>m</sup> a Strict Charge to preserve good order in y<sup>e</sup> City, and to discharge their Duty without Favour or Affection, y<sup>t</sup> when he swore the New Mayor he order’d him to be vigilant in Suppressing Vice and Immorality, and to have a watchful Eye over y<sup>e</sup> Constables, and y<sup>t</sup> his Lordship has assur’d him y<sup>t</sup> he will give as strict a Charge to all schoolmasters in relation to their scholars. That with such a second he hoped to reform the city of Durham.” He aimed “to train them up to the practice of virtue and the detestation of Atheism and Debauchery in their riper years.”<sup>132</sup> The lines dividing the work of the SPCK and the societies for reformation of manners were never clearly drawn.

But the society could also receive correspondence of a more elite character. Arthur Bedford, an active member of the society for reformation of manners in Bristol, wrote to the

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<sup>129</sup> SPCK MSS D correspondence, September 8, 1701.

<sup>130</sup> See, for instance, *An Account of Charity Schools in Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1712), 70-72.

<sup>131</sup> SPCK MSS D correspondence, March 1699/1700.

<sup>132</sup> SPCK MSS D correspondence, On October 13, 1701.

SPCK complaining that “the Study of the Hebrew Language...to be much neglected of late, notwithstanding its great usefulness in Divinity, its Affinity to the other Oriental Languages, and...represents the Bad Consequences of the Neglect of this Study in relation to our Disputes with the Jews, who have been very Instrumental in the increase of Socinianism, Deism, &c.”<sup>133</sup> And one Mr. Burschough from Devonshire wrote the SPCK to “propose that Dr. Pocock’s Arabic Translation of Grotius *de Veritate* be reprinted & dispersed in Turkey.”<sup>134</sup> The members of the SPCK were a cosmopolitan group, and they had their eyes set on the wider world. But to fully see how reformers actively brought their mission across the Atlantic to the inhabitants of North America—the settlers, African slaves, and American Indians—we must turn to Bray’s other organization, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.

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<sup>133</sup> SPCK MSS D correspondence, September 3, 1701.

<sup>134</sup> SPCK MSS D correspondence, July 13, 1700.

## Chapter 4 – Making a Rational and Holy Empire: The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts

As to our holy Religion: When doth that ever appear so glorious, as when it is enlarging its Borders, and extending its conquests over the World? As when it is beating down Ignorance, Superstition, Errour, Profaneness and Irreligion? As when it is triumphing over Prejudices, Lusts, Passions, and Vices of Mankind, and setting up its rational and holy Empire upon the Ruins of them?—William Dawes to the SPG, 1709<sup>1</sup>

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), founded in 1701 in London, was modeled after the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), founded three years earlier. Both societies were comprised of voluntary members from the elite ranks of the Church of England, and both aimed to promote true religion, sound reason, and good manners among poor and uneducated people. While the SPCK established schools and distributed books in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, the SPG sent missionaries to the European settlers, Indians, and African slaves in America.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter offers an analysis of the significant ideas of the SPG from the turn into the eighteenth century until 1730.<sup>3</sup> It shows how moral reformers approached their hardest task: in their eyes, to bring advanced civilization not only to men and women who were already Christian, however rude and ignorant they might seem to be, but to men and women who were strikingly remote, strange and heathen. It argues that members of the SPG aimed to reform the manners of the colonial subject in an attempt to create a unified British identity.

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<sup>1</sup> William Dawes, *A Sermon Preach'd before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, at the Parish-Church of St. Mary-Le-Bow, on Friday February 18, 1708/9* (London, 1709) 6.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the SPCK, see chapter 3 of this dissertation. The SPCK worked in the American colonies as well. Other antecedents of the SPG were the “religious societies” of the late seventeenth century and the societies for reformation of manners; see chapter 2 of this dissertation. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, the SPG established a program to send missionaries to India. In the nineteenth century, the scope of the SPG missionary project widened even further to include other parts of Asia and Africa. In 1965, the SPG joined with several other missionary groups in the UK to make the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

<sup>3</sup> This date is not arbitrary. The Society experienced several marked changes after 1730: the original members of the SPG were no longer active, the Society began to expand its efforts beyond the American colonies, and the rise of Methodism at this time contributed to a change in the nature of the SPG’s rhetoric. Thus, 1730 marks the end of the Society’s “youth.”

The emphasis of the SPG on manners—for missionaries, settlers, natives and slaves—makes sense if we consider that the SPG was an extension in purpose of the societies for reformation of manners. It had many of the same members, and it shared a similar outlook. As the societies for reformation of manners aimed to bring religion and manners to people throughout England, the SPG did so too in the colonies. Poor and heathen shared much in common in the opinion of these society members: both had a rational and good nature, but it needed to be cultivated through an education in correct beliefs and good habits. In extreme situations it needed to be disciplined by law. SPG members often made a connection between their own voluntary society and its two predecessors. One member, for instance, wrote: “That the carrying on of this Work *Abroad* will be perfectly uniform and all of a Piece, with those other good Works, which we have of late happily been carrying on here at *Home*: With Her Majesties *Bounty to the poor Clergy*, with our Endeavours for *Reformation of Manners*, and with our erecting and maintaining of *Charity-Schools*, for the religious Education of poor Children.”<sup>4</sup> And Gilbert Burnet wrote that the missionary project could be considered “A *Reformation of Manners*, which I name the more willingly, because the Designs that way and this which I now recommend, were, as it were, Twins, set on foot near the same time, and chiefly by the same Persons: A *Reformation of Manners* I say, and an abounding in such Charities as this now before you, may be an effectual Means of lengthening out our Tranquility and Prosperity.”<sup>5</sup> Richard

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<sup>4</sup> Dawes (1709), 23. Richard Willis, in his *Sermon Preach'd before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, at Their First Yearly Meeting on Friday February the 20<sup>th</sup>, at St. Mary-Le Bow* (London, 1702), called on all Englishmen, in their respective stations, to help the reformation cause: “Those that are *Magistrates* by endeavouring to suppress *Vice* and *Immorality*, which are, and always have been the great sources of Infidelity,” 16. This is the kind of rhetoric used by the societies for reformation of manners, and indeed Willis preached before those societies in 1702. Dawes preached to the charity schools in 1713.

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert Burnet, *Of the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts: A Sermon Preach'd at St. Mary-Le-Bow, Feb. 18, 1703/4, before the Society Incorporated for That Purpose, Exhorting All Persons in Their Stations, Assist So Glorious a Design* (London, 1704), 29. Also see William Stanley, *A Sermon Preach'd before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, at the Parish Church of St. May Le Bow, February 20th, 1707/8*

Willis's sermon for the SPG made clear that the project to spread Christianity throughout the New World was, essentially, an extension of the project to eliminate irreligion and vice in England. "We ought to consider what we can do at *Home*," he reminded members of the SPG, "for tho' this be our *Country*, yet I am afraid there is still great occasion for our pious and charitable endeavours this way."<sup>6</sup> In other words, both parts of the Empire could be improved.

My analysis in this chapter is based on two sources: the published sermons and pamphlets of the members of the SPG in London, and the letters and journals of the missionaries in the field. Rich or poor, erudite or unlearned, the men whose words fill these pages belonged to the same society, and shared many of the same goals. They were united by a common conviction that true beliefs, rational thought, and decent behavior were essential for the advancement of society both at home and abroad. Members of the SPG justified their missionary project through the production of a sermon and pamphlet literature aimed at the wealthy citizens of England. Their ideas were then carried across the Atlantic by the missionaries, repeated and often altered according to the experiences of the men there, and finally transmitted back to the metropole in the form of letters and reports. Ultimately, this chapter suggests that the philosophy of the SPG can be placed within eighteenth-century discourses on rational religion, the universal nature of man, the progress of society, commercial growth, education, politeness and sociability that were central to the emerging corpus of Enlightenment thought. But it also suggests that the SPG's enlightened outlook was inextricably joined with efforts at social control, imperial expansion, and paternalistic humanitarian relief.

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(London, 1708). Stanley sees the reformation of manners at home deeply connected to the work overseas: "And I dare say, that if *Half*, or a *Quarter*, perhaps a *Tenth* part of what is spent in *Play-Houses*, or lost in *Gaming-Houses*, those Seminaries of Wickedness, in this one City, were but applied to this good Use, it would answer abundantly all the Charge and Expense required," 24.

<sup>6</sup> Willis (1702), 9.

It is remarkable, considering how bountiful in breath and depth the SPG papers are, that little has been written from these sources in the last sixty years. And even the few studies of the SPG from the early twentieth century are much in need of revision.<sup>7</sup> Almost all histories of this organization were written by its own members, and published by its sister society, the SPCK.<sup>8</sup> The two classic surveys of the SPG are C. F. Pascoe's *Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G.* (1901) and H. P. Thompson's *Into All Lands* (1951). These books, the first written by the Society's record keeper, and the second by the Society's editorial secretary, describe in detail the institutional structure of the SPG, but offer little in the way of an analysis of it, especially of its ideas.<sup>9</sup>

Other studies of the SPG prove even more problematic. The earliest of these, *Historical Notices of the Missions of the Church of England in the North American Colonies* (1845), by Ernest Hawkins, secretary to the SPG from 1843-1864, ratifies, through the author's own language, the SPG's imperialist position well into the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> A far less rigorous

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<sup>7</sup> Classic works on the SPG in chronological order are: Ernest Hawkins, *Historical Notices of the Missions of the Church of England in the North American Colonies Previous to the Independence of the United States: Chiefly from the Ms. Documents of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts*. London: B. Fellowes (1845); C. F. Pascoe, *Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G.: An Historical Account of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1701-1900. Based on a Digest of the Society's Records* (1901); Frank Joseph Klingberg, *Anglican Humanitarianism in Colonial New York* (1940); R.P. Stacy Waddy, *A Ship under Sail. The First 250 Years of S.P.G.* (1950); H. P. Thompson, *Into All Lands. The History of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1701-1950* (1951); Margaret Dewey, *The Messengers: A Concise History of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel* (1975).

<sup>8</sup> Those studies that are not by members of the SPG or SPCK were written by apologists for the Church of England. Most of these studies aim to show the vitality of the Church of England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ernest Hawkins, for instance, wrote that "The following 'Notices' will show that the Church of England was not barren of good works during the last century." *Historical Notices* (1845), viii. See also Klingberg, *Anglican Humanitarianism in Colonial New York*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> As late as the 1950s, the SPG was still making the ideological point upon which it had been founded: Thompson writes in his preface, "Religion, our ultimate belief about the origin and meaning of the universe, and of mankind's place in it, is the ultimate base of character, and so of conduct."

<sup>10</sup> Hawkins' preface reads, for example: "Our Colonies in every part of the world are fast growing into great nations; and upon ourselves—the Church and realm of England—it depends to mold their institutions, and fix their principles. Happily the members of our Church are daily becoming more alive to this great responsibility. They see, in the diffusion of our language, the extension of our commerce, the vastness of our Colonial empire, and the

account of the Society, but similarly teleological in its approach, is R. P. Stacy Waddy's *A Ship under Sail* (1950), which was commissioned and published by the SPCK on the 250<sup>th</sup> birthday of the SPG.<sup>11</sup> The most insightful book on this subject is Frank Klingberg's *Anglican Humanitarianism in Colonial New York* (1940), which presents the SPG as one of the first humanitarian organizations. Klingberg claimed that the missionary of the SPG was an "ameliorative agent": as he put it, the missionary "in fact softened the impact of the new [colonial] order [on the natives]. Without him as a religious and social teacher, 'a secularized native,' bewildered by commercial and military pressures, would have suffered even more severely from the barbaric effect of a strange civilization upon a native culture."<sup>12</sup> While

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wonderful facilities for reaching the most distant parts of it, a Providential call to avail themselves of such unexampled opportunities for the furtherance of the Gospel." Hawkins announces his hope that this book will "direct the attention of any to the exceeding importance of laying well the foundation of future empires, by basing it on the unchanging principles of Christian faith and holiness." Ernest Hawkins, *Historical Notices of the Missions of the Church of England in the North American Colonies* (1845), viii; x-xi.

<sup>11</sup> R. P. Stacy Waddy—presenting the members of the SPG as the modern successors of St Paul—tells his readers: "You are invited to read this book so that you may know something of past history and present needs," in *A Ship Under Sail. The First 250 Years of the S.P.G.* (1950). His wish, like that of Hawkins, is that his account will galvanize future missionaries to action. His book contains no references. Margaret Dewey's *The Messengers: A Concise History of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel* (1977) concentrates on missionary activities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It too is written from the point of view of a Christian apologist. She writes: "It ought not to disturb us that the propagation of the Gospel in modern times has gone hand in hand with trade and empire. ... We have no cause to be ashamed that—in spite of all, the most benevolent the world has ever known—made possible the spread of the Gospel through a wider world than St Paul dreamt of." She continues: "Today we hear the Great Commission with different ears. Anthropological and psychological insights open to us dimensions of the Biblical message unperceived by earlier messengers. Those two great modern Hebrew prophets, Marx and Freud, have made us uneasily aware of motives for missions less respectable than those we like to declare. Two world wars have shattered Western complacency and any illusions the Third World ever had about European superiority in anything but the technology of power. All human efforts are ambivalent (including resolutions for 'liberation'): by all means let us humbly confess our failures, but let us also affirm what God can accomplish through his earthen vessels," 4.

<sup>12</sup> Klingberg, *Anglican Humanitarianism in Colonial New York* (1940), 8; 49. Klingberg also situated the SPG's work within the context of British imperial expansion. His words strike the modern reader as markedly whiggish: "The weight of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, as it operated in the Anglo-American world, is not to be assessed solely by the numbers of its converts, nor by the stamina of its missionaries, nor by the size of the collection and the disbursement of funds, but also by the fact that it functioned in a civilization, which, in the last two centuries, has in all aspects of human endeavor played a major part. The S.P.G., and those of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge as well, are, therefore, to be measured not in isolation but must be assessed as vital parts of an expanding world culture. If these Societies contributed to making this Anglo-American world more humane, to mitigating the effects of expansion on backwards peoples, or stimulated and extended intellectual development, or if they aided or retarded imperialism, they were doubly significant because

Klingberg's analysis of the SPG is illuminating, his conclusion is plainly discomfoting.<sup>13</sup>

Recently, there has been renewed interest in the SPG of the later eighteenth century. Travis Glasson, looking at the development of racial difference in the Anglican tradition, has offered a probing account of the SPG's involvement with slavery from the mid eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, especially as it played out in the Caribbean.<sup>14</sup>

This chapter, however, attempts a reassessment of the SPG's early thought. It suggests that the SPG aimed to unify diverse peoples by encouraging the spread of religion, education, and manners throughout the Atlantic. Thus, we can trace in its rhetoric the development of a new imperial ideology.

## **Birth of the SPG**

In 1675, Henry Compton, the newly appointed bishop of London, successfully applied to the king for ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the American colonies. Compton had become anxious about the state of religion in these distant regions. Some years later, he appointed two

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they were operating in one of the most virile of modern civilizations," 4. Klingberg's tenure at UCLA in the 1940s and 50s has meant that much of the SPG archives, which he had microfilmed, are located in UCLA's Young Research Library, facilitating my access to the materials for this chapter.

<sup>13</sup> I am not the only one to recognize the imperialist and religious biases of all of these works on the SPG. John Calam wrote in his *Parsons and Pedagogues* (1971): "David Humphreys produced in 1730 *An Historical Account of the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts*, which told how, through Church authority, the S.P.G. brought tone to an otherwise barbarous America by process of direct cultural transfer. More recently, at half-century intervals, self-congratulatory works sharing this culturally unflattering view of colonial America continued to appear. Earnest Hawkins' *Historical Notices* (1845) celebrated the colonizing as well as the civilizing effects of the Society's American experience. C. F. Pascoe's encyclopedic *Two Hundred Years if the S.P.G.* (1901) chronicled the S.P.G.'S ameliorating effect on colonial Americans in danger of shedding all vestiges of common decency. H. P. Thompson's *Into All Lands* (1951) related the S.P.G. Campaign against crass American ignorance," ix. Calam seems particularly disturbed by this historiography's suggestion that the colonists were not civilized; his own work offers an analysis of the experiences of teachers in colonial America, and does not directly overlap with the subject of this dissertation, namely an intellectual history of the SPG.

<sup>14</sup> Travis Glasson, *Mastering Christianity* (Oxford, 2012). Glasson's work concentrates on the Codrington Plantation in Barbados. When he looks at the origins of SPG thought, he focuses on Anglican uses of biblical history to understand (racial) difference. He also discusses legal measures passed in London, which served to define more narrowly the categories of enslaved and free.



men as his commissaries overseas: one he stationed in Virginia, the other in Maryland. The commissary to Maryland, Thomas Bray, had already written several books urging the building of libraries and the establishing of ministries in America. He had also collected a substantial library, which he brought with him to Maryland. There he founded one of the first public libraries.<sup>15</sup> Upon returning to London, Bray, aided by Compton, formed the SPCK with the hopes that this society would promote the establishment of future libraries and schools both in England and abroad. But he soon determined that America needed more than books: it needed ministers and teachers. He imagined a much larger, and costly, project: the maintenance of missionaries in the colonial territories. Aware of the difficulties of funding this scheme, he drafted plans for a new, officially recognized society in London that would organize and finance missionary ventures overseas. Obtaining the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Compton, and the members of the SPCK, Bray petitioned the king, who granted a charter for the *Corporation or Society, for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* on June 16, 1701.<sup>16</sup> Thomas Tenison, who was then archbishop of Canterbury, became the SPG's first president. Bray, his attention focused now on new projects, soon lost interest in the SPG. But he had secured a solid foundation for this organization, which would remain active until the 1960s.

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<sup>15</sup> For more on Thomas Bray, see chapter 3 of this dissertation. The works mentioned here are: *An Essay towards Promoting all Necessary and Useful Knowledge* (1697); *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1697); and *Apostolick Charity* (1699). Bray's most successful book was *A Course of Lectures upon the Church Catechism*, the first volume of which was published in 1696.

<sup>16</sup> This Charter was written by Bray, Bishop Compton, and Archbishop Tenison, among others. For the Charter, and a list of the signatures on it, see Pascoe, 932-935. A copy of the original printed version of the Charter is at the Huntington Library, and can be found on ECCO: [*Charter granted by William III*] (London, 1701). The Charter is reproduced in the *Account of the Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts, established by the Royal Charter of King William III, with their Proceedings and Success, and Hopes of continual Progress under the Happy Reign of Her most Excellent Majesty Queen Anne* (1706) and in the *Collection of Papers Printed by Order of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts: Viz. The Charter, The Request, Etc., The Qualifications of Missionaries, Instructions for the Clergy, Instructions for School-Masters, Prayers for the Charity Schools, Standing Orders of the Society, List of Members, Missionary's Library, etc.* (1706). William III died soon after he granted the charter to the SPG, and Thomas Burnet, in his sermon to the SPG, recalled: "This was among the last of the publick Actions of a Life that had been all employ'd in defending and Securing true Religion, both here and elsewhere," 24.

The first meeting of the SPG was held in Lambeth Palace on June 27, 1701. In these early years, members of the SPG were mostly “latitudinarian,” or moderate, in their views on religion, politics and science. Although they would have preferred the comprehension of nonconforming Protestants into the Church of England, these men had designed—and now they aimed to preserve—the religious toleration extended to Nonconformists in 1689. With a few notable exceptions, members of the SPG were Whigs; they had supported William’s claim to the throne in 1688, and they would support George’s succession in 1714. More than a few of these members were also affiliated with the Royal Society, and even those who were not, were at least sympathetic to the aims of the New Science as set down by Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton. All of these men were committed to a rational understanding of religion. While most of the Society’s members remained true to certain enlightened principles—most importantly, the universal nature of man—none of them went so far as to advocate for political equality at home or in the colonies. In 1688, these men had become, and would remain afterwards, great allies of England’s political and religious hierarchy. They saw the education of men and women in religion, science, and manners as the foundation for the gradual improvement of society, not for its radical transformation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 1 of this dissertation for more on the latitudinarians. Also see: Margaret Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689-1720* (1976); Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England* (1991); Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660-1700* (1993); G. R. Cragg, *The Church in the Age of Reason* (1980). The first members of the SPG were: Tenison, Compton, Evans, Williams, Fowler, Philips, Hustler, Wheler, Blackmore, Jervoyse, Hook, Sherlock, Stanley, Kennett, Mapletoft, Hody, Stanhope, Bray, Woodward, Butler, Shute, Slare, Harvey, Chamberlyne, Brewster, Nichols, Bromfield, Bulstrode, and Trymmer. Most of these men were also members of the societies for reformation of manners and the SPCK. On their first meeting, they elected officers of the Society; on their second meeting, they designed a Seal, as described in their minutes: “A ship under sail, making towards a point of Land, upon the Prow standing a Minister with an open Bible in his hand, People standing on the shore in a Posture of Expectation, and using these words: *Transiens Adjuva Nos.*” The motto was to be: “*Sigillum Societatis de Promovendo Evangelio in Partibus Transmarinis.*” At this meeting, byelaws and standing orders were also adopted, including a requirement that all members of the Society take an oath. See Pascoe, 6-7.

A central committee of the SPG convened once a month, usually at Tenison's library in St. Martins-in-the Fields or at St. Paul's Chapter House. All members were required to attend the meeting at St. Marylebone Church in London each February. At this annual meeting, a distinguished clergyman preached a sermon, which the Society then had printed and distributed at its own expense, along with a supplemental abstract of its progress to date. It is not surprising that the list of preachers for the SPG reads as a who's-who of the Church of England. The first of these sermons was given by Richard Willis, Dean of Lincoln and later Bishop of Gloucester, Salisbury and Winchester, in 1702. Only the second sermon, given a year later by Edward Stillingfleet, Bishop of Worcester and a leader of the latitudinarian faction of the church, was never published and its contents are unknown.<sup>18</sup> From 1704-1714, Gilbert Burnet, John Hough, John Williams, William Beveridge, William Stanley, William Dawes, Charles Trimnell, William Fleetwood, White Kennett, and George Stanhope each preached a sermon for the SPG.<sup>19</sup> The Society's published works were not limited to sermons: its charter, several accounts, a request

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<sup>18</sup> This was not due, as far as I can tell, from any scandal surrounding the contents of the sermon. The *Account* (1706) tells us: "The *Second* Annual Sermon was preach'd in the same Church, by the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of *Worcester*, on *Friday March* 19, 1703. And the Thanks of the Society was return'd to his Lordship, with a Desire to print the same: And tho' a Misfortune hindered for some time, the Society are still in hopes of the Publication of it." For more on Edward Stillingfleet, see chapter 1 of this dissertation.

<sup>19</sup> These clergymen did not only preach sermons to the SPG, but were also members of it. Willis (1664-1734) was an outspoken Whig and latitudinarian. Burnet (1643-1715), Bishop of Salisbury, was one of the most distinguished churchmen and thinkers of his time. Hough (1651-1743), Bishop of Worcester and head of Oxford for some years, was another outspoken Whig and latitudinarian. Williams (c. 1633-1709), Bishop of Chichester, was a Boyle lecturer, prominent latitudinarian and Whig. Beveridge (1637-1708), Bishop of St Asaph, was a leading latitudinarian thinker, and one of the most important proponents of voluntary societies. Stanley (1647-1731), succeeding Beveridge as Bishop of St Asaph, was another latitudinarian clergyman and a member of the Royal Society. Dawes (1671-1724), who would become Archbishop of York, was an exception: he was a moderate Tory. Charles Trimnell (1663-1723), Bishop of Winchester, was a prominent latitudinarian and Whig. William Fleetwood (1656-1723), Bishop of Ely, was another outspoken latitudinarian and Whig. White Kennett (1660-1728), Bishop of Peterborough, was a leader of the latitudinarians and Whigs in the Church of England, and an important supporter of voluntary societies. George Stanhope (1660-1728), Dean of Canterbury and Boyle lecturer, was another exception: he had high church sympathies, although he translated two books, *The Wisdom of Charron* (1697) and *The Maxims of Rochefoucault* (1706), for which he was accused of propagating libertinism and skepticism. See, J. H. Overton, *Life in the English Church, 1600-1714* (London, 1885) and Abbey and Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols. (London, 1878).

for ministers, its standing orders, and many other papers circulated in the eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

The SPG also kept meticulous records and minutes of its meetings, and copies of its extensive correspondences.<sup>21</sup> By the outbreak of the American Revolution, over 300 missionaries had been sent by the SPG to the American Colonies.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The first of the SPG's published works was a copy of its charter. Copies of this charter were printed and distributed both locally and overseas. The *Account of the Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts...* (1706) informs us that 500 copies of the first edition of the charter were printed and distributed among the members of the society so that they could further circulate them. In 1702, a call for missionaries, entitled, *The Request of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, Concerning Fit Ministers to be Sent Abroad for That Good Purpose*, was printed and distributed by the SPG. In 1704, the first of a number of accounts of the SPG was composed at the society's request by Philip Stubbs, an SPG member, as *An Account of the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts: What the Society, Establish'd in England by Royal Charter, Hath Done since Their Incorporation, June the 16<sup>th</sup> 1701 in Her Majesty's Plantations, Colonies, and Factories*. Two years later, White Kennett, Bishop of Peterborough and SPG member, composed an updated and more thorough *Account of the Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts, Established by the Royal Charter of King William III; With Their Proceedings and Successes, and Hopes of Continual Progress under the Happy Reign of Her Most Excellent Majesty Queen Anne*. That same year, the SPG published its *Standing Orders of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts*, which made public the rules governing the society, its members and its missionaries. Also in that year came out *A Collection of Papers Printed by Order of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts*, which included a copy of the *Charter*, the *Request*, and the *Standing Orders*, as well as "Instructions for the Clergy employed by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts," "Directions for Catechists for Instructing Indians, Negroes, &c.," "Prayers for the Use of the Charity-Schools in America," "A Catalogue of the Missionaries Library," and "A List of the Members of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts." This *Collection* enjoyed a wide circulation, and was updated and reprinted several times throughout the eighteenth century. Finally, in 1730, then secretary of the SPG, David Humphreys, wrote, *An Historical Account of the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts; Containing Their Foundation, Proceedings, and the Success of Their Missionaries in the British Colonies, to the Year 1728*. Humphrey's account is exhaustive, and remains invaluable to any scholar working on this subject.

<sup>21</sup> The bulk of the SPG manuscripts are housed at the USPG archives in Rhodes House Library, Oxford University. These are labeled series A, B, and C. There are around 50,000 documents. I have also consulted microfilmed versions of these manuscripts from the Library of Congress, copies of which are at UCLA. Other manuscripts can be found in Lambeth Palace Library in London. For a catalogue of these manuscripts, see: William Manross, *S.P.G. papers in the Lambeth Palace Library: calendar and indexes*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1974).

<sup>22</sup> See Pascoe (1901), 847. No missionaries were sent to Virginia or Maryland, where the Anglican Church was more securely established. The following were the first generation of ministers sent by the SPG to the American colonies. Patrick Gourdon was sent to New York; John Bartow was sent to Westchester in NY; Samuel Thomas was sent to South Carolina to instruct the "wild Indians"; John Talbot and Thomas Keith were itinerant missionaries; John Brook was sent to East-Jersey; William Barclay was in New England; Henry Nichols was in Pennsylvania; Thomas Crawford in Pennsylvania; and the same for Andrew Rudman; James Honyman was sent to Rhode Island; William Urquhart to Long-Island; and John Thomas to Long-Island; Le Jau was sent to Goose Creek, South Carolina. See *Account of the Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts...* (1706), Humphrey's *Account* (1730), and the manuscript letters. According to the *Account* from 1706, the missionaries received a salary, and sometimes money for other expenses; furthermore: "a Present of Books, (chosen out of an approved Catalogue) to the Virtue of Ten Pound, was made to every one of them, for the Use of themselves and their Successors; and another Parcel of small Tracts and Papers upon Divine and Moral practical Subjects, to the Value of five Pounds, in like Manner to each of

## **“To instruct and reform the world”: The SPG on empire and trade**

The SPG’s project was outlined in a sermon preached to its members by the bishop John Hough in 1705. In this sermon, Hough explained that he and his congregants shared a single objective: “to visit and reform the whole Race of Mankind, to enlighten [men’s] Understandings, to help them to frame right Ideas, and to let them know that God expects from them reasonable service.”<sup>23</sup> Hough’s words made clear that, for the SPG, the ends of religion, enlightenment and empire were indistinguishable. Few of the people listening to this sermon that day would ever journey beyond England’s borders; but as members of a society they would secure the means to send missionaries across the Atlantic in their stead.

As members of this society, they aimed not only to save souls, but also to transmit what they regarded as superior civilization to primitive societies. In his sermon for the SPG in 1706, John Williams marveled at how much of the world continued in its infant state: “What vast Tracts of Land are there yet remaining undiscovered? And what of those already discovered remain uncultivated? And what Multitude of Natives are there that remain as uncultivated as their Lands?”<sup>24</sup> Nowhere was this more apparent than in America. There, where planters had begun to make order out of the wild terrain, the missionary was needed to discipline the savage inhabitants. Despite a focus on the American colonies, however, the SPG maintained a global view of its project. In his sermon from 1708, William Stanley declared that members of the SPG

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them, to be freely distributed among their People and Neighbors in those Foreign Parts.” During the American Revolution, the SPG was temporarily prevented from its work.

<sup>23</sup> John Hough, *Of the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. A Sermon Preach'd at St. Mary-Le-Bow, Feb. 16, 1704/5* (London, 1705), 4.

<sup>24</sup> John Williams, *A Sermon Preached before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. At the Parish-Church of St. Lawrence Jewry, February 15, 1705/6* (London, 1706), 39. He continued: “Nations involved in the grossest Ignorance, that have no other Instructors than a blind, confused, and misguided reason, (if it may be allowed that Name) and no other Books than those of Nature, the Sun, Moon, and Stars, to inform them of a God; and are so ignorant, as to take them and worship them for Gods,” *Ibid.* Williams was a latitudinarian bishop, Boyle lecturer, and good friend to John Tillotson and Thomas Burnet.

were “Helping to instruct and reform the World.”<sup>25</sup> He and his associates were convinced that through the transmission of uniform religion, science, and manners, what was now different, even unknown, in the far reaches of the globe would one day become familiar. They imagined the earth populated by human beings who believed and practiced True Christianity, who privileged their reason over their passions, and who could speak to each other as fellow citizens of the world.

The SPG was committed to the advancement of the burgeoning English (soon to be British) Empire. It hoped that the global expansion of its own national customs, most importantly its own brand of reformed Christianity, would fortify England’s hold on its overseas territories, and facilitate England’s commercial relations with foreign traders. Although the SPG often directed unfavorable words at England’s colonial competitors, France and Spain, its members in London and its missionaries in the field were keen to cooperate with Protestants from other European nations for the sake of common goals.<sup>26</sup> At the same time that the SPG was reaching out to foreign allies, however, it was grappling with divisions in its own country. When Richard Willis gave his sermon, the first for the SPG, in 1702—forty years after the Restoration of the Church of England, and twelve years after the establishment of the Toleration Act— anxieties about religious unity in England still remained high. In this sermon, Willis implored his listeners and readers to “have a care...that you don’t break into *Parties* and *Factions*, but unite your *Common* Endeavours against the *Common* Enemies of your Religion.”<sup>27</sup> The so-

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<sup>25</sup> Stanley (1708), 11. Stanley was a moderate clergyman and fellow of the Royal Society.

<sup>26</sup> The SPG worked directly with protestant reformers from France, the Dutch Republic, Denmark, and Russia. See Linda Colley, *Britons* (New Haven, 1992) on the origins of British nationalism.

<sup>27</sup> Willis (1702), 2. Willis wrote similarly: “[The important] thing is that we *stand fast in one Spirit, with one Mind*; that we don’t break into *Factions* and *Parties*, but with *united* Hearts and Strength promote the Common Cause of the Gospel of Christ,” 6. And also: “I shall endeavour to persuade all that hear me, to *unite* in this Noble Work of

called common enemies of religion could be found at home and abroad; they were pagans, papists, atheists, deists and libertines. Although conformists and nonconformists of the Church of England continued to be divided on many aspects of Christian doctrine and worship, the SPG hoped that these people could at least agree that something had to be done about the truly irreligious, including those who had rejected religion altogether (atheists and libertines), those who had lost religion by way of superstition and idolatry (Roman Catholics), and those who had never received the gospel in the first place (heathens). There was no question that this last group drew the most sympathy from Willis and his associates. Willis pointed out that any success that could be expected in bringing Christianity to the heathen world was contingent on the united efforts of Protestants. “For these Reasons,” he said, “it is the duty of Christians as much as may be to compose all differences among themselves.”<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, the SPG had many detractors—especially from dissenting circles in England and America—who censured it for chasing a naïve vision of a future age, in which all men would be united by Christian beliefs and civilized behavior. In defense of its work, the Society explained that the process of reforming the thoughts and habits of the people of America, let alone the rest of the world, would take time, perhaps even generations. Gilbert Burnet, in a sermon he gave to the SPG in 1704, cautioned those who remained doubtful about the missionary project: “Let not the Objections that may be made against [this project], as if the

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promoting the Gospel of Jesus Christ: And what a Happy Church and Nation should we be, if this were all the *strife* that were among us, which should do most in this Blessed Cause!” 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. However, he continued: “I mean as far as is consistent with the preservation...of that *Regularity* and *Order* wherewith [God] designed they should be *governed*; within these bounds therefore we should all study to promote Love, and Peace, and Unity; that we may without interruption from other matters joyn our endeavours to advance [Christianity] in the World.” Willis blamed the “little progress made in the Conversion of Heathens” to the “Great Divisions” in the Church through the centuries, “little I mean in comparison...of what might have been expected had Christians instead of *quarreling* with one another bent their *united* Force and Zeal that way.” And he also wrote: “That we *be of one Mind and Spirit*, that we preserve Love, and Peace, and Unity among ourselves...are very requisite for our successful carrying on of this work,” 3-8.

Design were hopeless and must be unsuccessful, shut up any Man's Hand or his Heart. Things of this nature must go on slowly, and meet with great Obstructions and many Difficulties, chiefly at first."<sup>29</sup> Skeptics needed only to review England's own history for evidence enough that societies, over time, and, importantly, with the right direction, could improve. As Williams reminded his listeners, "Time was, when the Inhabitants of this Island [Britain] were as barbarous as the *Indians* are now."<sup>30</sup> He and his associates articulated a stadial theory of history, which would be expanded and refined several decades later by Scottish thinkers. Their view was that the history of each society followed an overall progressive trajectory: as a society matured, it became richer and more stable; its citizens more pious, rational and mannered; its sciences and arts truer and more brilliant. And although each society might develop at a different speed, this trajectory remained constant. Burnet concluded his point: "when we consider the gradual Progress, that the civilizing of Nations, and all Arts and Sciences have made [already]...have we not much more Reason to expect Success [in the future]."<sup>31</sup>

Yearly subscriptions, legacies, and donations to the SPG supplied the bulk of its funds for its missionary ventures overseas. Not surprisingly, its sermons took every opportunity to extol the Society's virtues to potential subscribers. Hoping to appeal to rich merchants and traders in England, the sermons often borrowed from the language of commerce—employing notions of exchange and debt—to explain the merits of the missionary project. These sermons reminded their audiences that England had become increasingly wealthy from a surplus of raw materials produced on Indian lands, and from the labor of slaves brought to America from Africa.

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<sup>29</sup> Burnet (1704), 27. For more on Gilbert Burnet, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

<sup>30</sup> Williams (1706), 38. He continued: "And we might have so continued to this Day, had it not been for the special Favour of God and the Industry of those Apostolical Persons."

<sup>31</sup> Burnet (1704), 27-28.



However, Indians and slaves had not received compensation for their part; the balance of this relationship had to be put right. Englishmen owed the Indians and slaves something in return for their land and labor—and what better payment could be offered to them than instruction in Christianity? Such an exchange of spiritual goods for material goods would restore the equilibrium, perhaps even tip the scale in favor of the natives. While the physical profits of planters, traders and merchants could only have temporary worth for them, the metaphysical profits that would be offered to the Indians and Africans would have eternal significance.

SPG propaganda also exploited a growing tension in the eighteenth century between wealth and virtue. It was assumed that the happiness of society depended on balancing the material prosperity of its citizens with their virtuous behavior. But this balance was difficult to achieve: the pursuit of wealth taught men to be selfish, and the principles of virtue taught them to be selfless. Members of the Society proposed a way that wealth and virtue could be reconciled: it was a matter of redirecting some of that wealth to the Society's charitable work with Indians and African slaves in America. Specifically, they urged investors in the overseas companies, merchants, traders and planters—those very men who had become rich at the expense of the Indians and slaves—to be the first contributors to this cause. Richard Willis, in his sermon for the SPG, wrote, "I would in a particular manner address [the society's work] to the Consideration of this *great City* [London], and especially to those who are *grown rich* by the *Trade* of the Plantations, of which I hope there are great numbers."<sup>32</sup> Burnet informed the prosperous men of London—whom he identified as the "great Dealers in Trade, who have had so

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<sup>32</sup> Willis (1702), 20. The importance of London as the center of commerce is also expressed by Burnet (1704) in his sermon to the society: "It is the Glory of this City, and a Glory far beyond the Magnificence of its Buildings, or the Vastness of its Trade, that it is the greatest Fond of Charities now in the World. A Fond never to be exhausted, and of Charities that are neither corrupted with Vanity nor Superstition," 22. See Hont and Ignatieff, *Wealth and Virtue* (Cambridge, 1983).

plentiful a Harvest in Temporal things, from the Productions of those Countries [the Americas], and from the Industry of our Colonies”—that they were “in a more especial manner, bound to minister to [the natives] in Spiritual things.”<sup>33</sup> And William Stanley indicated that great improvements might be made in the world “if we will but a little deny our own Profit...by sending out of our Abundance” financial aid to the SPG.<sup>34</sup> Thus, while the sermons demonstrated a profound appreciation for the bounties reaped from commercial trade and the plantations, they were quick to remind men and women of their Christian obligations, especially to charity.

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<sup>33</sup> Burnet (1704), 22. Others made the same point in their sermons, including, Beveridge (1707), Stanley (1708), Dawes (1709), Timnell (1710), and the *Account* (1706). Stanley wrote in his sermon, “there are *some* Men that seem more particularly obliged to this kind of Charity: I mean such especially as reap Profit and Advantage by Trading into those Parts. Such surely, when they consider it, cannot but be *ready*, *yea*, *desirous* and *glad* to give something to this purpose,” 22. Timnell said of merchants and traders: “it cannot but fall with greater Force upon them; who, by Means of their Intercourse with those Nations, which yet sit in Darkness and the Shadow of Death, have a fair Opportunity of making the Light of the Gospel spring up among them,” 13. And he also said: “This Help is more particularly to be expected...from such Persons as have any Wealth or *Trade in those Countries*: because they have from those Circumstances, by the Direction of Providence, a more immediate Relation to them. And one would always be willing to hope that those Christians, who reap so many temporal Things from a blind, abused, and ignorant People, should be ready to sow some spiritual Comfort among them, and help to Raise them out of the Mire,” 23-24. Beveridge wrote in his sermon, “Now, that we have so many and so great Estates gotten by our Trade with the Heathen, and by their Arts and Labours in all the foresaid Parts of the World. For they who have gotten them, cannot surely but look upon themselves as bound in Conscience and Gratitude to promote *their* Happiness in the other World, by whom they themselves are enriched in this. Otherwise, they have little Reason to expect God’s Blessing upon what they have gotten, either that or any other Way,” 21. Dawes wrote that “[we have] Obligations...to do all the good we can to these Gentiles in particular, for whom we are most immediately concern’d: I mean the Obligations arising from those great Advantages, which we receive, from our Trade and Commerce with these Gentiles. It will be enough barely to put you in mind, that we cannot make them a more rich amends, for all these Advantages, for all these their *carnal Things*, than by letting them *reap our spiritual ones*. And that this Consideration ought more especially to quicken the Zeal of such among us for the helping on of this Work, as do most immediately partake of these Advantages, arising from our Trade and Commerce with these Gentiles,” 22. The *Account* tells us: “[the society] desir’d all their Members who were Ministers and Inhabitants of the City of *London*, to apply themselves to the eminent Merchants of the said City, especially such of them as traded into the Plantations, and solicit them to promote this pious Design,” 25. And the *Account* further noted: that the society’s intension was “[t]o solicit the more wealthy and well disposed Citizens for their Countenance and Assistance; especially those Merchants whom God has bless’d in their trading into those Plantations,” 84.

<sup>34</sup> Stanley (1708), 7-8. Also see Burnet: “I hope none will say, that while Taxes lie so heavy, new Charities ought not to be proposed. The face of Wealth and of Expence that appears over the whole Nation, but most eminently in this City, shews that the Charge we lie under, does not so much as restrain *Luxury*, *Vanity*, and *Prodigality*: And what Shame will it be if *Charity* is the only ting to be restrained by it?” 28. Trimnell (1710) warned those that were stingy with their charity thus: “And as it must be a mighty Reproach to such; the Losing these favourable Opportunities of spreading the Christian Religion: So it will vastly increase their future Account; if it shall hereafter be found, that they not only neglected to improve those blessed Occasions; but were withheld by the Consideration of those worldly Advantages they reaped among Infidels, from extending that Compassion to them, which, in Gratitude to God, and to the poor People themselves, they ought to have shewn, 13-14.”

The SPG further contended that this enterprise would not hinder trade, but promote it. Its work with settlers in America would make those men more honest, and thus trade more secure. In his sermon, Hough considered “how [trade] would advance if our People abroad were brought under a sober Sense of Religion.” His conclusion: “The Natives would then come into their Confidence when they could depend upon and trust them: they would not fly away nor live in a State of War, when they found themselves no longer injur’d or molested: nor would they conceal their Goods or look for another Market when they knew where to deal with Safety and Justice.”<sup>35</sup> Burnet, similarly insisting on the benefits of the missionary project to commerce, wrote, “those who pretend to Calculate [what is] best, tell us, that under all this Charge, the Stock and Wealth of the Nation is not impaired, but considerably increased.”<sup>36</sup> For the SPG, then, investment in their missionary project would reap countless rewards: it would help to expand the British Empire, to fortify trade, and to unify Protestants around a common cause.

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<sup>35</sup> Hough (1705), 24. The SPG also claimed that English political and commercial dominance would remain, and English prosperity would increase only as long it pleased God. There was no better way to maintain God’s favor in overseas trade than by taking advantage of the network of men and ships crossing the Atlantic for the service of Christianity. Dawes made clear that by becoming members of the SPG and thus guaranteeing God’s blessing on their endeavors, merchants and traders would be safeguarding their own prosperity: “this [missionary project] will be a very proper Way of returning our Thanks to God, for those many glorious *Successes* and *Victories*, with which he has of late been pleas’d to bless us; and a most sure Way to engage him, to continue to us like glorious *Successes* and *Victories* for the future; and more especially to continue to us that Trade, with these Gentiles, which we shall be so careful to improve to His and his Son’s Glory.” Burnet said similarly: “In A Word, while our Colonies are as so many Mines of Wealth to us, and while such vast Numbers of Seamen are employed in so many hundreds of Ships as go backwards and forwards every Year in those Voyages, which breeds up a flourishing Nursery for our Fleets, that are the best Defence of our Nation; while we have so many Blessings coming home daily, shall we take no Care to secure those Blessings to us and to our Brethren in those Plantations?” 26-27.

<sup>36</sup> Burnet (1704), 28.

## **“From the strength of their reason and the uprightness of their hearts”: the SPG on natural religion**

The missionary project targeted non-Christians, or so-called heathens, in the American colonies.<sup>37</sup> For the members of the SPG who were committed to a rational view of God, religion and nature, the discovery of heathen peoples posed a serious problem. These men could be certain that a belief in true Christianity was absolutely requisite to an individual’s salvation, yet they were faced with a good portion of the world that had never before heard the name of Christ, that worshipped several deities, and that practiced strange rituals. Less moderate men might have concluded that God had condemned generations of heathens on account of their ignorance, but these men could not reconcile this notion with God’s rational and good nature. Surely, they thought, the good heathens—those who had led their lives with honesty, kindness, and industriousness—must have been saved. As Hough put it, “That the Ignorance of the *Gentiles* afforded them a true, and a just, I do not say a full and complete Excuse, is undeniable.”<sup>38</sup> This

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<sup>37</sup> Although, the missionaries for the SPG were often criticized for directing more of their efforts toward non-Anglican Christians in the colonies, rather than at the Indians and Africans there.

<sup>38</sup> Hough (1705), 5-6. He said that where the gospel remained unknown in parts of the world, “People cannot be said to believe or not believe. For no body can be said to assent to, or reject a Proposition of which he has never heard: and therefore such as Christ has never been preach’d to, are not to come into this account, nor have we Authority from the Declaration of our Saviour to pronounce of them either one way or the other, that they shall be sav’d, or that they shall be damn’d, but it becomes us to leave them to the Judgment of God, in which they undoubtedly safe from Danger of Hardship. And it is a stretch beyond what the Words will bear to carry this dreadful Denunciation of eternal Damnation for want of Faith (I mean of an explicit particular Faith) farther than to such as having had the Opportunity and Means of believing fairly offer’d to them, have yet rejected ‘em. ...[W]e do not know how far a general Faith may avail, where the particular is not possible to be arrived at, nor how far the Merits of Christ may be extended in such a case,” 8-9. Williams (1706) wrote: “As to the Case of the Heathens to whom Christ never was preached, they *stand and fall to their own Master*, and according to that which is *right* he will give them. It is amongst the Secrets which belong to God; and it amounts to little more than the *who can tell*, of the *Ninevites*; and is far from giving such Establishment to the Mind as the Case doth require. ...As for our Parts, we can only judge by our Law, which is our Rule, and so cannot take upon us either to absolve them whom the Law doth condemn, or to make that which is uncertain to be certain. Law is one thing, and Equity another; and as the Law doth not take in extraordinary Cases, so we cannot,” 14. Willis, similarly, said that although rejection of the gospel was one criterion for damnation, “I believe [this is] chiefly to be understood of those who have the Gospel Preached to them, but who *through an evil heart of unbelief* don’t receive it. As for those who never heard of the Gospel, and so have not the guilt of *rejecting* it,...they are *Creatures* of God, and he can find ways to deal with them as a Wise and Merciful *Creator*,” 14.

difficulty was not a new one: there had always been the question of whether men in the ancient world had been saved or damned, but the recently discovered Americas gave it a renewed, and troubling, significance.

What these men never doubted was that the empirical world reflected the rational will of God; that nature, reason and true religion always agreed. It only made sense, then, that there were some criteria by which God judged men who, divided from the rest of the world by vast oceans, had remained unaware of the teachings of Christianity. In their sermons for the SPG, members turned to natural religion as the solution: man was judged according to his aptitude to reason and act morally. Thus, God condemned the heathen, Hough said, if he acted against nature, if his behavior “in some degree was criminal, as far as it was owing to Negligence and want of Reflection, or to the Violence of ungovernable Passions, or to the force of Education and Custom.” Although passions and customs, Hough was quick to point out, “are very difficultly surmounted where there is no known Law to controul [them]”, such as the laws of Christianity, “yet some few have got beyond ‘em, by the Strength of their Reason and Uprightness of their Hearts.”<sup>39</sup> The SPG’s articulation of natural religion, however, posed its own set of problems. Even the most moderate members of the SPG did not want to say that an inherent notion of natural religion—of God, of morality, of an afterlife—was all that was needed for salvation, for this would be admitting to the superfluity of revealed religion, and affirming a kind of deism.

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<sup>39</sup> Hough (1705), 6. He also wrote on this point: “If an honest and virtuous Man, who understands and feels the Frailty of his Nature, finds a *Law in his Mind*, to the Equity whereof he cannot deny his Assent, and at the same time a *Law in his Members* that renders all his Endeavours of Obedience weak and imperfect; if such a Man looks up to God for Help and Strength, and prays that his defective, but sincere Attempts to please Him may become acceptable upon such Reasons and Motives as his Goodness and his Mercy may suggest. This I call a general Faith, where a Man plainly discerns he cannot live up to the Law that he admits, and is therefore obnoxious to the Justice of God, but relies upon his Goodness and Mercy of Relief. This Man we may safely affirm will certainly embrace the Gospel when it comes within his reach; and tho’ I dare not adventure to say, that he will be made a Sharer in Christ’s Merits, without coming to the actual Knowledge of Him, yet undoubtedly he is not to be reckon’d in the Number of Unbelievers, nor have we warrant to consign him to their Portion,” 9.

When Willis gave his sermon to the SPG in 1702, he had already written several discourses against deism, one of which was openly hostile to John Toland's *Christianity not Mystrious*. Willis, as well as most members of the SPG, saw atheism as a foremost pressure threatening the stability and order of English society.<sup>40</sup> Despite the Society's forceful condemnation of deism, it was not difficult for more orthodox minds to detect deistic tendencies in SPG thought. Its members often seemed to be following a particularly dangerous line of reasoning: namely, that although the Christian gospel was a very accurate account of the truth of things, and although it imparted a set of crucial guidelines for good behavior, it ultimately played a supporting role to what could already be grasped by looking to reason and nature alone. It was imperative, therefore, that the Society's sermons call attention to the necessity of the gospel itself for salvation. Williams, keeping to his clear style of argument, explained the error in placing too great an emphasis on natural religion at the expense of revealed religion. "What Doctrine can be more express than the Necessity of believing [in Christianity]?" he wrote. And he reasoned:

Now to what Purpose serves all this? Why so rigorously imposed, if after all it be not necessary, and that a Person may be sav'd of whatever Religion he is? Why should so great a Disturbance be given to the World [by Christianity], and it be in Truth (what was falsely said) turned by it upside down? Wherefore is all this cost, if Faith in Christ was not necessary to Salvation, or that a sober Heathen might as well be saved as *St. Paul*?<sup>41</sup>

Members of the Society were aware that the purpose of their organization was to spread the gospel into foreign lands; their project would be an empty endeavor if reason were not ultimately subordinate to revelation. Williams made this point in an especially compelling

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<sup>40</sup> Willis, *Reflexions Upon a Pamphlet, Intituled an Account of the Growth of Deism in England. Together with Some Considerations About the Christian Religion* (London, 1696). John Moore's sermon, *Of the Truth and Excellency of the Gospel: A Sermon Preach'd before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, at Their Anniversary Meeting, in the Parish-Church of St Mary-Le-Bow, on Friday the 20th of February, 1711/12* (London 1713), also contested atheism, deism, and "free thought." The SPG was concerned that radical sectarians in America were spreading atheism there as well.

<sup>41</sup> Williams (1706), 13-14. Williams was referring to the "Sanctions more affecting and terrible...which concern the Salvation or Damnation of Mankind."

passage of his sermon. In it, he imagined a conversation between a native and a missionary. The native, responding to the missionary's attempts to persuade him to convert to Christianity, remarks:

I grant what you say, that the Christian Religion doth propose many excellent Advantages to those that believe and embrace it; but I have been otherwise educated, and cannot easily part with what all my Progenitors have lived and died in; and must have very convincing Reasons to oblige me to forsake it. And therefore, pray satisfy me in my Doubt, and give me a plain and positive Answer, whether a Heathen continuing so to be, may not be saved, if he take Nature and Reason to be his Guide, and live soberly and virtuously? And why must all the World submit to you?<sup>42</sup>

When William's fictional missionary answers that a Christian would certainly be saved, but a rational and good heathen might be saved as well, the native does not hesitate to reply: "Then let the Fault lie upon me, and if I may be saved in the Religion of my own Country, I shall need no farther Instructor, nor shall I desire any Change." Williams concluded the point of his story: "If this be the Case, the Labour of the Missionary will be at an end; and all the Expense of sending such abroad may be saved. For what is left is not Christianity, but Deism. So necessary is it for all Men to believe in Christ, and to look upon that as a Condition, without which we cannot be saved."<sup>43</sup> The SPG, therefore, was left to negotiate conflicting notions of the natural reasonableness and goodness of the heathen, on the one hand, and the importance of Christianity to salvation, on the other.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17. Members of the SPG, however, did not want to say that all heathens were damned. Hough for one wrote, "If an honest and virtuous Man, who understands and feels the Frailty of his Nature, finds a *Law in his Mind*, to the Equity whereof he cannot deny his Assent, and at the same time a *Law in his Members* that renders all his Endeavours of Obedience weak and imperfect; if such a Man looks up to God for Help and Strength, and prays that his defective, but sincere Attempts to please Him may become acceptable upon such Reasons and Motives as his Goodness and his Mercy may suggest. This I call a general Faith, where a Man plainly discerns he cannot live up to the Law that he admits, and is therefore obnoxious to the Justice of God, but relies upon his Goodness and Mercy of Relief. This Man we may safely affirm will certainly embrace the Gospel when it comes within his reach; and tho' I dare not adventure to say, that he will be made a Sharer in Christ's Merits, without coming to the actual Knowledge of Him, yet undoubtedly he is not to be reckon'd in the Number of Unbelievers, nor have we warrant to consign him to their Portion," 9.

## **“In their outward behavior they must be unblameable”: The SPG on morals and manners**

For a solution to the problem of heathen salvation, the SPG turned to the subject of morality. The question was: what motivated men to be moral? Unsurprisingly, the SPG sought its answer in Christianity. By taking this course, the SPG was following in the tradition of John Tillotson, the most celebrated sermon writer of his time, and Archbishop of Canterbury from 1691-1694.<sup>44</sup> Tillotson had intended his sermons to serve as rational defenses of Christianity. In them, he asserted that only the Christian religion provided a motive for moral behavior: Christianity made clear to people that their present actions would have consequences for them in a future, eternal life. It was in every person’s true interest then to be moral because moral individuals would be rewarded, and immoral individuals punished. As Tillotson put it, religion was “for man’s own interest and advantage.”<sup>45</sup> The motivation for morality was ultimately a utilitarian one: “Every one desires his own preservation and happiness, and therefore hath a natural dread and horror of every thing that can destroy his being, or endanger his happiness.” So that men were moral “who love themselves and desire their own preservation.”<sup>46</sup> Otherwise, there was little incentive for people to suppress their passions, or to give up their pleasures for the sake of a virtuous life. Hough explained in his sermon to the SPG, “*Let us eat and drink for*

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<sup>44</sup> For more on Tillotson, see chapter 1 of this dissertation. Members of the SPG were interested in finding an alternative to Hobbes’s position that only an absolute government was capable of disciplining men’s unruly passions in such a way that they might live socially and peacefully.

<sup>45</sup> Tillotson, Sermon I, “The Wisdom of Being Religious,” in *Works* (1742). Latitudinarians described calculating future rewards in the same way they described calculating profits.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* William Fleetwood wrote in his *Sermon Preached before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, at the Parish Church of St. Mary-Le-Bow, on Friday the 16th of February, 1710/11* (London, 1711), “[Heathens] feel a Sort of War within themselves, betwixt their Appetites, which are tumultuous and disorderly, and their Reason, which would fain restrain them; And altho’ they know not how to deny themselves, yet they are secretly convinced they *should and ought*, are pleas’d when they *can and do*, and griev’d and asham’d of their Weakness when they *yield*. Thus far the Reason and natural Conscience of some Men have carried them, without the Aid of Revelation: And therefore wise and reasonable Men would be glad to be deliver’d from this Bondage they are under, to their own corrupt Affections, considering them as *troublesome*, tho’ not *sinful*, and to be redeemed to such a noble Liberty, as Reason tells them they might and should enjoy,” 7. In other words, Christianity brought liberty of reason over the bondage of the passions.



*tomorrow we die*, [would be] good Advice, if the Inference were true. For why should we not make the most of this Life, if nothing beyond it is to be expected? Or if I am to come to no future Account for my Actions, Why should I suffer the troublesome Notions of Virtue, Justice, or Compassion to stand in the way of my present Interest or Repose?” But, Hough pointed out, “when the Tribunal of God is erected in the Mind, all *these foolish Thoughts Perish*.” In short, Christianity supplied a motive—based on self interest—for moral behavior that was strong enough to preserve this behavior over and against the unruly passions of individuals and the disorders of societies. Christianity made men social so that men could form stable societies. Religion was therefore a safeguard to rational and civilized society.<sup>47</sup>

Certainly, nature did not seem to secure moral behavior. Since ancient times it had been widely accepted that fate did not reward the virtuous, nor did it punish the wicked. As Hough put it once again, “That Providence very rarely judges and punishes in this Life, is so manifest and visible, that the *Epicureans* and *Atheists* of old made it their principal Argument that there was not at all.”<sup>48</sup> Reason, unaided by revelation, was also impotent to move men against their

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<sup>47</sup> Hough (1705), 11-13. Fleetwood (1711) gave a further reason why Christianity secured good morals, manners and civilized society: Christianity established that there is one God. He wrote, “nothing was to be done with the *Gentiles*, till they believed there was but *One God*. This also made good Way for the Reception of that pure Morality, that Christ commanded to be taught: for, as the idolatrous Worship of the *Gentiles* was generally accompanied by Rights, either *cruel* or *obscene*; so the returning to the Worship of the true God, abolish’d naturally those bad Customs. And as Men think they ought to endeavour to resemble, as well as they can, the God they worship; so by having God represented to them, just and true, holy, merciful, and good, they would naturally conform their Manners to those Notions. Which is one Reason why the *Christian* Morality exceeds all others; because the *Christian* Revelation discovers a more excellent and perfect supreme Being, than any other Institution or Religion,” 6. And he similarly wrote: “Christianity was to overthrow Idolatry, root out the Worship of many Gods, and to reform the wicked World in all Instances: It was first to introduce the Worship of one, and the true God into the World, and then to conform the Reason and Manners of it, to his Will, to engage Men to live with one another, like Children of the same common Father, and Subjects of the same Prince, and Servants of the same Master. These were the two great things that Christianity was to do, to convince the World that there was but one God, and that the way to please Him, was to live well with one another, to do Justice, shew Mercy, live Virtuously, and discharge Honestly the Duties of our natural, and our civil Relation,” 4-5. His point was the Christianity was the foundation of society.

<sup>48</sup> Hough (1705), 11-12. The SPG further argued that appeals to history—namely, empirical evidence—could not provide a good motive for moral behavior.

passions. Hough continued: “Had St. *Paul* called the *Athenians* to Repentance, and not offer’d ‘em this Reason for it,” namely, God’s future judgment of them, “‘tis probable he would have found but very little Regard.” Hough imagined the Athenians responding to Paul: “Forsake our Pleasures: Forsake our Passions: Forsake our Interests: And for what? Because you tell us you have Truth on your side, and think you can convince us of Unreasonableness and Absurdity. If that be all, we will not purchase Conviction at so dear a rate, nor entertain a Truth that carries so many Troubles along with it.” Only Christianity, which made clear to men’s reason their interest in being moral, could assure good behavior. Hough concluded: “And therefore it is no wonder that the plain Preaching of the Apostles had such a mighty Force and Influence, above the cold Lectures of Philosophy. The philosophers recommended Temperance, and Justice, and good Nature, and offer’d excellent Rules of Life to Mankind; but they had not strength to carry their Precepts home to the Heart, and enable ‘em to keep their ground there, against irregular Desires and Inclinations.”<sup>49</sup> Philosophy and Christianity might both demand moral behavior, but only the latter could effect it.

It followed that the most sensible way to influence non-Christians to receive the Christian religion was by demonstrating to them, through the virtuous lives of the missionaries, the

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<sup>49</sup> Hough (1705), 13-14. Hough finished his story of Paul and the Athenians: “But when he told them...that every Man should have an happy or miserable share in them according to the deeds done in the Flesh: This could not chuse but rouze the Attention of the most stupefied Sinner, and it then became his Interest to be earnest and inquisitive,” 13. Hough admitted that heathens might have had a dim notion of the afterlife. But this notion was confused at best: “These doctrines were indeed brought to light through the Gospel...Whereas the wisest and most illuminated of the Heathens had but dark and confus’d Notices of a future State, always attended with perplexing Uncertainty; nor could they in their most assur’d Moments ever rise beyond a reasonable Conjecture and a comfortable Hope,” 13-14. Willis (1702) asked people to “consider what they mean by a *Moral Life*, if they mean such *Morality* as the bare principles of *Reason* without *Revelation* would suggest to us, this is not the *morality* of the *Scriptures*...; but if they mean the *Morality* which the *Scriptures* teach us, *that* is founded upon *Revelation*, and supposes a *belief* of the great Principles of the *Christian Religion*,” 10-11. The difference between Christian morality and rational morality was that one was powerful and the other was powerless to move people’s actions. The morality of the Scripture could not be understood without reference to God and his judgment, which, Willis wrote, “are some of the chief Branches of the *Christian Morality*, and without which all the rest would be a *dead, lifeless* thing, of very little power and efficacy for the Conduct of our Lives,” 11. Ultimately, for the latitudinarians in the SPG, Christianity was about securing morality – rather unorthodox.

strength of Christian morality.<sup>50</sup> Burnet stressed in his sermon that “The moral part of the Christian Religion is that which will most effectually recommend it. This is visible and sensible to every Man: none are of so low a size, but they must conclude, that a Religion which makes Men just and charitable, sober and modest, sincere and faithful, compassionate and generous, has excellent Characters on it.”<sup>51</sup> Trimmell made a similar point: Christianity attracted people to it by virtue of its moral precepts—“there is such a Tendency to the present Happiness of Mankind in [the Gospel’s] holy and excellent Laws”—so that when these moral precepts “[were] fairly, and kindly, and constantly proposed, by one that in all the other Parts of his Conduct lives agreeably to them; one [could] hardly help thinking but that...the Hearts of Men [would be disposed] to embrace them.”<sup>52</sup> Good morals and manners, Burnet wrote, “are things that [all people] may be made capable of,” so that “the representing these oft to them must and will, in conclusion,

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<sup>50</sup> Burnet (1704) made clear that arguments based on tradition would not be effective. He wrote, “We cannot offer to the wild Natives of these parts those Arguments that are convincing in these parts of the World, where a Series of concurring Histories, a Succession of many Ages and Manuscripts that appear evidently to be of a great and established Antiquity, give proofs of Facts in the first Ages of Christianity that cannot be denied by those who enquire into them, and are willing to be satisfied about them. But no part of all this can be offered to Infidel and Savage Nations: who know not what Books are, nor what a Series of Time is; and so cannot be convinced by such Arguments,” 16. Rather, he explained, “We have indeed other Arguments that may make a deep Impression on them, if hearkened to.” These were rational and empirical arguments. He specified that through reason, “We may...shew them how preferable our Religion is to theirs: How much juster our apprehensions of God are, and how pure and simple our Worship is, in opposition to their gross Fables, wild Conceits, and barbarous or ludicrous ways of Worship. We can shew them what our Hopes and Fears are with relation to another State: and how much more suitable these are both to the Attributes of God and to the Nature of Man, than their apprehensions are,” 16-17.

<sup>51</sup> Burnet (1704), 18. Burnet recommended that missionaries convince non-Christians by showing them the benefit of a Christian life to the morality and manners of individuals and the stability and flourishing of a society. He said, “We can shew them that the Purity of our Religion is, in that inward Holiness that is formed in our Minds, and that spreads it self thro’ all our Thoughts and Designs, as well as thro’ all our Words and Actions: we can shew them how perfect and amiable a thing this inward and uniform Virtue is, and what wonderful Effects it must have on Mankind where it is received, and mutual Confidence and universal Love rendering all Men not only safe, but happy in one another,” 17. Burnet also said, “The chief strength of the first Apologists for Christianity lay, in the Appeals that they made to the Heathen World, concerning the change that was visible in those who became Christians: in their Justice and Probity, their Humility and Sobriety, and above all things, in their mutual Love to one another,” 19.

<sup>52</sup> Charles Trimmell, *A Sermon Preached before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, at the Parish-Church of St. Mary-Le-Bow, on Friday the 17th of February, 1709/10* (London, 1710), 21. He also said that Christianity was justified by reasonable arguments: “there is such Reason and Force in the Principles and Promises of the Gospel.”

produce great effects among them, especially if they see that the Persons who propose all this to them seem to believe it themselves.” But he warned missionaries that, “On the other hand, all Men will make a quick Inference against a Religion, that consists only in a Name, and in some Opinions and Forms: and that has no other effects on Mens Tempers and Lives, but that they outwardly profess it.”<sup>53</sup>

Thus, for the SPG, it was imperative that missionaries have good morals and manners; the success of the entire project was contingent on the proper conduct of those Christians living in heathen lands. Dawes explained that the missionaries sent by the Society to the American colonies were required “to do several Things, in Order to this very End of bringing over Unbelievers to the Christian Faith; as to avoid all Occasions of *giving Offense to them*, to *have their Conversation honest among them*, and so carefully to discharge all *relative Duties* towards them, that by these Means, they might *win and gain* them to Christ.”<sup>54</sup> Williams similarly wrote: “This being presupposed as the first Thing necessary, that a Missionary be a good Man himself, whose Office it is to perswade and make others to be so.” And he warned that “Vice and Negligence, which often go together, are like a secret Leak at *Sea*, which sinks all at once, and ends in terrible Disappointment. It is therefore the great Care of this pious Foundation, to prevent such Abuses; to send such Persons upon this Design, as may be Examples to others and

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<sup>53</sup> Burnet (1704), 17-18. He said: “For indeed it will be a shameless thing to offer to persuade them to believe and profess a Religion, which, rude and savage as they are, they must needs see in the Lives of those called Christians, that they are not convinced themselves of those very things of which they talk to magnificently to others. Here certainly all the Attempts that are to be made on others must begin,” 17-18. And Burnet rebuked men who had a concern for Christianity “as Men are apt to have for the Honour of their Country, or of their Friends: that they assist at some publick Acts of it, with perhaps as little Reverence and Seriousness, as those of other Religions do shew upon their Solemnities; but that with all this, they are both ignorant of their Religion, and negligent in every performance of it: and in all their Dealings with others they are deceitful and cruel, false and perfidious: and besides all this, are vicious and brutal in their Appetites and Passions,” 18.

<sup>54</sup> Dawes (1709), 9.

that teach over again in their Lives what they have before taught in their Principles.”<sup>55</sup> In his sermon, Trimnell censured all ministers who, by their bad behavior, discredited Christianity, but, he confessed, “they if possible are much more to blame, who, undertaking to preach the Christian Religion where it is not yet known; give such an Idea of it to those they would pretend to convert, by what they themselves do; as to make the *Infidels* think it is better for them to remain as they are.”<sup>56</sup>

When in 1702 the Society circulated a “Request” for missionaries to be sent to America, it made sure to indicate that every candidate had to come with a reference of good character.<sup>57</sup> And when the Society wrote up its “Instructions for the Clergy employed by the Society,” it specified that missionaries be “in their outward Behaviour...circumspect and unblameable, giving no Offense either in Word or Deed; that their ordinary Discourse be grave and edifying;

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<sup>55</sup> Williams (1706), 36; 35-36. He continued: “The next Point in order is, that he be able, willing, and *apt to teach*:... That he be skillful, and know how to deal with Infidels, in order to their Conviction, and to represent to them the Misery and Danger of the Condition they are all in, and be able, when they are convinced to resolve the great Question...*Sirs, what shall I do to be Saved?* That he will understand the Tempers and Passions of Mankind; and that he be prudent, modest, and *of good Behaviour*, and be *gentle unto all Men*,” 36-37. Similarly, Willis (1702) wrote that in order that the missionary project is successful, “it is very requisite, that we live up to our Profession; that...we [do not] bring Reproach upon the Gospel by our evil Conversation, and by that means prejudice People against it... [O]ur lives and our Professions [cannot] contradict one another,” 3-4. And Trimnell (1710): “I trust none that take this Mission upon them, will suffer themselves to fall into any such Courses, as must unavoidably frustrate all the good Ends for which they are sent. It must be confessed, that there are many Difficulties in such an Undertaking as this; but it has also its Advantages too: A great deal of new Matter to work on; and the natural Disposition of Men, corrupt as they are, to have a great Regard to those, who at so much Hazard and Pain to themselves, shew a tender Concern for their Good,” 19-20.

<sup>56</sup> Trimnell (1710), 19. The members of the SPG often pointed to Roman Catholics and radical sectarians in America as examples of Christians who were discrediting Christianity by their bad behavior.

<sup>57</sup> *The Request of the SOCIETY for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts; concerning fit Ministers to be sent Abroad for the good Purpose* (London, 1702). The *Request* asked that potential missionaries be recommended to the society with the following information: The Age of the Person; His Condition of Life, whether Single or Married; His Temper; His Prudence; His Learning; His Sober and Pious Conversation, His Zeal for the Christian Religion, and Diligence in his Holy Calling, His Affection to the present Government, His Conformity to the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church of England. The *Account* (1706) records: “the Society took an especial Care, that such Minsters only should be sent over, who were of a sober and exemplary Life...and who did appear truly qualified both by temper, and other requisite Endowments,” 21. And: “The Society makes sure that before it sends a man as a missionary, he is of a very good character. And it drew up a paper of *Instruction for the Clergy employed by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts*: Wherein they give them proper rules of Behaviour,” 35.

their Apparel decent, and proper for Clergymen; and that in their whole Conversation they be Instances and Patterns of the Christian Life.” It further required “That they do not Board in, or frequent Publick-houses, or lodge in Families of evil Fame; that they wholly abstain from Gaming, and all vain Pastimes; and converse not familiarly with lewd or prophane Persons, otherwise than in order to reprove, admonish, and reclaim them.” These instructions also informed missionaries of their responsibilities: “That the chief Subjects of their Sermons be the great Fundamental Principles of Christianity, and the Duties of a sober, righteous, and godly Life, as resulting from those Principles.”<sup>58</sup>

#### **“A humane, sweet, tractable temper”: The SPG on the American Indians**

The American Indian, as described in the early sermons of the SPG, was a rational man, obedient to the dictates of natural religion. His behavior was polite, his conversation was pleasant, and his dealings were honest. He only had one shortcoming, and it was through no fault of his own: he knew nothing of Revealed Religion, nothing of Christ and his sacrifice. The distance separating the Americas from Christian civilization had rendered this native at once

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<sup>58</sup> “Instructions for the Clergy employed by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts” in *A Collection of Papers Printed by Order of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts: Viz. The Charter. The Request, Etc. The Qualifications of Missionaries. Instructions for the Clergy, Etc. Standing Orders of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (London, 1706) 10-14. SPG propaganda, unsurprisingly, took every opportunity to extol the manners of its missionaries in the field. See, the *Account* (1706), which reports: “This strict Care and Caution has had such a Blessing of God upon it, that most of the Missionaries have obtained in those Parts a very good Report from the Governours and People, particularly the Honourable the Lord *Cornbury*, a great Friend and Patron of those good Designs, in a late Letter, is pleased to say, That *as to the Minister who are settled at New-York, Jamaica, Hampstead, West-Chester, and Rye, he must doe them the Justice to say, that they have behaved themselves with great Zeal, exemplary Piety, and unwearied Diligence, in discharge of their Duty in their several Parishes, in which his Lordship hope the Church will by their Diligence be encreased more and more every Day.* And Colonel *Heathcot*, in a late Letter dated from the Manour of *Scarsdale*, within the same Province of *New-York*, *November 9, 1705*, does assure, “That he must do all the Gentlemen that Justice, whom the Society have sent to the Province, as to declare, that a better Clergy were never in any Place, there being not one amongst them that has the least Stain or Blemish as to his Life or Conversation. And tho’ he is not an Eye-witness to the Actions of any, save those in his own Country; yet he omits no Opportunity of enquiring into their Behaviour, both of the Friends and Enemies of the Church; and they all agree in the good Character of them, and that they use their best Endeavours to gain over the People, &c,” 22-23.

innocent and ignorant, a subject to be admired and to be pitied; his manners were unspoiled by the corrupting influences of society, but his mind was wanting the knowledge necessary for his salvation. This sympathetic figure of the American Indian was sketched in almost all the early sermons of the SPG; the authors of these sermons hoped that their listeners and readers would draw only one conclusion from them: the American Indian was in great need of Christian charity.

The society's view of the American Indian can firmly be placed in the tradition of thought on the "noble savage" that began with the writings of de las Casas, Amerigo Vespucci, Montaigne, and the baron de Lahontan, and continued in the works of many of the *philosophes*, most notably, Diderot and Rousseau. Representations of natives as noble savages were most often formulated in order to criticize the artificial and harmful state of contemporary European society. The SPG's descriptions of natives were no exception: American Indians were more natural and moral than many of their civilized counterparts. But for the SPG, the native's pure qualities made him ideally suited for conversion to the one religion in perfect harmony with nature, namely, true Christianity as restored by the Protestant Reformation, and perfected in the Church of England. And there were reasons why the SPG might hope to achieve a great success with the Indians. The native was Locke's natural man in the flesh—he was a *tabula rasa*, whose innate faculties were undeniably reasonable and good, and thus he was the ideal vehicle through which reason and religion might spread throughout the New World according to God's providence.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Much of what was said in these sermons concerning the American Indian was shaped by the need to convince moneyed men and women that their contributions would support a project which had great potential for success. It is not surprising then that a central theme in the published papers of the SPG was the Indian as a person who was receptive to Christianity. The native's natural reasonableness and goodness, as the argument went, made him ripe for the acceptance of the gospel and the duties of a Christian life.

America's first encounter with Christianity could be dated, with the arrival of Columbus, only a little over 200 years before the SPG first convened. In his sermon, John Williams emphasized the profound isolation of the New World from the Old: "*America* is a Country divided from the other three parts of the Earth, with which it had no Communication, nor had the other any Knowledge of [it] till the Year 1492, and consequently [America] had no Knowledge of Revealed Religion." And although, Williams noted, the Indians and Europeans must have originated from the same ancestors, as did all human beings, their common history had run its course well before the time of Christ. Anticipating the metaphor made famous by Defoe only thirteen years later, Williams remarked, "I know none that have discovered any Footsteps of Christianity here [in America]." <sup>60</sup>

Departing little from the view of natives first articulated by noble savage theorists such as Montaigne, the SPG claimed that the American Indian was particularly suited to Christianity on account of his rationality. God, having endowed all human beings with a rational understanding, had left no person—civilized or rude—unacquainted with the precepts of natural religion. And

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<sup>60</sup> Williams (1706), 25. It was thought that the Indians did share certain practices with the ancient Jews. One missionary in South Carolina, Robert Maule, compared Indian practices with those of the Jews. One shared practice was circumcision. He wrote: "they have some customs among them that look as if they had been derived by tradition from the Jews; they all of them show great joy and thankfulness at the gatherings of their first-fruits, which they express by their feasting, dancing, and other indications of rejoicing. The heads of their families have great deference and respect paid them by their children and relations, who dare scarce to much as speak in their presence without their particular leave and approbation. They are extremely fond of a numerous issue, and reckon it a great virtue among them to have killed and destroyed many of their enemies. Some nations of them do this day circumcise their children, and have still remaining amongst them some imperfect notions of the deluge. I have, in my conversations with some of their old men, clearly discovered their belief of a God, and of future rewards and punishments." SPG MS Letters A, vol. 7, letter 363. Another missionary, Giles Rainsford, in North Carolina, wrote in 1712 that a Chowan Indian he spoke with had an idea of Noah's flood, that this Indian said to him: "My father told me, I tell my son." SPG MS Letters A, vol 7, letter 417. Another missionary, Le Jau, wrote: "That singular tradition among the Indians of a time wherein there was no Woman has been confirm'd to be by some more Indians but somewhat imperfectly they don't know themselves at this time why they do such and such things, at least we and they want Words to express our thoughts. The Indian Children of our Neighbourhood speak English, there is hope that in process of time they may be Instructed; amidst their wild ways of Living we may perceive a great deal of Patience, sobriety, justice and Modesty, their eatables are in Common, their head Man whom ignorantly we call a King has the power over them as that of a Father in his family, but he labours and fares with the rest." SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 5, letter 120, June 13, 1710.



since it was only a small step from apprehending the laws of nature to the laws of the gospel, the natives, as Edward Chandler explained it, needed only to “live up to the Measure of Knowledge already given them of God’s Will” to appreciate the truths of the Christian religion.<sup>61</sup> The members of the SPG assumed that human reason held so much authority over the individual, that unless the individual succumbed to his passions, he could do nothing but conform his thoughts and actions to its perfect logic. Thus, the reasonableness of Christianity would immediately appeal to the natural reasonableness of the Indian. It was hardly surprising then to Williams that, “when the Missionaries came first amongst [the Indians], they received them as Messengers from Heaven, and soon were disposed to be baptized.”<sup>62</sup> One missionary, Giles Rainsford, writing from North Carolina in 1712, said that indeed the Indians “seemed very inclinable to embrace Christianity.”<sup>63</sup> And George Stanhope could write in his 1714 sermon that Indians “may, humanely speaking, be thought at least equally disposed to *receive* the Truths of the Gospel [as Europeans are].” This was true, according to Stanhope, because “the greater the Convictions of Natural Religion any Men are under, the better Preparation they seem to be in, to hearken to God’s reveal’d Will, when it shall be discovered, and duly attested to them.” And since natives often have “a deeper Insight into, and clearer Conviction of, Natural Religion,” they also have “in proportion, a better Preparation to embrace Revealed Religion.”<sup>64</sup> In contrast, for many Europeans, the voice of nature, and with it, of true religion, had become barely audible over the din of a superstitious, enthusiastic, and atheistical society. The American Indian, still so like the original of man, heard the voice of nature loudly and clearly.

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<sup>61</sup> Edward Chandler, *A Sermon Preached before the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (London, 1719), 22.

<sup>62</sup> Williams (1706), 27.

<sup>63</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 7, letter 417.

<sup>64</sup> Stanhope (1714), 8.

Most of all, American Indians were thought to be suited to Christianity on account of their good morals and manners. “The *Indians* in those Parts [are] capable of receiving the Impressions of the Christian Religion, and [are] easily inclined to embrace it,” Williams said of the natives in America, because they have “a tractable, sweet, and gentle Disposition, and [are] endowed with all those Qualities which [make them fit] for it.”<sup>65</sup> Chandler described the Indians in similar terms: “They are noted to be of a humane, sweet, tractable Temper.” In fact, he added, “Their Morals have been a Reproach to those of the Christians, that first came to live with them.”<sup>66</sup> White Kennett, in his sermon of 1712, said that he had heard that the Indians “were very honest, civil, harmless People, that they were not addicted to Quarrelling, theft, or Murther; that they did Marry, or at least live as Man and Wife; one Man with one Woman, never changing till Death made the Separation. That they were punctual and honest in performing their Bargains; and that they were inclined to receive the Christian Religion.”<sup>67</sup> The early missionaries, before many of them became disillusioned by their work, confirmed this view of the Indians in their letters. Robert Maule, a missionary in South Carolina, reported to the SPG on the character of the Indians: “They are for the most part, great lovers of justice and equity in their dealings, and can’t endure either to cheat or to be cheated.”<sup>68</sup>

What was seen as key to the success of the missionary efforts in America was the Indians’ responsiveness to education. Chandler explained that “Teachableness is a requisite Qualification for a Disciple of Christ”—that is, a susceptibility to being molded in thoughts and

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<sup>65</sup> Williams (1706), 26-27.

<sup>66</sup> Chandler (1719), 22. As evidence for this claim, Chandler added, “This is the Account Travellers give of that People [the Indians].” This picture of the Indians, however, was in marked contrast to the one represented to the SPG by their missionaries in the field, as we will see.

<sup>67</sup> White Kennett, *The Lets and Impediments in Planting and Propagating the Gospel of Christ. A Sermon Preach'd before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, on Friday the 15th of February 1711/12* (London, 1712), 21-22. Kennett got this information from Captain Dampier, *New Voyage* (1703).

<sup>68</sup> SPG MS Letters A, vol. 7, letter 363.

manners. It was fortunate for the missionaries, then, that the natives, Chandler said, “want only right Direction, to believe and practice aright.” And, Williams reckoned, if the early European missionaries had dealt kindly and reasonably with the Indians, they would have enjoyed a great success. As he put it, “in all Probability it would have afforded a plentiful Harvest; if there had been due Care taken to win and instruct the Natives...to have made them theirs in Affection and Friendship; and...to have made them Christ’s by Principle.”<sup>69</sup> At the very least, the missionaries needed to speak to the natives with clarity and reason, and to treat them with honesty and kindness.

But, according to the SPG, the first delegates to the Amerindians—namely the Spanish Jesuits—had taken a very different approach to the one recommended by the SPG. As Williams put it, the Spanish brought Christianity to the natives “with Sword, Fire, and Torture, with the utmost Oppression and Barbarity.”<sup>70</sup> Williams was not alone in this opinion; almost all of the early sermons of the SPG attacked the Spanish and Portuguese for their ruthless methods of converting the natives. This was in part a response to the frequent criticisms leveled at the English for having ignored, throughout the seventeenth century, the condition of the souls of the

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<sup>69</sup> Chandler (1719), 22; Williams (1706), 26. On education of the Indians, Burnet (1704) wrote: “As for the Natives, such of them as have not our Language, and are past their Youth, and that come to us full of Prejudice, it is not easie to say, what can be done to them. But if they were justly dealt with, and gently treated by our People; if they saw as much cause to esteem us for our Morals, as they do to admire us for our Ingeniousness; this might dispose them in time to think well both of us and of our Religion. This might give them a desire to come under our Protection, and to become our Friends and Allies: and from hence every thing might be hoped for in due time; of which we see some very promising beginnings already. They might be moved to send their Children among us to be taught both our Language and our Religion,” 21. And he further noted: “This must indeed be a work of time: former ill usage must be forgot: all Prejudices must be conquer’d, by a constant course of Justice and Tenderness towards them. If these Methods were taken, and steadily pursued in a series of some Years, we cannot doubt but the effect of them would soon to appear,” 21-22.

<sup>70</sup> Williams (1706), 26. Kennett (1712) made a similar point by referring to de las Casas, who, he wrote, “condol’d the Misery of the poor *Indians*, that they were hunted into Conversion like Beasts into the Nets and Toils: That their Country was conquer’d and laid waste by Fire and Sword round about them; that the Cross was set up for a Title of the New Christian Possession; and that it was Death for the Natives to remove it. That their best Condition was to be Fugitives and Exiles in some other Land; for they could stay only to be Slaves and Sacrifices to the Will and Pleasure of their new Lords and Masters,” 11.

natives in the New World.<sup>71</sup> Although Catholic missionaries had long been active in bringing religion to the vast pagan regions of the Americas, the SPG attributed their successes in that regard to their cruelty.<sup>72</sup>

The members of the SPG were certain that Spanish and Portuguese brutality had been responsible for turning the Amerindians against Christian belief and practice altogether. As White Kennett stated in one of the most comprehensive indictments of the Spanish missionary project in an SPG sermon: “By the [Spanish] Conquests and Usurpations, in the Name of the Church, it is certain that the poor *Indians* did imbibe a great Prejudice against Christianity: They could not but abhor a Religion that banish’d them, or murder’d them, and took their Lands and

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<sup>71</sup> Dawes (1709), for one, wrote in his sermon: “Let us remember that we are *Protestants*, and as such are bound both, to wipe off that foul Reproach, of wanting a *Missionary Zeal*, for the Conversion of Infidels, which our Adversaries of the Church of *Rome* have been casting in our Teeth: And likewise to prevent Infidels from being made Prey to the Church of *Rome*, that most unsound and corrupt part of the Christian Church, and which, so industriously *compasseth Land and Sea to make Proselytes* to it, by using our utmost Diligence to proselytes them to our *own Church*, the *best reform’d* and *most pure Part* of the Christian,” 21.

<sup>72</sup> The sermons of Burnet (1704), Williams (1706) and Kennett (1712) in particular explained the modest progress of the English missionaries by contrasting their methods of converting the natives in America with those of the Spanish and Portuguese. But all the sermons at least mentioned how wanting England was in missionary work. For instance, Willis (1702) wrote: “The little care that we have hitherto taken of the State of Religion in those Plantations continues a standing *reproach* both upon our Church and Nation: and this is what is often objected to us by those of the Church of *Rome*; We have indeed many things to say against their way of Managing these matters, and in defence of our selves, but after all I am sorry that we can’t give them the only full answer to the objection, which is the denial of the matter of fact.” And, he continued: “They have in that Church many advantages for carrying on such a work which we have not in Ours; in the first place, they have in all Countries of their Religion, great numbers of Persons not appointed to any particular *Cure* or business, who have put themselves out of their own power, and may be sent into any part of the World at the Will and Pleasure of others who tarry at Home...And therefore I hope the *Charity* of our *People* will now help to supply that defect, and take away this *reproach* from our Church and Nation, and that it shall never more be said, that they of the Church of *Rome* are more Zealous to promote *Superstition* and *Idolatry* in the World, than we are to promote the *true, uncorrupted Religion* of Jesus Christ,” 21-22. And Stanley (1708) similarly wrote: “It hath been long made an Objection against us by those of the Church of *Rome*, that whatever other Charities were among us, yet we of the Church of *England* were wanting in this great part of it, that we took no care to convert the Heathens, with whom we conversed, and by Trading with whom we got so much; nor even to keep our own People in their own Religion. ...[So we will have this Society...] And I hope in God, that by sending good Ministers and good Books thither, we shall teach our Converts such a *Form of sound Words*, such a Christianity as the Apostles taught the World, and make them better Christians than the Papists make by their Missions,” 12-13.

sorry Houses in Possession.”<sup>73</sup> The SPG mourned a wasted opportunity to convert the American natives. Williams said that he had constructed his entire sermon in order “to show, how favourable an Opportunity was lost, and how the Natives were eternally prejudiced against Christianity” on account of the Spanish conquest.<sup>74</sup>

According to the SPG, it was not just Spanish cruelty that repulsed the Indians, but Spanish vice. The Spanish settlers and missionaries lacked self control, decency and reflection; they were not sociable or mannered, honest or civil. Indeed, they were at the mercy of their own worst passions. Spanish violence toward the natives was at heart driven by greed and a lust for power. So that, on the one hand, those Indians that could see through the greed of the Spanish

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<sup>73</sup> Kennett (1712), 11. He continued: “That Obstinacy, with which many of them now resist the Gospel is owing to this Aversion and Hatred which they found in their Fore-Fathers, which is improved in their Minds, by what they see, where Popery prevails among them; where the Governours, call’d Christians, are often so many Executioners and Tormentors of them; and where the very Missionary Priests are rather worldly Tyrants and Oppressors, than Guides and Leaders unto Heaven,” 11-12. Burnet (1704) made a similar point. The Spanish treated the Indians, he said, with such “unexampled Cruelties and Barbarities” that accounts of their exchanges “almost exceed belief.” And, he continued, those few Indians, who “escaped that savage Treatment”, which most often resulted in their death, have received “such unconquerable Prejudices against Religion...that ‘twill be a Miracle indeed if ever they came to have just Impressions of it,” 12. Burnet also said in his sermon, that when, “about two hundred Years ago...Great Discoveries were made...of the Western World, of which we knew nothing before”, an opportunity was given to the Europeans, “for here was a Harvest, and that a great one, if it had fallen into good hands.” But the natives fell into the hands of the Spanish explorers and colonists, and although “[t]he poor ignorant Natives were struck with admiration of their new Masters, and disposed to an entire Submission to them in all things, and might have been easily brought to the Faith of Christ,” the Spanish drove many of the natives away by their cruel dealings with them, 11. Similarly Stanhope (1714) said: “That unexampled Avarice and Cruelty, which proselyted Men with Repine and Violence, with Fire and Sword, and Tortures worse than Death, have left such Horrors on the Minds of that suffering People, that...the Numbers these false Apostles have prejudiced against the Christian Name, would far exceed those, whom they have proselyted to a sincere Love of it,” 18. And Williams made the similar point: “upon the barbarous Usage of those Natives, who were destroy’d without any Provocation; when whole Countries were made desolate, like a Wilderness, and the Cities and Towns depopulated; when by Tortures they were compelled to turn Christians, without any previous Instruction, they had an Abhorrence of the Christians, and bestow’d no better a Name upon them than *Yares*, that is *Devils*,” 27. And finally, the Account (1706): “the Discovery of a new World must have open’d a new Scene: It is now more than two hundred Years, since Providence directed us to the Knowledge of America. The *Spaniards*, who were the first Possessors of the *Southern* Parts, did profess a Zeal for converting the poor Pagans to *their* Catholick Religion; but not to mention, that the Corruptions of Popery were almost as gross as the Errors of Paganism; they certainly took such violent Measures, as could not possibly persuade or convince any Rational creature. ...they used all the Engines of Terror, Force and Cruelty; in such a barbarous Manner, that their own Authors have made grievous Complaints of them, and the poor Natives, instead of being reconciled to the Christian Religion, must needs have received the deepest Prejudice and Aversion to it,” 2-3.

<sup>74</sup> Williams (1706), 27.

were disgusted by their vices, and rejected Christianity altogether.<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, the others, susceptible to the habits of the Spanish, adopted many of those same vices, becoming an ever more corrupt people, and far less suited to true Christianity and civilization than they once had been as pagans.<sup>76</sup>

Such naturally good and reasonable human beings, the SPG insisted, needed to be handled according to gentle and rational methods. Members of the Society often contrasted the missionary tactics of the English to those of the Spanish. White Kennett wrote:

I would only observe to you, that the soft and salutary Methods of Conversion, taken by this Society, are of a more Christian nature; are far from breathing out any Threatenings, or any Slaughter, any Conquest or Slavery of the People of the Land. Our Plantations were at first settled, as it were upon *derelict Lands*, whereon the former Inhabitants had been well nigh Extinct by Wars and Pestilence, and the Remnants of them had, for the most Part, retired into remoter, safer Habitations. Our farther Progress in those Countries has been by acknowledging the Property of the original People, entering into Alliance and Commerce with them, receiving Allotments of Ground by fair Purchase from them, taking them into our Protection, and defending them from the Inroads of any other Enemy.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Kennett (1712) described the greed of the Spanish from what he thought was the point of view of the Indians: “The Notions the *Indians* had of [the Spanish] and their Religion, were these: They looked upon them as a sort of People entirely eaten up of base and covetous Desires; and that they would do any thing for sordid Gain; and therefore they have held up pieces of Gold to them in Mockery: *to Christians* (they say) *here’s Gold, here’s Gold!* Intimating, there was the Thing they Admir’d and Ador’d; they knew very well it was the governing Idol of their Souls, and that whatever respect they pretended to God Almighty, it was this only that they Worship’d in their Hearts; and therefore the *Spaniards* have heard them say, *Look upon this Gold, and behold your God.* It is for this that you have subdued us, and done so many Mischiefs; ‘tis for this that you Game, Blaspheme, Curse, Quarrel, Steal, commit Rapes, and practice all manner of Lust and Villainy,” 15. And he continued, getting much of his information from *las Casas*: “The *Indians* scarce know what it is to take away one another’s Goods: They live innocently by their Neighbours, without offering them any Violence or Oppression. And what Thoughts must such People as these have of those that call themselves Christians, when they see them commit all manner of Crimes and Villainies; when they see them guilty of so much Injustice and Treachery; and in a Word, of all the Abominations of which Men who are left from God, and have no Principle of Honour or Conscience, can be capable? This makes many *Indians* laugh at the God we worship, and persist obstinately in their Infidelity,” 21. Williams (1706) wrote, “the *Spaniards*, took another Course, they were unexpectedly fallen into a rich and plentiful Country, where they happened to have Power to do what they would, and they willed to do whatever they had a Power for,” 26.

<sup>76</sup> Williams (1706) wrote: The Spanish “soon shewed, that they sought not them, but theirs; and instead of infusing into them the Principles of Virtue and Religion, they made them worse in their Morals, and as utterly averse to their Religion, as they were to them,” 26. And Kennett (1712) wrote: “The *Spaniards* (says their Bishop of *Chiapa*) have even debauched the *Indians* by the ill Example they have set them, and taught them a great many Vices they never heard of before they conversed with the *Spaniards*. Such as Oaths and Blasphemes against Christ, the Practice of Extortion, Lying, and many other Sins that seem’d opposite to the sweet and peaceable Temper of the People,” 27.

<sup>77</sup> Kennett (1712), 12-13. Also see the *Account* (1706): “when the *Northern Parts of America* were afterward discovered by the *English*, and some little Colonies were there settled; it did soon appear, that the Spirit of the Reformed Protestant Religion was very different from that of the Roman Church. For here, no one Instance was given of hunting poor Souls into a forc’d Conversion, or of putting any one to Death, or to any manner of Torture,

In other words, the conversion methods of the English were sound arguments, good examples, and fair prices, while those of the Spanish were “sword, fire and torture.”<sup>78</sup> However, the English could be accused, as much as the Spanish, of spreading bad manners among the Indians. Kennett again made this clear:

Nor can we suppress the Complaints...against too many of our own People in those Parts; who are said likewise to have taught the poor *Indians* some Immoralities and Vices, not before so much as named among them: Drunkenness, an Abomination they never committed, till we supplied them with the Matter of it: Cursing and Swearing, their happy Language never reach'd unto, till we enrich'd it with Oaths and Blasphemies; besides the Pride of Apparel, the Arts of Gaming, the Devices of Luxury and Avarice, and some other Vanities and Sins which they had never attained to, but by the Imitation of Strangers.<sup>79</sup>

Le Jau reported from South Carolina that the Indians were “a good sort of people, and would be better if they were not spoiled by our bad examples.”<sup>80</sup> Another missionary, Thomas Moor, wrote

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for the Sake and Name of Religion. These softer milder Ways did indeed prevent our boasting of that great Multitude of Converts wherein the *Papists* gloried: but they had however this good Effect, that they left those barbarous People more free and unprejudiced, and fitter to receive the Impressions of Christian Faith and Knowledge, when by Degrees they should be made upon them,” 3. Burnet (1704) wrote, “by teaching Astronomy, and reforming the Calendar, have much recommended themselves to a Nation, fond of an exactness in those things. Surgery and the Knowledge of Physick has also got them much Credit. These are innocent and useful things, and tho' they are not the Signs of an Apostolical Mission, yet they may be allowed as just and prudent means to procure a ready welcome to the Preachers of a new Religion: but the Instructing those Nations in the *Tactics* of War, and in the Inventions of making havock of Mankind, by Bombs and other such destructive Machines, and the insinuating themselves into the confidence of Princes, by acquiring them with such pernicious Secrets, does not look like the Messengers of the *Prince of Peace, who came not to destroy Mens Lives, but to save them,*” 13-14.

<sup>78</sup> Stanhope (1714), 18. Moreover, when the Spanish did teach the Indians, it was not in a way that enabled them to understand the lesson. Williams (1706) wrote: “we may observe, that the Church of *Rome*, by sending Missionaries thither, had other Designs in View; Christianity was professed, but little taught, if we may believe an Eye-Witness *Acosta*.” He quoted from *Acosta's De Procuranda Indorum Salute* (1588): The Spanish taught the Indians prayers and salutations in Spanish “which the poor *Indian* no more understood, than the *Spaniard* understood the *Indian*,” 30-31. And the Spanish priests learned the Indian Tongue, but, “Nay, the Ignorance or Negligence amongst them [the Indians] was so great” it was impossible for them to understand anything of significance of Christianity, 31. Thus, the Indians, remaining ignorant of any real knowledge of Christianity, could not be considered true converts. Also see Burnet (1704): “In some of [the missionaries] nothing is pursued but Gain and Luxury: in others that lie wider, and more out of View, a gross Ignorance and a stupid Unconcernedness in every thing that relates to Religion, is but too visible. They go from hence but ill instructed: and that small measure of Knowledge not being improved by Reading or Conversation, it must wear out and sink to nothing. Their Children must be yet more ignorant than themselves, unless they are better furnished than they are both with Schools and Books. The narrow Provision of those who serve in the Gospel there, makes that they cannot furnish themselves with Books, and the other means of Study, unless they are better assisted,” 19-20.

<sup>79</sup> White Kennett, (1712), 28-29.

<sup>80</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 4, letter 142.

that "'tis from the behaviour of the [settlers] here, that [the Indians] have had, and still have, their notions of Christianity, which God knows, hath been generally such that it hath made the Indians to hate our religion."<sup>81</sup> Over the years, the letters to the SPG from the missionaries in America conveyed an increasingly pessimistic attitude about the potential for spreading Christianity among the Indian populations. The English settlers were blamed for undermining the work of the SPG, as one missionary said, by "cheating [the Indians] abominably in the way of traffick," but even more by "their ill practices in bringing too much rum among these poor people."<sup>82</sup> It was finally this great European vice—drinking—that seemed to have the most unfavorable outcome. As the missionary G. Muirson wrote to the SPG in 1708, "I have taken some pains to teach some of [the Indians] but to no purpose, for they seem regardless of Instruction—and when I have told them of the evil consequences of their hard drinking &c. they replied that Englishmen are the same."<sup>83</sup> Yet another missionary, John Thomas, informed the Society: "Indians are wholly given up to drink, and rum and strong liquor being the only deities they now care [for] or are solicitous to worship."<sup>84</sup> Ultimately the society focused less and less on the American Indians, who they perceived were "wast[ing] away...like snow against the sun," and turned their attentions to the African slaves on the plantations.<sup>85</sup>

### **"As just and honest, as chaste and virtuous": The SPG on slavery**

The Society's sermons defended slavery on one account: the slave trade had brought African heathens into contact with Christianity, thus advancing God's providential scheme for a

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<sup>81</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 2, Nov 13, 1705.

<sup>82</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 3, Oct 15, 1714.

<sup>83</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 3, letter 168.

<sup>84</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 5, letter 9.

<sup>85</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 2, letter 122.



united Christian world. William Beveridge, in his sermon, said that he could only defend slavery when it was recognized as a mechanism by which Christianity might eventually be spread throughout Africa. As he put it,

Now, that such Multitudes of Heathens are brought out of *Africa* every Year, and made Slaves to Christians in *America*, which I verily believe God would never have suffered, but that he designed they should be there all taught the Principles of the Christian Religion, and some so well, as to be fit to be sent back again into their own Country, with full Instructions to preach the Gospel to those Nations, that they also may be brought over to Christ.<sup>86</sup>

Slaves were not described as noble savages, as the free Indians often were. A life of bondage, it was said, had rendered slaves immoral, irrational, and ill-mannered. In a letter to the SPG, Francis Le Jau, a missionary sent by the Society to Goose Creek, South Carolina, expressed his views of American Indians and black slaves. He wrote, “the Indians I have conversed with do make us [Christians] ashamed by their life, conversation, and sense of religion quite different from ours; ours consists in words and appearance, theirs in reality. I hope they will soon worship Christ.” In contrast, he wrote of the slaves: “The Negroes are generally very bad men. I will baptize none but such as lead a Christian life and of whom I have a good testimony.”<sup>87</sup> For Le Jau, as for most of his associates back in London, the slave’s unfortunate condition, not his inherent nature, was at the root of his degenerate state. As Le Jau wrote in another letter, “[the slaves are] generally sensible and well disposed to learn, but it is the

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<sup>86</sup> William Beveridge, *A Sermon Preach'd before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (London, 1707), 20-21.

<sup>87</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 3, letter 141. In general, however, Le Jau’s letters, reveal his sympathy for the slaves, and a determination to convert them. He described his work with them: “Since it has pleased Almighty God to bless me with health I have upon Sundays, after our Divine Service invited the Negroes & Indian Slaves to stay for half an hour. The Invitation to my great Comfort has been joyfully rec’d by above 50 of ‘em. We begin and end Our particular Assembly with the Collect *Prevent us O Lord* &c. I teach ‘em the Creed, the Lords Prayer, and the Commandments; I explain some portion of the Catechism. I give them an entire Liberty to ask questions. I endeavour to proportion my Answers and all my Instructions to their want and Capacity... [T]he most pious among their masters stay also and hear; others not so zealous wou’d find fault, if possible. Their Murmurings sometimes reach my Ears, but I am not discouraged.” SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 5, letter 120, June 13, 1710. Also see, Thompson, *Into All Lands* (1950), 51. As the years went on, Le Jau became more disillusioned by the Indians. Le Jau was a former French Huguenot who had conformed to the Church of England.

Barbarity of their masters which makes ‘em stubborn, not only in not allowing them victuals or Clothes, but cruelly beating ‘em.’”<sup>88</sup> In his correspondence with the SPG, Le Jau frequently criticized master brutality toward the slaves, but he never condemned slavery itself.<sup>89</sup>

Ultimately the institution of slavery seemed to be propitious to missionary efforts. It was thought to be easier to discipline a heathen in the principles and practices of the Christian religion if this person had already been made obedient to authority by his bondage to a master. In other words, the slave, accustomed to appropriating new habits of mind and body, could more easily be converted. In 1706, John Williams noted in his sermon, “Here we may reasonably expect a greater Success in the Conversion of [slaves], than of Natives; because they are wholly in the Power of their Masters; and are not in a Condition to refuse whatever they demand of them.”<sup>90</sup> Elias Neau, one of the few missionaries sent by the SPG to work exclusively with slave

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<sup>88</sup> Le Jau’s 1705 report to SPG, in Appendix to SPG MSS Journal.

<sup>89</sup> Le Jau vehemently opposed—“with all my might”—a law for the punishment of runaway slaves, which he deemed “a very inhumane Law and in my Judgment very unjust in Execution.” This law established that a “[runaway] Negroe must be mutilated by amputation of Testicles if it be a man, and of Ears if a woman.” He told the Society, “I have openly declared against such punishment, grounded upon the Law of God, which sets a slave at liberty if he should loose an Eye or a tooth when he is Corrected, Exod. 21, and some good Planters are of my opinion.” Le Jau then informed the Society of one slave master who had invented “a most Cruel Contrivance...to punish small faults in slaves. He puts them in a Coffin where they are Crushed almost to death, and he keeps them in that hellish Machine for 24 hours commonly with their Feet Chained out and a Lid pressing upon their stomach. This is a matter of fact universally known. When I look upon the ordinary cause that makes these poor souls run away, and almost despaire, I find it is immoderate labour and want of Victuals and rest.” SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 6, letter 396, February 20, 1711/12. In the same letter, he wrote about the deaths caused by Small Pox and fever in South Carolina: “The Surgeons are of opinion that the aire has been infected these 14 years. I took upon a more Immediate Cause that is the Irreligion and Lewdness of too many persons, but chiefly the Barbarous usage of ye poor slaves. I endeavour to urge the duties of mercy towards them as much as I am able...but still I am contradicted by several Masters, but I trust in God these visitations will serve to make them mind better things than worldly advantages.” SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 7, 395. In another letter, Le Jau wrote, “I have in some of my last Letters given you an Obscure Account of some Contradictions I met with concerning some unjust, profane & Inhumane practices which I thought it was my duty to declare against. A poor Slave woman was barbarously burnt alive near my door without any positive proof of the Crime she was accused of, which was the burning of her Master’s House, and protested her innocence even to my self to the last.” SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 4, letter 142, March 22, 1708/9. It is important to note that Le Jau did not oppose slavery altogether, only the more brutal forms of it.

<sup>90</sup> Williams, (1706) 21-22. Missionaries, ironically considering their views of the “Noble Savage,” found their work with black slaves to be more fruitful than their corresponding work with American Indians. For example, the missionary Le Jau wrote from his parish in Goosecreek, North Carolina, that his black congregants outnumbered his

populations, informed the Society that he was confident missionary work in New York would have greater success with African slaves than it was having with Indians—“such a Harvest would be more plentiful than that of the *Indians*”—because the Indians were itinerant, while slaves were tied down.<sup>91</sup>

At first, missionaries of the SPG were optimistic that slave owners would cooperate with them. The religious, moral, and behavioral reformation of slaves, they supposed, would be in the interest of both masters and slaves; it would improve the spiritual, perhaps even the material condition of entire plantations. Ebenezer Taylor, a missionary in St. Andrews, South Carolina, provided the SPG with evidence of moral progress made through the efforts of one slave owner, a certain Madam Haigne, who had set to work instructing her slaves. “In my parish,” he wrote, “there belongs a very considerable number of Negroes that were very loose and wicked, and little inclined to Christianity before her coming among them. I can’t but honour...the Extraordinary pains this Gentlewoman [has] taken to instruct those Negroes in the principles of Christian

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Indian ones thirty to one. Another missionary, Samuel Thomas, was sent to work with the Yammonsea, but he found them at war with the Spanish, and so he turned to instructing slaves instead.

<sup>91</sup> According to Neau, it was first necessary that “some honest Subsistence were allow’d to any good Person, for undertaking the Office of a Catechist among them [the slaves].” And he added that success was also contingent on whether or not “the masters would send, or at least suffer their Slaves to be catechiz’d every *Sunday*; and the Ministers would examine, from Time to Time, what Progress is made in improving and saving those poor ignorant Souls.” As told in *An Account* (1706), 58. Neau, like Le Jau, was a French Huguenot who had conformed to the Church of England. See Neau’s letter from July 10, 1703, in which he attempted to convince the SPG that a missionary to the slaves was needed. *An Account* related that Neau—“a plain zealous Lay-man at *New-York*”—wrote in a letter to the Society that “[t]here were among them a great Number of Slaves, called *Negroes*, of both Sexes and of all Ages, who were without God in the World, and of whose Souls there was no Manner of Care taken. And therefore it would be worthy the Charity of this Corporation, to endeavour to find out some Methods for their Instructions, in order to the converting and baptizing of them, without any Way affecting the Property of their Masters,” 58. The Society decided to ask Neau himself to undertake this mission, and paid him a salary of 50 pounds a year for it. He then received a license from Governor Cornbury to preach among the Negroes, Indians and settler children of New York. He began by going door to door to instruct the slaves, “but finding that to be inconvenient, he prevailed with the Masters to send their *Negroes* every *Monday*, *Wednesday*, and *Friday*, at four in the afternoon, to his House; where he made them begin with the Lord’s Prayer in *English*, and then propos’d the most familiar Questions about the Nature of God and his Works; this small Beginning was to serve as an Introduction to the Creed, and so on to the Church Catechism,” 59-60.

Religion, and to reclaim them and reform them, and the wonderful success [she has] met with in about half a year's time in this great & good work."<sup>92</sup>

But Madam Haigue was an exception. Missionaries repeatedly complained of opposition to their work from slave owners on the plantations.<sup>93</sup> Taylor wrote that, although in his parish there were "many Negroe & Indian Slaves in a most pitifull deplorable & Perishing Condition," they were nevertheless "little pitied by many of their Masters, & their Conversion & Salvation little desired and endeavoured by them." He reckoned: "If the Masters were but good Christians themselves & would but concur with the Ministers we should then have good Hopes of the Conversion & Salvation at least of some of their Negroe & Indian Slaves. But too many of them rather oppose than Concurr with us & are Angry with us."<sup>94</sup> Thomas Barclay, a missionary in Albany, New York, told the SPG that the slaves there had "a great forwardness to embrace ye Faith of Christ & a readiness to receive instruction." But, he continued, some slave masters "[were] so ignorant and others so averse that by no entreaties [could] their consent be had." In conclusion, he wrote, "I have mett wth a great [deal] of difficulty in ye Conversion of ye Negroes."<sup>95</sup> Le Jau expressed similar frustrations. He wrote to the Society, "Several sensible and sober slaves have asked me also to be baptized and married according to the form of our holy Church. I could not comply with their desire without the consent of their masters; but I have

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<sup>92</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 8, letter 357, July 28, 1713.

<sup>93</sup> Similarly, in London, the SPG met with disapproval from investors and traders.

<sup>94</sup> Taylor reiterated that he was disliked by slave owners "for endeavouring as much as I doe the Conversion of their Slaves. And Urging them to endeavour it also. But whoso ever and how great so ever Displeasure I reap thereby, while I am a Minister of Christ, and of the Church of England and a Missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign parts, by the Grace of God, I will Sincerely and Earnestly endeavour the Conversions & Salvation of these my poor fellow Creatures." SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 8, 357, July 28, 1713.

<sup>95</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 9, letter 145, June 29, 1714.

exhorted them to perseverance and patience.” In the end, however, he reported, “the masters are unwilling, most of them.” And he admitted, “what I do out of Charity is not well received.”<sup>96</sup>

In London, members of the Society took notice of the missionaries’ grievances. The *Abstract*, issued by the SPG in 1715 as a summary of its activities, claimed, “That the great Obstruction to the *Conversion of Slaves* especially, lies at the Door of their Covetous, Atheistical, and Ungodly Masters.”<sup>97</sup> In his sermon for the SPG in 1711, William Fleetwood expressed his regret that resistance from masters to the conversion of slaves had become “so common in all our *Plantations* abroad, that I have reason to doubt, whether there be any Exception of any [Englishmen], who cause their Slaves to be Baptized.”<sup>98</sup> Although this opposition came primarily from slave owners in the colonies, it could also come from English traders and investors, who feared that the education and conversion of slaves might eventually ebb the flow of wealth issuing from slave labor. Fleetwood framed his entire sermon as a challenge to widespread opposition to baptizing slaves in America. This sermon became an indispensable piece of propaganda for the SPG, and it enjoyed an especially wide circulation. One missionary, Giles Ransford, in Chowan, North Carolina wrote in 1712, “[I] prevailed on Mr. Martin [a slave owner] to let me baptize three of his Negroes 2 Women and a boy. All the

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<sup>96</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 4, letter 142, March 22, 1708/9. Le Jau wrote, “as I fear’d the Negroes and Indian Slaves should not be sent to be Instructed. I must give the melancholy account that it has so happened. Yet I will not be discouraged but will take all opportunities and will use all manner of means as God pleases to enable me to serve those poor Souls. Their working upon Sundays for their maintenance and their having Wives or Husbands at a great Distance from their Masters plantations, in my humble Judgment, dos much harm and hinders much good.” SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 4, letter 142, March 22, 1708/9.

<sup>97</sup> *An Abstract of the Proceedings of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, In the Year of our Lord 1715* (London, 1716), 12. It also affirmed that the opposition by slave masters to slave conversion was “often represented from the *Press*, and in *Conversation* almost every where.”

<sup>98</sup> William Fleetwood, *A Sermon Preached before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, at the Parish Church of St. Mary-Le-Bow, on Friday the 16th of February, 1710/11* (London, 1711), 15.

Arguments I cou'd make use of would Scarce Effect it, till Bishop Fleetwood's Sermon preach'd before the Society turn'd ye Scale."<sup>99</sup>

Slave owners often prevented their black slaves from being baptized by claiming that slaves were of a subhuman species, and therefore, could not become Christians. Williams explained in his sermon: "The Negroes and Slaves, are for the most part treated...by some as if they were a different Species, as they are of a different Colour from the rest of Mankind; and are too often discouraged, and refused to be made Christians."<sup>100</sup> The missionaries in America confirmed this in their letters. Le Jau reported to the Society: "Many Masters can't be perswaded that Negroes and Indians are otherwise than Beasts, and use them like such. I endeavour to let them know better things."<sup>101</sup> In another of his letters, Le Jau recounted what one woman asked upon hearing that her slaves might be baptized: "What! Is it possible that any of my slaves could go to heaven, and must I see them there?"<sup>102</sup>

Hostile to this notion that black slaves were not fully human, the Society's sermons and pamphlets argued that all men, free or enslaved, were fundamentally the same—they were equally created by God, they were equally endowed with the capacity to reason, they were equally required to live a moral life—and only circumstances rendered men different. Slave owners, blinded by their material interests, were unable to view their slaves in a sensible light. As Le Jau wrote to the Society from South Carolina, "I dayly perceive that many things are done

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<sup>99</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 7, letter 417, July 25, 1712. The arguments made in this sermon, however, were not entirely original to Fleetwood: many bore similarities to those made in several earlier SPG sermons, notably those in the sermons of John Williams (1706) and William Beveridge (1707).

<sup>100</sup> Williams (1706), 20.

<sup>101</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 4, letter 142, March 22, 1708/9.

<sup>102</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 7, letter 395, February 20, 1711/12.

here out of a Worldly and Interested Principle.”<sup>103</sup> In a remarkable passage of his sermon, Fleetwood insisted that if slave masters were to observe without prejudice “those unhappy *Creatures*, whom they use cruelly”, they would

see them equally the Workmanship of God, with themselves; endued with the same Faculties, and intellectual Powers; Bodies of the same Flesh and Blood, and Souls as certainly immortal: These People were made to be as Happy as themselves, and are as capable of being so; and however hard their Condition be in this World, with respect to their Captivity and Subjection, they were to be as Just and Honest, as Chaste and Virtuous, as Godly and Religious as themselves.<sup>104</sup>

George Stanhope made a similar point in his sermon of 1714: “Birth and Fortune, Climate and Complection, Barbarism and Servitude, are only Circumstantial Differences; such as ought not to be made too great Reckoning of, when the Essential Parts continue the same.”<sup>105</sup> He admitted that in their present condition, slaves did not always appear fully human—“Slaves, it is true, they are, and Negroes; wild and untaught, exposed to common Sale, and wrought like Beasts of Burden.” But, he emphasized, they nevertheless shared in a common humanity. He told all Christians: “Is it nothing to you, that they are created by the same God, formed of the same common Ancestor, endued with the same Soul, the same Capacities of immortal Happiness? Nay, which should touch us more tenderly than all the rest, They also are redeemed by the same Precious Ransom.”<sup>106</sup> Slaves—their inherent qualities good, but their beliefs and habits more fit

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<sup>103</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 4, letter 142, March 22, 1708/9.

<sup>104</sup> Fleetwood (1711), 15-16.

<sup>105</sup> George Stanhope, *The Early Conversion of Islanders, a Wise Expedient for Propagating Christianity* (London, 1714), 17.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17. He also wrote: “And this is the true Light to view these *Creatures* in; that They, by whom You subsist, may not be suffered to perish; nor your Salvation hazarded, by obstructing, or not promoting Theirs, for whom the Son of God did disdain to shed his Blood,” 17. Fleetwood (1711) made a similar point: masters and slaves, he wrote, “were bought with the same Price, purchased with the same Blood of Christ, their common Saviour and Redeemer; and in order to all this, they were to have the Means of Salvation put into their Hands, they were to be instructed in the Faith of *Christ*, to have the Terms and Conditions fairly offered and proposed to them,” 16. Thus, he challenged slave owners who remained resistant to the efforts of the SPG: “Let any of these cruel Masters tell us, what part of all these Blessings were not intended for their unhappy Slaves by God, purchased for them by the Blood of Christ, and which they are not equally capable of enjoying with themselves?” 16. Fleetwood also warned slave masters that if they refused to instruct their slaves in the Christian religion, they would be hindering God’s providence and the progress of history, and they certainly would not be rewarded in the next life. “What

for beasts than men—were in need of an education in religion and manners. The SPG intended to Christianize and civilize slaves, so that these people might realize their potential as rational and moral human beings. Stanhope concluded his argument in favor of the conversion of slaves: “A good Man will find but too much Ground for Grief and Pity, but none at all for Neglect, Contempt, or inhuman Treatment, even in the meanest and most abject of his own *Species*. He will observe, with Holy Indignation, the wretched Degeneracy of Human Nature, when uncultivated and left to itself; and will be very solicitous to restore it to its due Honour.”<sup>107</sup>

Another objection to the conversion of slaves was the one that the missionaries heard above all from owners on the plantations. This objection was based on the notion that Christians could not also be slaves, and so a slave, upon being baptized, had immediately to become free.<sup>108</sup> James Adams, a missionary in North Carolina wrote in 1709 that indeed “masters would by no means permit [slaves] to be baptized, having a false notion that a christened slave is by law free.”<sup>109</sup> And Elias Neau, writing from New York, informed the Society, “That great Impediment to this good Design, was a vulgar Prejudice in those Parts, that if the *Negroes* were baptized, they

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Account then, will these Masters give of *themselves*, who are the Occasion and the Instruments of bringing these unhappy People, from a Country where the *Name of Christ* is never heard, or call'd upon, into a Country where *Christians* govern all, and *Christ* is call'd their *Lord and Master*, and yet will not permit these Slaves to be Instructed, and become the Servants of this heavenly *Master*?" And further: "They hope, 'tis likely, *God* will be Merciful to these unhappy Creatures, tho' *they* themselves will not be so: Their Hope is good; but they have Reason to fear *God* may deny that Mercy to themselves, which they deny to others." Fleetwood wrote of slave masters, who were "excluding from its [heaven's] Gates those who would gladly enter if they might, and exercising no less Cruelty to their Souls (as far as they are able) than to their Bodies...[o]ne may ask with Indignation indeed, what such People think of *Christ*? But 'tis more proper to say, they think not at all of Him: For if they would consider Him in any Quality or Capacity whatever...they would no more venture to lay an Impediment in any one's way to Conversion, than they would throw themselves into the Fire deliberately. ... And no Man living can assign a better and more justifiable Cause, for *God's* withholding Mercy from a *Christian*, than that *Christian's* with-holding the Mercy of *Christianity* from an *Unbeliever*," 16-17.

<sup>107</sup> Stanhope (1714), 17.

<sup>108</sup> The masters' objection, as Fleetwood (1711) stated it, was—"were their Salves *Christians*, they would immediately, upon their Baptism, become *Free*," 18.

<sup>109</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 5, letter 102.



would cease to be Slaves; tho' neither the Law nor the Gospel does authorize any such Opinion."<sup>110</sup>

The Society's members and its missionaries frequently argued in response that the baptism of slaves did not set them free. Fleetwood made absolutely clear that masters should have "no fear of losing the Service and Profit of their Slaves, by letting them become *Christians*. He explained that "Their Avarice and Cruelty are grounded on a certain Mistake: They are neither prohibited by the Laws of *God*, nor those of the *Land*, from keeping *Christian Slaves*; their Slaves are no more at Liberty after they are Baptized, than they were before."<sup>111</sup> A missionary, Thomas Barclay, in Albany, New York, assured the Society that "ye first thing I inculcate upon [the slaves] is that by being baptiz'd they are not free. I am oblig'd wth ye greatest Caution to manage this Work, & I have publickly declared that I will admitt none of them into ye Church by baptism till I have obtained their Masters consent, yea I send them home without Instruction who cannot have their Masters allowance to come."<sup>112</sup> But although the laws of Christianity did not require that a person be free in order to be a Christian, Fleetwood reminded his listeners and readers that the legitimacy of slavery was dependent on the civil laws.

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<sup>110</sup> *An Account* (1706), 59.

<sup>111</sup> Fleetwood (1711), 20. This, he says, is "not the meaning of *Christian Liberty*; the Liberty wherewith *Christ* had made them Free, was Freedom from their Sins, Freedom from the Fears of Death, and everlasting Misery, and not from any State of Life, in which they had either voluntarily engaged themselves, or were fallen into through their Misfortune." He explained: "The Liberty of Christianity is entirely Spiritual," 20. What masters think about conversion, and thus hinder conversion of slaves. Fleetwood: "But this, I say, is a Mistake common to Masters and to Servants, and occasions the latter to seek for Baptism purely for the sake of Liberty, without Regard to the true unspeakable Advantages of Christianity; and occasions the former to hinder them, by all Means, from being Baptized, for fear of losing their Service; and with as little regard to the Spiritual Privileges, which they thereby with-hold from those unhappy People: Whereas if both were undeceived, the Masters would be no losers, and the Servants the greatest gainers in the World," 23. Fleetwood explained a related worry of slave owners: "The *Third* and last Pretense, is built upon the same Bottom, *i.e.* that of Interest: For, since they bought their Slaves for Money, they should be Losers by permitting them to be made Christians, since after that, they could not part with them for Money; it being, they say, Unlawful to sell *Christians*," 26. Some colonies passed laws specifying that a baptized slave did not become free.

<sup>112</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 9, letter 145, June 29, 1714.

Britain, having laws against slavery, Fleetwood indicated, was a civilized nation; America was not yet so. His hope was that slavery would be only a temporary institution, and some day those slaves, having been made Christian, would become freemen.<sup>113</sup>

Even Fleetwood felt he had to be careful not to antagonize merchants and traders who might consider slavery to be fundamental to the growing English overseas economy. Fleetwood explained himself:

I would not have any one's Zeal for Religion (much less my own) so far outrun their Judgment in these matters, as to cause them to forget that we are a People who live and maintain our selves by *Trade*; and that if *Trade* be lost, or overmuch discouraged, we are a ruined Nation; and shall our selves in time become as very *Slaves*, as those I am speaking of, tho' in another kind: I would not therefore be understood, in what I have already said, or in what I am to say farther, to plead for any other Liberties or Privileges, than what are reconcilable with Trade, and the Nation's Interest, tho' a little perhaps abated.<sup>114</sup>

But nevertheless, to the notion that the material conditions of the plantations would greatly suffer should slaves become free Christians, Fleetwood responded with a particularly radical position for the SPG. Fleetwood wrote:

We may Answer, that were this true, the Mischief of it would be no greater in our *Plantations* abroad, than it is at home, where there is no such thing as *Slavery*, but all our Work is done by *hired* Servants; for good Wages and good Usage will always invite Servants, even to the hardest Labours. And if this would not turn to a good Account, 'twere better the World should pay much dearer for the Pleasures and Conveniences those Places afford, than purchase them so cheaply at the expense of so much Misery, such Cruelty and hard Treatment of Men, as good as our selves.<sup>115</sup>

The final objection slave owners proposed against the conversion of their slaves, at least according to the SPG, was that if their slaves were to become Christian, they might have to treat slaves more humanely, and thus lose the profit they make by maintaining them at no greater than

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<sup>113</sup> Fleetwood (1711) further explained: "whatever Liberties the Laws indulge to us, they do it to us as *English Men* and not as *Christians*. If therefore it be lawful in our Country, to have or keep any Slaves at all, it is equally lawful to have or keep them so, tho' they are *Christians*: The Laws do not distinctly favour *Christianity* in this Point," 21.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. Fleetwood allowed that even if "this would be some Inconvenience to the Civil Government, with respect to Trade," God "would make an ample Compensation for all the Inconveniences and Loss it might sustain, by making their Slaves, or letting them be made *Christians*." He reminded his audience: "But after all, what considering Man would run the hazard of being under God's Displeasure, by hindering others from becoming Christians, for all the Profit, Honour, and Advantage in the World?"

a subsistence level. As Fleetwood put it, masters “would be obliged to look upon ‘em as Christian brethren, and use ‘em with humanity,” and “they should be oblig’d to use them with *less Rigour*, than the nature and necessity of their Service will admit, if their Masters must be Gainers by them.”<sup>116</sup> Le Jau confirmed in a letter to the Society: “If a Minister proposed the Negroes should be instructed in the Christian Faith, have Necessarys, etc., the Planters are very angry and answer it would consume their profit.”<sup>117</sup> But Fleetwood, once again, argued in response to this objection, that Christians, as rational, moral, and civilized people, had a responsibility to treat all human beings with benevolence without exception. Fleetwood wrote that Christianity not only “commands the Exercise of all Compassion, Kindness, and good Nature towards *Christians*,” but it “distinguishes it self from [other religions], by commanding Mercy and Compassion to be shewn *to all the World* alike, without respect to Sect or party, unless where there is an unavoidable Occasion of Preference.” This was what distinguished Christianity among all religions. Fleetwood explained:

It is therefore a great Mistake at the bottom, to think themselves at Liberty, to treat a *Savage*, and an *infidel*, with Inhumanity and Rigour; but ‘tis a strangely cruel and most wicked Absurdity that is built on this Mistake: I may not use a *Christian* Unmercifully, therefore I will not let this *Savage* be a Christian, for fear I may not use him afterwards unmercifully. What a Mockery would it be, to pretend that I cannot relieve a Man, because he is not qualified for my Charity, when I know at the same time, that I hinder him from being qualified, lest I should find my self obliged to relieve him? What is this, but to hinder him, as much as in you lies, from being happy *for ever*, for fear he should be a little more at Ease in *this Life*? Be true to your Religion, and go through with it; it obliges you to shew all Pity and good Nature, even to the *Bodies* of your Slaves; and then when that is settled and believed, you will find your selves disposed to shew all Mercy to their *Souls*; since the best Reason you can find for being cruel to their Souls, is fetch’d from the Fears of being afterwards disabled from being cruel to their Bodies. Were one talking to good *Christians* on this Subject, we should only need to say to them—Here is an Opportunity of being merciful both to the Souls and the Bodies of your fellow Creatures.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. Also see Le Jau’s 1705 report to SPG, in Appendix to SPG Journal.

<sup>117</sup> Le Jau’s 1705 report to SPG, in Appendix to SPG Journal.

<sup>118</sup> Fleetwood (1711), 23-24. He continued: “for whom *Christ* died, as well as you, and both whose Soul and Blood He will require at your Hands, at the last Day, as far as you were instrumental in Tormenting the one, without Occasion and most just Necessity; and in hindering the other from coming to the Knowledge, and Faith in *Christ*, that was to save it,” 25-26.

However, in the first decades of the eighteenth century much of what the SPG wrote about slavery was ambivalent toward, if not outright critical of the institution, and often called for the humane treatment of slaves, though never abolition. Yet, the SPG soon became fully reconciled to slavery, embracing slavery in its rhetoric as well as in its deeds. For one, the Society ran two plantations with hundreds of slaves in Barbados, while many of the missionaries themselves soon owned slaves. Also the discourses published by the Society more and more emphasized the importance of bringing Christianity to the slaves as a way to keep the slaves obedient within the hierarchy of the plantation.<sup>119</sup> Even in the early papers of the SPG the idea that Christianity would make slaves better slaves was often made. Le Jau informed the Society that “the converted slaves became better servants.”<sup>120</sup> And he wrote in a different letter that Christian “Slaves behave themselves very well, and do better for their Masters profit than formerly, for they are taught to serve out of Christian Love & Duty.”<sup>121</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter looked at the SPG’s published works, as well as its manuscripts, in order to show how moral reformers in London broadened the scope of their reforming efforts to include the far reaches of the American colonies. Within the larger context of this dissertation, this chapter suggests that the work of the SPG in the New World was an extension of similar work being done in the Old World by the societies for reformation of manners and the SPCK. The members of all three of these societies envisioned an empire of religion, reason, and manners

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<sup>119</sup> See Glasson, *Mastering Christianity* (2012) on the Codrington Plantation, which was left to the SPG to administer in 1711.

<sup>120</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 5, letter 120; see vol. 6, letter 142.

<sup>121</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 5, letter 120, June 13, 1710.

originating in England, extending outward through Scotland and Ireland, crossing the Atlantic, spreading through the Americas, and eventually even reaching Africa and Asia. They believed that a pious, rational and polite population would secure religion, politics and commerce, as well as develop the arts and sciences, both at home and abroad. Already, the ongoing efforts of the SRM and the SPCK were actualizing this vision within the British Isles. Now, advocates of these societies hoped, the work of the SPG would make it a reality in America.

We can see that these societies shared a broad vision for the improvement of manners and morals throughout the burgeoning British Empire. I have followed the process by which ideas of religious diversity were transformed in the context of the colonies, where a different set of cultural and social demands were in place. The societies hoped to encourage better—and more uniform—manners and habits on both sides of the Atlantic, bringing all peoples of the empire under a common cultural denominator. Thus, they created a new imperial ideology.

## Chapter 5 – Forming British Subjects: Thomas Bray and George Berkeley on the Conversion of American Indians

We now focus our attention more closely on one of Thomas Bray’s unrealized plans to send missionaries to live within the Indian communities in America. In doing so, we can highlight some of the larger implications of reform for the burgeoning British Empire of the early eighteenth century. As we have seen, reformers in London had argued time and time again that Christianity was a tool of sociability and civilization. In England, these reformers had been confronted with the problem of how to unite people with different religious convictions into one peaceful community. As a solution, they emphasized Christian behavior over beliefs. When reformers directed their attention to the American colonies, they were confronted with a new problem: how to unite people—European settlers, African slaves, and American Indians—whose differences were much more pronounced. Ultimately, reformers aimed to create civilized subjects—unified through shared manners and mores—throughout the British Empire. They were never just working for conversion; they were working for civilization. In *A New Imperial History*, historian Kathleen Wilson has shown how, in the early days of the British Empire, “the ideals of ‘civilization’s’ diffusion, began both to fuel and to reflect British economic, political, and territorial expansion. In this rapidly changing world...the question of national identity itself became particularly unsettling.”<sup>1</sup> By looking at the ideas of reformers like Bray, we can get a sense of how members of the reforming societies began to conceive of the imperial project as a civilizing process, and how they saw themselves as essential agents in the creation of a unified British identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Wilson, *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire 1660-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3-4.

In the early eighteenth century, two ministers of the Church of England, Thomas Bray and George Berkeley, presented contrasting visions for how best to educate and convert to Christianity American Indians. Berkeley sketched a plan that would bring young Indians to an elite college on Bermuda Island where they would receive a liberal arts education. After graduation, the Indians would be encouraged to return to their native communities, where, it was hoped, they would impart their newfound knowledge of religion, and of letters and sciences, to their relations. Since these educated Indians would know how to read and speak English, while still having retained their native language, they would be well-placed to become cultural brokers between Christianity and barbarism.

Bray sketched an entirely different kind of plan for the education and conversion of American Indians. In his view, individual Indians should not be taken from their homes and educated on a remote island. Rather, European men and women should be sent to live within Indian communities. There they could impart to the Indians not a liberal arts education emphasizing philosophy and theology, but a practical education emphasizing manners and skills. Bray was convinced that “heathens” and “savages” first had to be “civilized” and “humanized” before they would be fit to receive more complex ideas, like the principles of Christianity. Bray explained that this was because “there can be no Instruction of a People Wild and Savage, ‘till in some Measure Civilized, or Tam’d,” and thereby rendered susceptible of Christian Doctrine.”<sup>2</sup> The latitudinarians had argued that only people who had control over their bodies were capable of rational thoughts. The work of both the societies for reformation of manners and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge was aimed at helping people get control—by breaking their bad habits and forming good ones. Here, then, we see Bray applying this view in the context of

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Bray, *Missionalia: Or a Collection of Missionary Pieces Relating to the Conversion of the Heathen; both the African Negroes and American Indians* (London, 1727), 57.

the American Indians. According to him, before they could receive the principles of Christianity, Indians had to learn good manners and habits: how to establish property, work the land, preserve food for the winter, make and wear clothes, keep themselves and their homes orderly and clean. Only after their manners and habits were thus improved, could their rational capabilities improve as well. For Bray, this civilizing process—and ultimately, conversion process—would be effective when it was applied to entire communities, not merely to a few individuals.

Bray's vision for the conversion of American Indians brings into focus one of the central points of this dissertation: namely, the emergence of a new discourse on manners, habits, and customs as absolutely essential to social life. It is revealing in other ways too. Bray and the reformers were attempting to create a unified British subject on both sides of the Atlantic. They equated heathen peoples in America with the poor and ignorant in England, both of whom, they considered, were at a low stage in their cultural development. Bray and the reformers hoped that through a process of cultural homogenization they might create a new British identity among diverse peoples. To this end, they recommended using modern methods that included keeping records, carrying out inspections, and sharing expertise.

Near the end of his life, Bray published a rather unusual packet of miscellaneous works. It contained a letter addressed to the clergy in Maryland, a plan for the conversion of heathens in America, a biography of a Roman Catholic missionary, a book-list, and several other tracts, all of which he hoped would have practical value for the missionaries in the colonies. Only a few copies of *Missionalia: Or a Collection of Missionary Pieces Relating to the Conversion of the Heathen; both the African Negroes and American Indians* (1726/7) can be found in libraries



today.<sup>3</sup> It was printed and distributed by the Associates of Dr. Bray, an organization Bray had founded in 1724 to assist him in the administration of a large sum of money earmarked for the conversion of black slaves in America. The origins of this organization are found in 1697, when Bray traveled to Holland in order to secure funds from King William for the development of libraries in the colonies. Although the trip was unsuccessful, it was not unproductive: in The Hague, Bray made the acquaintance of one of William's secretaries, Abel Tassin D'Allone, who, at his death in 1721, bequeathed £900 to Bray for the education of the slaves on the plantations. It was to administer this money that Bray formed his Associates.<sup>4</sup>

The centerpiece of Bray's *Missionalia* was an attack on the famous philosopher, and then dean of the English Church in Ireland, George Berkeley, who in 1724 had published his *Proposal* to build and maintain a college for the education of American Indians on Bermuda Island.<sup>5</sup> In the *Missionalia*, Bray offered an alternative scheme for "civilizing" and "humanizing" the Indians, explaining how the large sums of money Berkeley had raised for his school in Bermuda could be better spent. Bray's criticisms of the Bermuda plan were not off the mark: ultimately, Berkeley's project—despite great investments of money and effort—was never realized (to the great disappointment of the dean). A comparison of these two texts illuminates

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<sup>3</sup> *Missionalia: Or a Collection of Missionary Pieces Relating to the Conversion of the Heathen; both the African Negroes and American Indians* (London, 1727). The British Library holds a copy, and a copy from Harvard is available on ECCO.

<sup>4</sup> SPG MSS Letters A, vol. 9, letter 17; also see Lydekker, *Thomas Bray* (1943), 12. At this point Bray was no longer officially involved with the SPCK or the SPG. The SPG assumed that Bray would transfer D'Allone's money to it, since the education of slaves in America fell under its purview. However, when Bray made clear that D'Allone had requested that the money be administered by Bray himself, the society dropped the matter. Bray formed the Associates because his health was in decline. The Associates were given the official name, *Trustees for Mr. D'Allone's Charity for the Instruction of the Negroes in America*, but were usually referred to as *Dr. Bray's Associates*. In 1730, soon after Bray's death, this organization became responsible for the Georgia Trust, charged with making a charitable colony in America for debtors. One of the original Associates was the famous James Oglethorpe.

<sup>5</sup> George Berkeley, *A Proposal for the better Supplying of Churches in our Plantations, and for Converting the Savage Americans to Christianity, by a College to be erected in the Summer Islands, otherwise called the Isles of Bermuda* (London, 1724). Berkeley would later become Bishop of Cloyne.

the ways that English reformers began to understand their role in the formation of civilized and Christian subjects of a new British empire.

Recently, there has been some interest in George Berkeley, specifically in his moral and social thought, as well as in his experiences in America. However, although Berkeley's plan for a college in Bermuda is often mentioned, scholars have failed to look at the plan closely, let alone situate it beside Bray's competing plan.<sup>6</sup> The emphasis of this chapter, however, is squarely on Bray, who, as one of the most important reformers of this period, conveys through his novel—and often disturbing—ideas some of the implications of reform for the development of a new imperial ideology.

### **Two views of the clergy in America.**

In all probability, Berkeley never intended to offend Bray when he wrote his *Proposal* (1724).<sup>7</sup> However, it was not difficult to see in that pamphlet a direct attack on Bray's lifework. In it, Berkeley argued that in spite of whatever efforts had been made to organize libraries and schools in the colonies, as well as to send missionaries to the parishes there, American men and women remained as ignorant and rude as ever. He described the settlers as still having "little sense of religion, and a most notorious corruption of manners," and the natives as continuing "in much the same ignorance and barbarism, in which we found them above a hundred years ago." By crediting "several excellent persons of the Church of England"—i.e. Bray and the members

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<sup>6</sup> The exceptions to this are Steiner, "Two Eighteenth Century Missionary Plans," *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 11, no. 3 (July 1903), 289-305, and McCulloch, "A Plea for Further Missionary Activity in Colonial America," *The Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, vol. 15, no. 3 (September, 1946). However, these are both brief accounts and provide very little analysis of the sources. For recent interest in the Irish Enlightenment, see the special volume of the *Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 45, no. 3 (Spring 2012) on the Irish Enlightenment. See also, Gaustad, *Berkeley in America* (New Haven, 1979), and Breuninger, *Recovering Bishop Berkeley: Virtue and Society in the Anglo-Irish Context* (New York, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Although it is unlikely that Berkeley had Bray in mind when he wrote his *Proposals*, he probably had heard of Bray.

of the SPG.—for their “good intentions” in conveying Christian knowledge and manners abroad and “even [having] combined into societies for that very purpose,” Berkeley at the same time drew attention to their failure.<sup>8</sup> We can imagine how outraged Bray must have felt when he read the *Proposal*. Here he was, an old man, having devoted the greater part of his life to organizing missionaries and libraries in the colonies, confronted with the famous philosopher, who had just raised astounding sums of money for a utopian missionary plan in Bermuda.

For Berkeley, it was a disheartening fact that in America, the English missionaries, rather than transmitting Christianity and civilization to the people there, had “themselves degenerated into Heathens.”<sup>9</sup> More than a quarter of a century earlier, Bray had first voiced his own concerns over the quality of clergymen going abroad. He then had recognized that only the most desperate men crossed the Atlantic to take up residence in one of the impoverished parishes there. But since that time, Bray had implemented several schemes to remedy this situation, not least of all his library scheme, which he was confident had done much to guarantee that the American parishes were, and would continue to be, filled by knowledgeable, moral, and mannered clergymen.<sup>10</sup> He thought he had been especially successful in placing worthy ministers in the parishes in Maryland, where he had been stationed for several months in 1699 as the Bishop of London’s commissary. Bray had not only hand-picked most of Maryland’s clergymen himself, but while he had been in that colony, he had visited these men, inspected their libraries and schoolhouses, drafted a law for their established maintenance, and preached several sermons

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<sup>8</sup> Berkeley, *A Proposal* (1724), 3-4. Berkeley must have been referring to the SPCK as well as the SPG, since he explicitly wrote that these men, having formed themselves into societies, had “given great encouragement, not only for English missionaries in the West Indies, but also, for the reformed of other nations, led by their example, to propagate Christianity in the East,” 3. He was referring here to the new work of the SPCK in India.

<sup>9</sup> Berkeley, *A Proposal* (1725, expanded edition), 20.

<sup>10</sup> In many of the parishes in America, Bray had established parochial libraries, and thought these would bring men of the best qualities there; see Chapter 4.

to them. In the *Missionalia*, Bray addressed the clergy of Maryland as his “Dearly Beloved Brethren,” telling them that he could “Testify even now, above Thirty Years since I had some Relation to *Maryland*: The singular Affection I have, for so long Time, bore to the whole Province, and in an especial Manner to the Clergy therein, that I still retain.” So when Berkeley wrote in his *Proposals*, how “very meanly qualified both in learning and morals” the clergy in America were, it is not surprising that Bray took these criticisms to heart.<sup>11</sup>

Berkeley thought that what America needed was its own educational facility, a seminary, which could fashion ministers from among the native American populations, both settler and Indian. As long as all clergymen originated from Britain, America would continue to be supplied with the most ignorant and ill-mannered among them. As Berkeley explained, little could be expected from those, “who quit their native country on no other motive, than that they are not able to procure a livelihood in it, which is known to be often the case.” But, with a seminary on American soil, he was sure, young men born in the colonies might become ministers; and in this way it was much more likely that, “men of merit would be then glad to fill the churches of their native country, which are now a drain for the very dregs and refuse of ours.”<sup>12</sup> An American ministry, Berkeley thought, had to be supplied by American men.

It was essential that America have polite, mannered, well-spoken clergymen, for, Berkeley insisted, “the surest means to reform the morals, and soften the behaviour of men” depended on the character and skill of the preacher. He recognized, like Bray, how important manners were to the transmission of ideas: “mankind are more apt to copy characters than to

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<sup>11</sup> Bray, *Missionalia* (1727), Dedication; 1; Berkeley, *Proposals* (1724), 4. In his *Missionalia*, Bray, always at work on his Library Project, also informed the clergy in America that he was happy for “The Opportunity lately given me, to testify my singular Esteem and Affection for you, as also to give the Reason of my now sending the small Supply of Books towards the Increase of your Libraries, which you will find in the ensuing Scheme and Catalogue,” 3.

<sup>12</sup> Berkeley, *Proposals* (1724) 4-5.

practice precepts.” However, when Berkeley thought about molding the character of the missionaries, he imagined he would make it after his own image—classically trained scholar, skilled orator and man of letters. He acknowledged that “the same doctrine, which maketh great impression, when delivered with decency and address, loseth very much of its force by passing through awkward or unskillful hands.”<sup>13</sup> His missionaries, trained by himself and his colleagues in the seminary on Bermuda, would have no such failings in the art of rhetoric.

In particular, Berkeley hoped to attract “the children of savage Americans” to his seminary. He imagined that, after having received a good education, these Indians would return to their original communities, where they would impart what they had learned to their families, and in this way, knowledge would soon spread throughout the uncultivated—and previously unreachable—parts of America. Outsiders could never be effective missionaries to the Indians “if we consider,” Berkeley wrote, “the difference of language, their wild ways of living, and above all, the great jealousy and prejudice which savage nations have towards foreigners, or innovations introduced by them.” However, although Indians were rarely receptive to the strange ideas and habits of foreigners, surely, he thought, they would be open to innovations introduced by their own kin. Indeed, Berkeley assumed, they “would be less apt to suspect, and readier to embrace a doctrine recommended by neighbours or relations, men of their own blood and language, who would not be thought to have designs on the liberty or property of their converts.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, it seemed to him, a few educated Indians would serve as the most effective means of bringing about the education and conversion of entire native communities.

Bray responded to Berkeley’s attack on the character of the colonial clergy. He composed his *Missionalia* as a “Vindication of the Plantation-Clergy” and of those who were

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

responsible for sending them abroad—namely, Bray and his friends. With this work, he hoped to discredit the view that “none but Illiterate Creatures have been hitherto sent upon that Mission (a prejudice which is found to operate strongly...since Dean *Barkley* has found Means and Encouragement to disperse his Libel throughout the Kingdom.)”<sup>15</sup> Bray was especially eager to challenge any insinuation that the libraries he had worked so hard to establish were not fulfilling their purpose. “Indeed,” he wrote, “it would be a Thousand pities, that after so much Pains and Expense of Time and Money (and the latter on the Founders part more than any one other), that any one of these *Parochial Libraries*, should ever be rendered useless by having ever an Idle and Illiterate Drone put in Possession of such a Treasure, and Means of Improvement.” He asked, “with what Face of Modesty” could any man accept a position in a colonial parish with one of these libraries, and have neither the inclination nor the capacity to use it. Bray imagined ministers of the greatest erudition filling the posts in the colonial parishes, where there were often more books available to them than in many of the poorer parishes in England and Wales. “In the Name of Goodness,” he exclaimed, “let such an *Illiterate* remain on this side of the Ocean,” rather than venture to America, especially Maryland, where, he pointed out, not only did the parochial libraries match some of the best libraries back home, but where there were furthermore two truly extensive general libraries, “provided on purpose, as to stimulate the Studious, so to enable them to attain to Higher Improvements in useful Learning.”<sup>16</sup> For Bray, his network of libraries in the American colonies ensured the continual education of missionaries stationed there.

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<sup>15</sup> Bray, *Missionalia* (1727), Dedication. He was also defending the members of his organization, the SPG, to which, somewhat ironically, Berkeley would later belong.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* Bray pointed out that it would also be a pity if the libraries in the colonies were not used “after such due and Solemn Care by the Repeated Laws of the Province to preserve those Libraries for the Use of all future Successions of Ministers.” Bray certainly thought the reputation of his lifework was at stake.

That missionaries in the colonies were willing to accept books as partial compensation for their work abroad was no sign of desperation on their part, Bray said; rather it confirmed that they had “a due Value for Books” and that their “Hearts are in their Studies.” Bray made a point to mention that the same organization—the SPCK—that established libraries abroad, had established them in Britain as well—“so that our People at Home may not sink into utter Ignorance and Barbarity.”<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps there might be some truth to Berkeley’s criticisms of the American clergy, however. At the very least, Bray was compelled to offer a response to them: he outlined additional measures to be taken to assure the fitness of future missionaries. First, he thought potential missionaries should be given a probation period—about a year—during which time they would remain in London where they could further their education as well as be observed by their superiors, the Bishop of London and the members of the SPG. This would assure that “Persons of Sobriety, Piety and good Abilities be sent on the Mission.” During the probation period, the missionary would prepare himself for his post “by laying in a good Stock of Knowledge in the Study of Select Tracts.” At the same time, his superiors in London would have the opportunity to evaluate whether he was fit for duty by observing his “*Industry, prudent Behavior, and good Conduct.*”<sup>18</sup> For Bray, any successful missionary needed to be equipped with two tools: knowledge of the great books, and practice in good habits.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* Bray explained that in England “there are no such Libraries yet provided, but what have been by the same Hands as those in *Maryland.*” Anxious that men studying for ecclesiastical office know what great treasures were available to them in the colonies, Bray wrote, “And it seems now to be rendered necessary, that young Divines or Candidates for Orders, in our Universities, should be appriz’d that there are such standing Encouragements [Libraries] in every Parish in *Maryland.*...which may be Inducements to Men of Letters, and Lovers of Books, who also are generally Persons of best Morals, and greatest Sobriety, from Time to Time hereafter to go as Missionaries into that Province,” Dedication.

<sup>18</sup> Bray, *Missionalia* (1727), Dedication.

Second, Bray proposed a measure that dovetailed with his own work in prison reform. While on probation, the missionary could gain experience working with poor, ignorant and vicious men and women by volunteering in the local prisons. Bray described his idea: “it has been thought of Use to employ them during their Probation in Preaching to our poor Prisoners in Two of the most forlorn Prisons in the Outparts of this City.” This work, Bray explained, would accustom missionaries “to the most distasteful part of their Office” and also “bring them to a Temper of Mind, and facility of Expression to the level and low Capacities of the most Ignorant.” It would thus “fit and prepare them for that Part of the Mission relating to the poor heathen.”<sup>19</sup> We can see that in Bray’s mind, the poor, ignorant, disorderly, and criminal in England had similar characteristics to the heathen in America.

Still more measures might be taken across the Atlantic. An “instructor” could be stationed in the colonies, where he would be entrusted to “Conduct this whole Affair,” by keeping an eye on the clergy there. Bray imagined that the inspector would maintain a register of the people instructed in each parish; send a copy of this as well as other accounts to his superiors in London; suggest to them better methods to promote “the Good Design” with greater success; and inform them of any obstructions that were hindering progress. Bray also recommended the appointment of a “curator”—perhaps the same person—to develop the libraries in the parishes, to oversee book circulation among the clergy, and to supervise the education of the inhabitants. In short, this curator would be responsible for advancing learning and culture in the colonies. Bray drew a parallel between the curator’s work in America and his own work in England. With his associates, he said, he had recently taken on “the Genuine Sister-Design,” focusing on Britain, “namely to be *Curators* for Increasing the Number of

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*



*Parochial Libraries* in our Meanly-endow'd Cures here at Home.” He admitted that Christianity—and civilization—was needed not just overseas, but also “in the Extreme and Remoter Parts of the Nation.” If something was not done for the people in those regions, their steady decline “would in Time, bring them down to the Level of the [black slaves] against whose Ignorance [the missionaries] have begun...to provide for.”<sup>20</sup> For Bray, again, there were many similarities to be made between the ignorant and poor in England and the heathen in America—they both occupied a lower stage of cultural development.

Not surprisingly, for Bray, the “*Curator*” and his successors in the colonies would need a special library, stocked with books that pertained to the larger aims of the missionary enterprise.<sup>21</sup> This library would include not only the kinds of books of theology and general knowledge that were found in the parochial libraries, but it would also include “These farther requisite Ingredients, viz. a Collection of the Choicest *Missionalia*, as well Popish, (& *fas est ab hoste doceri*) as Protestant, that can be found, giving an Account of the Nature and Situation of Ministers, and Condition of Life, of the People to be Converted, of the Scheme of Doctrine necessary for their Institution, and of the best Method of Dealing with them.”<sup>22</sup> Specifically, Bray was interested in building a library that would specialize in books on the manners and customs of the various heathen nations. Such a library would provide insight into how best to approach civilizing and converting the peoples of the world. His own *Missionalia* attempted to do just that.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* Bray wrote, “it is with this View that such a Library has been provided, and sent with one Mr. *Eversfield* now in his Voyage.”

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* Interestingly, Bray included in his own *Missionalia* a biography of Bernard Gilpin, a Roman Catholic missionary, whose life, Bray hoped would inspire others to imitation.

## **“The Impracticableness of Converting of any Savage or Barbarous People in their own Country”**

Berkeley’s proposal to educate the American Indians had provoked Bray to direct his attention away from the question of converting African slaves, although he never abandoned his interest in this subject altogether. In fact, he often used the African slaves as a point of comparison to highlight certain problems relating to the conversion of the American Indians.

When Bray wrote his response to Berkeley’s plan, he began by addressing his Associates, and turned to the question that immediately concerned them—the conversion of black slaves—before moving on to address the same question concerning the American Indians.<sup>23</sup> Bray emphasized the importance of the American clergy for this task, writing, “that the most Expedite and Natural Way to set that Work on Foot, would be, to *induce the Clergy, above all others, in the Plantations, to take that Design to Heart.*” The minister of each colonial parish (rather than an elite professor, as Berkeley might have had it) would assume responsibility for the instruction of black slaves, who were “as much a part of the Pastoral Charge as the Planters themselves.”<sup>24</sup> Bray argued, against Berkeley, that local efforts would always be more effective than centralized ones when it came to instructing primitive people. He recalled that when he had asked several clergymen in Maryland whether they would be willing to instruct the slaves, “they unanimously declar’d we might be assur’d of at least Twenty, or Twenty Five worthy Ministers in that Province who would heartily Engage in it, being provided of the Assistances propos’d

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<sup>23</sup> Bray addressed his associates: “as to the *Negroe Slaves* brought to the Continent of *America*, Mr. D’ALLONE having been pleas’d in his Letters to me before his Demise, as well as by the Express Words of his Will, to desire I would Assist him in his Design, by drawing a Scheme on which Plan this Good Work might be carry’d on with greatest Success; and you yourselves having been pleas’d to do the like; The Result of my Thoughts upon the whole, after the maturest Deliberation, please to take as follows...” And: D’Allone “leaving it to the Disposition of myself, and of those Gentlemen I should Associated with me, to carry on the Design, the Yearly Issues from a Legacy, which he devoted for Encouraging and Promoting the *Conversion of the Negroes* in the *British Plantations.*” In, *Missionalia* (1727), 3-4.

<sup>24</sup> Bray, *Missionalia* (1727), 4; Dedication.

[books].”<sup>25</sup> It would take this small army of clergymen—spread throughout the American colonies—to fully infiltrate the Indian territories.

But if the clergyman were to succeed at their task, they needed the right tools—namely, “proper Books, both for their own, and the Negroes Use.”<sup>26</sup> At the end of his *Missionalia*, Bray included a booklist divided into two categories meant to satisfy both of those requirements—books for the instructors and the instructed. He had already assembled numerous sets of books, many of which had been shipped abroad. Beyond that, Bray informed the clergy in Maryland, “it has been thought fit, with this first Cargo of Books, to send you a few *Horn-Books* [i.e. primers], *Spelling-Books*, and *Catechisms*, to distribute into proper Families.”<sup>27</sup> He thought these measures would suffice as aid to the American clergy in their efforts to convert the black slaves on the plantations. Bray, with the support of his Associates, had determined that the money from the D’Allone trust would be reserved for maintaining missionaries near the plantations, and for providing them with relevant books.

Now Bray turned his attention to the main issue at hand: what was to be done about the conversion of American Indians. Although he identified many common qualities in black slaves and American Indians, Bray also recognized that their immediate contexts were significantly

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Dedication.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. Bray wrote, “And to enable them to do their Part therein, we conceiv’d it would be absolutely necessary to furnish the Clergy with Books, both for their own Use, and of those they should Direct and Induce to be subservient to them in Instructing the *Negroes*; and also for the Use of the *Negroes* themselves, in Learning to *Read*, to say the *Catechism*, and to *Pray*; to furnish, I say, the Clergy with the Books best adapted to both Branches of the Design,” 4. Bray also wrote, “The Encouragement which is propos’d to be given being only such, as the Narrowness of our Fund, as yet, enables us to give, is a Supply of necessary Books, which you will find digested in the following Scheme, consisting of Two Parts. Those in the First, are intended for your own Use, and may be Additions to your Libraries, being, in a Manner, all of them publish’d since the Libraries you have were settled. The other Branch is for the Use of the *Negroes*; and it is hop’d, that as you will be able to prevail with some in the better dispos’d Families of your respective Cures, to Teach the young *Negroes* to *Spell*, and onwards, ‘till they can *Read*; as also the Church-Catechism, and some Prayers by Heart; so especially that the *School-Masters*, which (I understand, are now settled in every Parish) will be assistant to, and observant of your Directions therein,” 5.

different. While slaves were confined to the plantation and restrained to obedience by their masters, Indians remained wild and free. Thus, different approaches, he determined, had to be taken for their respective conversions. Bray was rather skeptical about the possibility of making much progress with the Indians. First of all, there were so few of them. Indeed, “there being...in some single Families of the Considerable Planters as many Heathen of the *Negroe-Kind*, as there are in some whole Nations, as they are reputed, of the *American Indians*.”<sup>28</sup> Since there were many more black slaves to be converted than there were Indians, putting resources toward the former would result in greater returns on investment. Nevertheless, Bray offered as a response to Berkeley, in perhaps the most telling part of this *Missionalia*, his advice on how to instruct the American Indians. This part he titled, *A Memorial Relating the Conversion, as well of the American Indians, as of the African Negroes*, and it was addressed to the clergymen in Maryland.

One of Bray’s main points in this work was that, although the social contexts of Indians and of black slaves (in America) were significantly different, the social contexts of the Indians and Africans (in Africa) were quite similar. In recognizing this, Bray was acknowledging how

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<sup>28</sup> Bray, *Missionalia* (1727), 12. Bray, implicitly refuting Berkeley, wrote, “So that you will thereby, in no Ways, come behind in your Success, the Great Undertaker to Convert Heathens, who Promise here such great Things of that Kind, at the same Time loudly Exclaiming, but very Injuriously, I am perswaded, against the Clergy in *America*, for not making it your Care to Convert the Heathen. But we that know you better, as we Assure many, when Occasion offers, or your Zeal and Endeavours to do what you can, and, as far as enabled, to Convert the Blacks (who are by far the more numerous Body of Heathens in those Parts): so we hope, the Accounts you will be able to return us, in due Time, after you shall have receiv’d these small Supplies of Means, will give us Grounds to erase the Prejudices injuriously caus’d, as we apprehend, by those very unjust Representations,” 12. Again we see the idea that there are many more black slaves to be converted than Indians. Bray did clarify, however: “Nor yet do we Confine you, by the Nature and Tenor of these Helps, sent you to forward the *Conversion* of that Branch of Heathen, the *African Blacks*, who are now Slaves among you, so as to exclude the other Heathen Bordering upon you, from partaking of your Care. That these are principally in our Eye is, because our Application of the Charity we are entrusted with, is directed with Reference to these. But though this Part is chiefly to be attended to by the Intent of the Founder; And because the *Negroe Slaves* being more by their peculiar Circumstances of living so Confin’d, as not to roam about in a Wild and Savage Way of Living (such as is that of the *American Indians* we thence conceive your Pastoral Care in instructing of them, will more successfully Answer the Design of Mr. *D’Allone’s* Bequest: It is therefore principally expected, you should apply to this Part,” 12-13.

the circumstances of black men enslaved on the plantations had rendered them distinct from their kin still free in Africa. Noting that the D'Allone money was meant for the conversion of slaves in America, Bray asserted, "I say, in *America*, for had the Good Gentlemen form'd a Project of doing it in *Africa*, their Native Country, Where they have no Restraint from living in a Wild and Savage Manner, it wou'd have been very Impracticable." The same was true of converting the Indians in America, as he explained: "The Reason of the Impracticableness of Converting of any Savage and Barbarous People, *Africans* or *Americans*, in their own Country, where, or at least whilst they Roam about in the Woods, Hunting after Prey as the Wild Beasts do, as is the Manner of the Indians, is very plain; That in such circumstances of living it is hardly conceivable how they shall be at all Instructed, or ever be brought to attend Instruction, much less retain it, so as to be the better for it." Slaves, on the other hand, could not easily abandon their studies "because the Negroe Slaves being more by their peculiar Circumstances of living so Confin'd, as not to roam about in a Wild and Savage Way of Living (such as is that of the *American* Indians)." Moreover, their confinement meant that slaves had been "already in some Measure brought into the Civil Life."<sup>29</sup> This was why D'Allone had specified that his money go to their education. What Bray was suggesting was that American Indians could not in his opinion be converted until they, as a nation, had been civilized. In other words, they first had to be made into people who were no longer recognizably Indian, or savage, before they could be made Christians.

It strikes one as odd that Bray made sure to emphasize how useless it was to convert heathens in their own country, when the very aim of his essay was to argue for a particular scheme of converting Indians in America. But he made this point because, for him, the

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<sup>29</sup> Bray, *Missionalia* (1727), Dedication; 13; 103.

fundamental idea he wanted to convey was that there was no sense in attempting to convert a people to Christianity before first successfully civilizing them. Again and again, Bray argued for a reformation of Indian manners so that they would become enlightened, polite, sociable people, not very different from Englishmen. Bray summed up his plan for the Indians: “to the Humanizing of them, and Reducing them from a *Savage* to a *Civil Way* of life.”<sup>30</sup> Although true Christianity could be apprehended by all rational men, many heathen peoples had lost their ability to reason correctly. They needed, as entire communities, to acquire better manners and habits, which would enable them to reclaim their rational natures. This development entailed a disciplining of their behavior, the advancing of their sciences and technologies, the regulating of their laws and their social arrangements. What Bray never lost sight of was his view that human beings were social animals, and that their characters were shaped within their society—they were products of their social contexts. Thus, the improvement of one person had to be fortified by the collective improvement of all.

### **The Story of Two Africans**

For Bray, American Indians were closest to Africans in Africa. Their civilizations were equally at an early stage of development, but also equally capable of advancement. Bray told the clergy in Maryland: “on the Continent of *Africa* the Wild Inhabitants [are] in like Circumstances with the *Aborigines* on your Borders. The Heathen in both Quarters of the World, *Africa* and *America*, seem to us as alike in Way of Living, and Sentiments of Religion, as two Eggs.” So that “the very same Method must be taken with both,” if either type of heathen could eventually be found “laying aside their Barbarous and Savage way of Life,” and in its place embracing a

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

“Civil Life.” Bray explained that he had developed his approach to the conversion of the Indians by reflecting on certain lessons he had learned from an attempt, many years earlier, to convert some natives of South Africa. Here he referred to a “Scheme of Instructions” he had drawn up for the conversion of Africans—and now included in his *Missionalia*—since “any Directions proper to the State of the *Negroe Heathens* [are] also Practicable towards Christianizing [the] *American Indians*.”<sup>31</sup>

Bray devoted many pages of the *Missionalia* to a story about two young African men whom he had encountered while he was in Maryland. According to this story, an English captain, having sailed to Delagoa, in Mozambique, in the southern part of Africa, found these two youths “to have something of a Genius and Curiosity” and convinced them to sail back with him to England, so that they might see more of the world. The captain promised to return them afterwards to their home. However, the African youths never reached England; instead, the captain sold them into slavery. The two youths found themselves at the mercy of several masters, a hurricane, a shipwreck, the inhospitable terrain of Cuba, the African Company and the East India Company before they fell into the hands of a “kind” captain, who brought them to Bray’s parish in Maryland. While this captain was preparing to return the Africans to their home in Delagoa, Bray himself instructed the youths in Christian knowledge, and directed a school-master to teach them to read and write. Bray reported that indeed “they made a pretty good Progress both in Reading and Writing.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Bray, *Missionalia* (1727), 13-14. Bray told the Maryland clergy that he was sending them, especially the ones “whose Cures are in the Outparts of *Maryland*, nearest the Indians,” “a *Copy of Instructions, drawn up for one lately sent Hence to instruct a Heathen Nation, on the South of Africa, who as to Religion, and their Way of Living, seem’d to us to be exactly like your American Indians*,” 18-19. Bray wanted to know “Whether the like method may be proper to be taken, with reference to the Indians Bordering upon the English Provinces in America; or whether another Undertaking now-on Foot [Berkeley’s plan], is more Practicable, or may be likely to succeed,” 19.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 21. For the story of the two Africans, see pages 20-48.

Soon enough, the captain and his wards left for Delagoa. On the ship, the two youths were accompanied by the school teacher, whose duty it was to supervise their further studies, as well as to do what he could when they reached land to “gain the Favour of their Brother”—purported to be a Prince—“to make [an English] Settlement at Delagoa.” It was to this teacher that Bray wrote up a set of Instructions, which he now related in detail in his *Missionalia*.<sup>33</sup>

Of the six steps Bray outlined in his Instructions, five of them specified how to form good behavior in the Africans, whereas one was devoted to the teaching of religious principles. The first step required that the Africans form sociable habits, that they settle their families on individual plots of land, and that that they accept divisions of property. Bray directed the missionary to persuade, “with the utmost Air of Goodness Possible,” the Africans “to be Willing and Desirous to leave off their Savage way of living in the Woods, and in Hunting Wild Beasts, and in Fighting with, and Destroying one another; and to betake themselves to a Human and Sociable way of Living.” Bray, following John Locke, thought there could be no sociability without some form of property. He suggested that the Africans establish stable living arrangements by dividing up their territory, giving each family a share of land proportionate to its size.<sup>34</sup>

After the Africans were settled, the next step was to build dwellings and farms on their land. Bray told the missionary, “Perswade them to *Build Houses*, each Family one, upon that Share of Land allotted to them, and to *Plough* and *Sow* the Land with what Seeds are Proper; such as is fit for Tillage with *Corn*, or *Rice*, or *Pulse*; in the other Sort of Land to Plant *Orchards* and *Vineyards*; and, in Time, to make *Gardens* adjoining to their Houses for *Herbs*, *Roots*, and *Salads*.” By these means they would be able to live a sedentary life. The third step required

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 21. For Bray’s Instructions, see pages 22-38.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 22. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1690).



women to preserve and store food for the winter, make clothes, and keep their houses clean and orderly. Women should “employ their Time at Home in making *Bread, Butter and Cheese*, and in preparing wholesome Food for the whole Family, *Brewing* the Liquors of all Sorts, *Boiling* or *Roasting* their Meat, in *Spinning of Linen or Woolen* for Clothing, also in *Weaving*, and then in making their Garments.”<sup>35</sup> In this way the Africans might become clean, tidy, and healthy.

Once these good habits had been instilled, Bray was sure, the African heathens would begin to recognize the benefits of a civilized existence. He instructed the missionary, “Tell, and Convince them as far as Possible, how infinitely more Comfortable and Happily they will Live, every one, when well fed and clothed, in Houses of their own, than Wild in the Woods, exposed naked to the Cold in wet Seasons, and to the Scorching of the Sun in the Heats of Summer.” The latitudinarians had argued that Christianity brought happiness to individuals and societies. Bray appropriated that logic, applying it here in a new context: civilization, he said, brought happiness to individuals and societies. Next, the missionary had to instill a sense of morality into the heathens. So that they “curb unlawful Lusts,” the missionary should insist that the Africans “*Marry*, each of them the most Sober Woman they can find in their Country, contenting themselves each with having only one *Wife*, and by no Means to take to themselves more.” The fifth step required the missionary to convey the value of industriousness to the heathen people, so that they might exchange their “Wandering and an Idle Life” for “a Settled and Industrious way of Living.”<sup>36</sup>

“And lastly,” Bray wrote, “tell them, That to make themselves a more Happy People than hitherto they have been, the Good God has sent the *English* among them.”<sup>37</sup> Keeping in mind that

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<sup>35</sup> Bray, *Missionalia* (1727), 22-23.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24; 36.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

Bray had written these instructions with the goal of making an English settlement in Africa, we can see that what Bray had outlined were the steps he thought should be taken by the agents of an expanding British Empire in order to mold new British subjects. The movement to reform manners had transformed from a program aimed at controlling English vices to a program aimed at conquering colonial peoples.

But what about the conversion of the Africans? Bray finally addressed this subject in the final pages of his Instructions. Now that the Africans were settled and civilized, their manners and habits reformed—perhaps even beginning to resemble the English—Bray imagined they might be receptive to more complicated rational arguments. The principles of true Christianity, according to Bray, could only be held by the most advanced peoples on earth. Thus, Africans could not be converted before they had been civilized, “it being Impossible to conceive how any Religious Impressions and Instructions should be given them to any Purpose, or remain upon them in their wandering State. Nor was it ever known in Fact, that Christianity did thrive among a Rude and Barbarous People, continuing in an unsettled and savage Way of living, as in the Nature of the Thing, it is impossible it should.”<sup>38</sup> Once these heathens had obtained good manners, they were ready for knowledge—Christian knowledge.

At this final stage, then, the missionary could establish a school and persuade the youth to submit to religious instruction. Not surprisingly, Bray advised that the missionary appeal first to those notions of God that were known through natural religion, since every heathen should

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<sup>38</sup> Bray, *Missionalia* (1727), 24. Bray further wrote, “no Religion whatsoever, at least bordering upon Truth in any Degree, can be planted in any Soil not cultivated with Humanity,” 43. Although Bray had much admiration for the methods of Catholic missions, he considered Catholicism itself to be a barbaric form of Christianity: “And it is very Remarkable, that as our Blessed Master came into the World when it had become most *Civiliz’d*, and where it was so, in few Ages Christianity overspread the civiliz’d Part of it; so upon the Inundation of Wild and Barbarous Nations into the *Roman Empire*, True Christianity did sensibly Decline...both in the *Eastern* and *Western* Parts of the Empire,” 24. Another hope for the Africans was that they would be receptive to English imperial ambitions within their lands, and that they might one day become profitable commercial partners with the English.

understand those ideas intuitively.<sup>39</sup> The first point to get across was God's existence and his role as creator of the heavens and earth, which the missionary should explain "by the excellent Order and Contrivance of both the Heavens and Earth, and of every Part of the Creation, being in its Make and Contrivance so admirably Wise as does demonstrate them to be the Effects of some Case of Infinite Wisdom, Power and Goodness." This approach to understanding God through reason and universal concepts was standard within latitudinarian discourse. Bray thought that even those people who had no knowledge of Christianity, had, nevertheless some dim notion of the existence of God.<sup>40</sup> To know God, was to be rational, and to be rational was to be human.

Thus, ignorance of natural religion was a sign of true barbarism. Bray warned the missionary that if he should find the inhabitants of Delagoa to have no notion of God, "you will find them Live the Life of Brutes, wandering and seeking their Prey in the Woods, like Beasts of Prey." The missionary's task was to take these brutes and form them into men: "labour to make them Sensible," Bray instructed, "that though in Shape they seem like other Men, they will, while they continue thus Ignorant and Savage, deserve no more to be esteem'd Rational Creatures than Apes and Monkeys are. But when they shall become Believers in God, then, and not till then, they will be reckon'd by all knowing Persons to be *Men*, and *Reasonable Creatures*."<sup>41</sup> Conversion thus was the last step in a civilizing process—the final indicator that savages had become men. Indeed, Bray had intentionally arranged his instructions so that their

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<sup>39</sup> Bray explained that there were some "Notions which the Heathen Nations universally, *Asian, African*, and *American* have," *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>40</sup> Bray, *Missionalia* (1727), 25. Bray told the teacher: "further prove this Fundamental Point of Doctrine to them, from the universal Consent and Acknowledgment of Mankind, there having been no Nation found yet in the World, except perhaps some few, who having abandon'd first their Reason, have sunk into mere Brutality, but who have some Notions of a Supreme Being," 26.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 26. Bray wrote that "In both the African and American Nations indeed, almost all Notions of God, as a Good Being, seem in a Manner quite Extinct, so that both one and the other are suck vastly below the Eastern Heathen, even to be as it were mere Animals, or, as Ignorant as the Brutes," 56.

progression mimicked the way, he thought, societies naturally developed over long periods of time. He strongly recommended “the observing a due Order and Method,” in all endeavors “to Rescue men from a *Savage* to a *Civil* and Human Life.”<sup>42</sup>

Despite Bray’s best efforts “to introduce [Christianity] and as also Humanity and Civility of Manners among the whole Nation of the Delagoans,” he reported that his plan had ultimately proven ineffective—“But alas! the Success answered not in the least our Expectation,” he admitted. On the journey back to Africa, Bray continued his story, one of the African youths hanged himself. The other arrived in Delagoa, whereupon, Bray explained, “his Instructor went with him to his Mother’s Hutt, where the Rascal having entered, shut himself up, the poor Tutor standing at the Door six Hours before he would come forth to him; and when at length he came out, with great Reluctancy, he gave him such Frowns, and look’d so Surly upon him, that the Man thought it concern’d him speedily to return on Ship-board, if he would save his Life.” The instructor quickly abandoned his mission, and returned to Maryland.<sup>43</sup>

Bray thought he had learned a valuable lesson from all this: it was of no use to educate one man, while his community remained uncivilized—men would appropriate whatever habits and manners were practiced in their own society. It seemed, as Bray put it, that, “the ungrateful Brute, who had been treated from his first Arrival here to his Return, as it befitted a Person of Quality and Distinction (and all to soften him the better to receive the Impressions of Humanity and Religion) [appeared], so soon as got among his Fraternity, to be as Savage as the worst

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 37. Bray emphasized that there were two goals here: to civilize heathen behavior and to educate heathen minds. He wrote, “of the Six Introductory Articles, the five first, relating to the reducing those Rude People to the Civil Life; and the Sixth, pressing upon you to discharging the Part of a *School-Master* among them (in Exercise of which you must Learn Their Language, and Teach Them Ours),” 41. He said that this method was “the only Way to introduce Humanity and Civility of Manners among the whole Nation of the Delagoans,” 45.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

among them.”<sup>44</sup> Bray was convinced that whole societies had to be civilized, not merely a few individuals, if this work was to be successful.

Bray explained that part of the failure could be attributed to the kind of education the African youths had received. In Maryland, the Africans had been given “a Gentleman and Scholar-like Education.” Bray described their treatment: “they were boarded out at great Expense, were well Cloath’d and Rigg’d, and were ty’d to Swords; nay, to finish the Parade, had a Tutor provided to attend them at Home, an Hour or two in a Day, to Teach them to Read, Write, and Cast Accounts.” But, Bray now considered, they had not been taught good manners; they were heathens in civilized clothes: “in this Equipage I found them, when they came to the Captain’s house in my Parish, and it was not without Indignation, that I perceiv’d so much Cost bestow’d, shall I say, to very little Purpose? Nay, I’ll venture to affirm, to very bad Purpose.”<sup>45</sup>

He thought that they had received the wrong kind of education. Rather than having been taught complex principles of religion and philosophy, the Africans “should have been Apprentic’d in the Country to some honest Carpenter, or like Artificer, who was withal a Farmer.” They needed to learn skills before they learned ideas. From the “artificer,” Bray said, the Africans should have learned to build a barn; then, when they rejoined their brother in Africa, they could have built similar barns, “which would be Comfortable Habitations to their Brother’s Subjects, comparatively to what they now Enjoy.” The Africans, Bray imagined, impressed by English technology, might have been more receptive to the English way of life. The Africans could have also learned from the artificer how to plough the land and plant corn, how to raise cattle and kill livestock, and how to treat the skins of animals. From the artificer’s wife, the Africans could have learned to milk the cows, make butter and cheeses, spin wool and linen, and

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48.

make shoes and clothes. Most importantly, Bray thought, the Africans should not have been able to “Eat or Drink, or Wear any Thing but what their own Hands were put to, and in the Operation of which they had...their Share.”<sup>46</sup> For Bray, these practical skills were far more valuable to savages than the lofty ideas imparted through a classical education.

The larger lesson Bray took from the Delagoa incident was that it was useless to try to convert individuals before their entire society became civilized. As he put it, he had come to realize “the Impracticableness of Converting any Savage and Barbarous People, *Africans* or *Americans*, in their own Country (where they Roam about in the Woods, hunting after Prey, as the Wild Beasts do).” He could not even see how these wild humans, without first being tamed, “should be at all *Instructed*, or even be brought to *Attend* Instruction, much less to *Retain* it so as to be the better for it.”<sup>47</sup> He now applied this lesson to the Indians in America.<sup>48</sup> He was convinced that before the Indians could be converted, they had to be formed—through a practical education—into new people: “It is not to be apprehended by us, how they should become *Christians* before they are made *Men*, or so long as they remain in a State of Brutality.” Indians had to acquire British culture, they had to be “perswaded to build Houses, to cultivate their

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<sup>46</sup> Bray, *Missionalia* (1727), 48-49. In truth, Berkeley had also thought it important to treat his Indian pupils modestly: “A small expense would suffice to subsist and educate the American missionaries in a plain simple manner, such as might make it easy for them to return to the coarse and poor methods of life in use among their countrymen,” *Proposal* (1724), 8.

<sup>47</sup> Bray, *Missionalia* (1727), 58.

<sup>48</sup> Bray thought that the six points he had proscribed for the missionary to Africa was relevant to missionaries working with Indians, since “both the *American* and *African* Indians being much upon the same Level, as to Matters of Religion (neither of them, as yet, possess with Religious Sentiments, scarcely of any Kind) the whole foregoing Scheme of Doctrine may be as proper to be pursu’d in the Instruction of the one, as well as of the other,” 56-57. And again, he thought “*the like Method is to be taken with the American Indians, as was attempted with the African Heathen*,” namely, “endeavouring, first, to Civilize them, and then to Instruct them, and make them Christians,” 57. And once more: “Considering [the Indians] live in an *unsettled State* on the Continent of *America*, much in the same Manner as the *Delagoans* do in *Africa*, we cannot see but that the like Methods must be taken with the former, as was above directed with respect to the Latter; that is, to prepare them for the Reception of the Gospel, by endeavoring, in the first Place, to Civilize them, not conceiving how otherwise their Instruction and Conversion should be at all Practicable,” 58.

Lands, to raise Provision for their Families out of the same, and to have distinct Properties, and thereby be induc'd to abide in the same Places, where they may be always found Summer and Winter.”<sup>49</sup> And he emphasized again, “to prepare this unhappy Part of our Species, little better than Brutes, though in Human Shape, and indu'd with intellectual Faculties, they must be in some Measure *Civiliz'd*.”<sup>50</sup>

### **Civilizing the American Indians “by Daily and Familiar Intercourse”**

Finally Bray was ready to offer his method for the conversion of American Indians. In opposition to Berkley's plan to take Indians from their communities and educate them in isolation, Bray recommended that English missionaries go live among the Indians. His plan required that the colonial clergymen send “Seventeen Subaltern Instructors,” or “artificers” to

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<sup>49</sup> Bray, *Missionalia* (1727), 58-59. And he further mused: “Or suppose they could be taught to Read, and be imbu'd with the Principles of Religion, whilst they live but Part of the Year near the Christian Borders, what will all this Signify when they run out to Hunt, or to War, the remaining Part of the Year, and perhaps never return to the same Place; or if they do, have forgot all the Knowledge they had attain'd, and have practic'd all along the intermediate Time the very Reverse to it? The very *Reverse to Christian Rule*, I mean, to which Savageness and Brutality is in all Things the most Contrary. No; besides that, Light and Darkness are not more Opposite than two such contrary Ways of Life; the Christian Faith, and Morality, is a Plant of too delicate a Texture to grow upon an unprepar'd Soil,” 59.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 59. Bray acknowledged the rather controversial nature of his views, namely that conversion was not the first goal of the missionary enterprise, but rather civilization. He toned down his idea by giving this qualification: “I do not indeed mean, that nothing is to be done towards enlightening their Minds with the great Truths of the Gospel, ‘till they shall be quite civiliz'd, and brought to live in full as regular Manner as we *Europeans* do; but what I mean is this, that both Parts should be begun and carry'd on together, attempting to reduce them to Humanity, as well as to sow the Seeds of Christianity among the Clans of Indians next adjoining to the Habitations of the *English*. Besides that, the Indians on the Borders are not so Numerous, nor so addicted to War as the *Iroquois*, and those beyond the Mountains describ'd by *Hennipen*, *Lahontan*, and others; these, by Commerce with our Planters, are rendered more Tractable, and by what I could observe myself, or learn from others, have something more settled Places of Abode; and from being a numerous People, as formerly, are reduc'd, for the greatest Part, to slender Companies, however still call'd Nations. The Queen of *Pomonki*'s People, I have been told, were formerly a Considerable Nation, but now have been reduc'd to not many Scores. And in my *Parochial Visitation* towards the Fall of the *Potomock*, I pass'd by the Hutts of such another Cast, far from being a numerous Hoard, or Tribe, I think they call them the *Potapski* Indians. Now as to these smaller Nations living upon the Borders, something more Humaniz'd than those more Remote; These, by some Acquaintance with the Planters, and having already receiv'd some Knowledge and Taste of the Comforts of Life which the Planters enjoy above themselves, might methinks without very great Difficulty be wrought upon, proper Measures being taken,” 60-61.

settle within the Indian communities.<sup>51</sup> These artificers would have the task of “Humanizing” the adult Indians—first by encouraging the Indians to divide up their land, giving each family a proportional share of the property. Since the artificers would be living within the Indian community, Bray explained, they would be “coming in also for a Share” of the property. In this way, the English would completely integrate themselves among the Indians. At this point the artificers would teach the Indians practical skills—they would “help them to Build their Houses, to till their Land, to Breed up Cattle, such as would supply them with wholesome Diet, and to Cloath them and their Children.”<sup>52</sup> Finally, the artificers would teach the Indians “Occupations most necessary, whereby to live with any Comfort in the World, and to Inure them to some Degree of Industry.” All these skills would be learned gradually through everyday practices. The artificers’ wives were given the task of teaching the children to spell and read in “little Charity-Schools,”—Bray added, “as in our Country Villages [in England].” He was convinced that this was the only realistic way to “reduce all of them from Bestial to a Civil Life.”<sup>53</sup>

After these practices had become routine, the artificers would gradually introduce Christian ideas to the Indians. As Bray put it, the artificers would “sow some Seeds of Religion and Virtue in their Minds, by their daily Conversation with them, and by Degrees to Instill into

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 90; 61 Bray: “That two or three Artificers of sober Conversation, together with their Wives, and both of some Competent Knowledge in Religion, shou’d be sent to live and abide among them. The Artificers whom principally I wou’d desire, shou’d be *Carpenters*, *Tillers* of Land and *Tailors*.”

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 61. Bray continued: “The whole Clan shou’d be induc’d by these Persons Perswasions to divide the Tract of Land belonging to them, allotting to everyone having Wife and Children a distinct Proportion which he may call his Property, these Artificers coming in also for a Share. The *Carpenter* shou’d together with his own, offer to Build them little Houses, calling for their Assistance to fell Timber, to saw it, and afterwards to help them in Building their own Houses. The *Tiller* of Land shou’d instruct and assist them in raising Corn, and Breeding up Cattle. And the *Tailor* in making up Clothes. And the Wives of each of these Artificers shou’d teach the *Indian Squaws* with their Daughters, to Milk their Cows, to make Butter and Cheese, and to spin Linen and sow their Garments. So far as to the *Civil Life*.” 61.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 97; 80; 62.



them a System of Christian Doctrine.”<sup>54</sup> Bray criticized Berkeley’s scheme in which, he said, the college professor—just one individual person—would have neither the will nor the ability “to mix with them in *Civil Life*.” And thus, there could be no “Measures taken to Civilize the Indians, but purely to Instruct them in Religion.”<sup>55</sup>

Bray had long thought about the question of how men, who spoke different languages, could communicate with one another. He was convinced that there was a certain degree of incommensurability between different cultures. He pointed out that “Till the Instructor and Instructed can understand one another, there can be no Communication of Sentiments on either Side; and ‘till then, as the Indians are Barbarous to us, so are we to them.”<sup>56</sup> For Bray, one of the advantages of having English families live among the Indians, was that the two nations might teach each other their respective languages. Bray thought that the Indians would most easily learn English by working with the artificers on everyday tasks.<sup>57</sup> It was in repeated habits of life, and not in the classroom, that people picked up language. This was as true for the English as it was for the Indians. Bray explained, “It seems as by this daily and familiar Intercourse with them, the *English* will soon learn the Indian Languages,...so the Indians, by such daily, and perpetual, and mixt Conversation with the *English*, will on their Parts also, soon attain our Language, which will be a great Happiness both to them and us, and together with our Language,

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 97. Bray added: “Methinks by some such Method it might not be Impracticable to bring over a whole Nation together, both to the *Civil* and *Religious* Life, such as wou’d become Christians. And Methinks no great Matter of Charge in Gratuities to the Artificers, and Materials to work withal, and in Coarse Linen and Woolen wherewith to make them Garments might suffice,” 62.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 92; 95.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 91. Bray quoted Corinthians, “*I shall be into him that speaketh a Barbarian, and he that speaketh a Barbarian to me,*” 44. This quote indicated a recognition that the English customs and manners, at first at least, appeared as barbaric to the heathens as heathen customs did to the English.

<sup>57</sup> It would not be hard to imagine, Bray thought, how the Indians would learn English “in our way of sending with our Capital Artificers, who must mix with the Indians, in most Occupations of common Life, in *Felling Timber*, *Building their Houses*, in *Cultivating their Ground*: in short, doing every Thing with them tending to Clothing, as also in Housewifery and Schooling,” *Missionalia* (1727), 92.

will gradually promote Sentiments of Religions.”<sup>58</sup> Ultimately, what Bray was arguing for was the creation of a shared culture in which English culture—including language, manners, and religious beliefs—was impressed upon the Indians.

Bray left the responsibility for the actual conversion of the Indians in the hands of the clergymen in the American parishes. But he was aware that it was unrealistic for the missionaries in the colonies to venture very often into Indian lands in addition to tending to their own parishes. Bray made sure to emphasize that his plan did not intend “to lay any Burden upon you the *American Clergy*. We...are not utterly Ignorant of yourselves, nor of the Circumstances of your Cures.”<sup>59</sup> He acknowledged that responsibility for the instruction of the Indians would greatly inconvenience clergymen who were already traveling far distances to care for their flock. The cures nearest to the Indian nations were often “in Length and Breadth Forty, Fifty, or Sixty Miles over”—“I can testify from my own Knowledge,” he said. This was why he insisted that the missionaries should only instruct the Indians intermittently.<sup>60</sup> The real burden then rather fell to the artificers, who, living among the Indians, would daily work on improving Indian manners

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<sup>58</sup> Bray, *Missionalia* (1727), 92. Bray had been very impressed with Jesuit missionary methods. He also told to the potential artificers: “As to the Necessity of setting up a School among them, for them to learn your Language, as well as you to learn theirs...it is inconceivable how otherwise you and they can come so mutually to understand one another as to communicate the Sentiments of either one to another,” 43.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 63. Bray was keen to defend the clergy against the criticisms of Berkeley: “Of yourselves we have receiv’d a quite different Account from what a late Author, in his great Zeal for the Converting the *American Indians*, has been pleas’d to give of the main Aims you had in your Mission to those Parts, and of your Pastoral Care therein,” 63.

<sup>60</sup> Bray, *Missionalia* (1727), 64. Bray described the ministers’ job: “tho’ you cannot wholly leave your Cures which call for such constant Attendance, to go afterwards, it may be an Hundred Miles off, to spend a Week or more among the *Indian Nations*, especially finding it to little or no purpose; yet we doubt not but you wou’d as often as you can, without prejudice to your proper Flocks, take a Ride to Visit the Artificers we have propos’d as above, to Encourage them, and Direct them too in the Prosecution of the Good they are set upon. You would willingly too doubtless, render yourselves useful to them by a Supply of Necessary Books; And by being *Internuntio*’s as it were between them, and those who may assist the good Design here; you may render yourselves also Assistant therein to great Purpose, especially by Acquainting your most Excellent and Vigilant *Diocesan* with the Growth or Progress of the Design; with what Difficulties it may Labour under, and with what will be farther wanting to forward, and from time to time to Spirit it up. And thus, as we conceive, it wou’d not be Impracticable for you to be Instrumental in Converting the *Indian Nations*, so we wou’d take a great Pleasure in discharging our several Parts. And let this suffice for our Scheme,” 65.

and habits. Bray's ideas, thus, betrayed his real concern: he was more interested in the civilizing process than he was in conversion.

### **Berkeley's College in "the Montpelier of America"**

By contrast, Berkeley's plan for the conversion of Indians emphasized the importance of giving them an education in religious and philosophical ideas rather than in manners. In his *Proposal*, Berkeley outlined his design for a seminary that would provide Indians with a liberal arts education. Only boys under ten years of age would be admitted, "before evil habits have taken a deep root; and yet not so early as to prevent retaining their mother tongue, which should be preserved by intercourse among themselves." Berkeley's method of getting Indians to attend his college particularly bothered Bray, and not without good reason. Indian youths would be brought to the college "either by peaceable methods from those savage nations, which border on our colonies, and are in friendship with us," Berkeley explained, "or by taking captive the children of our enemies."<sup>61</sup>

The curriculum at Berkeley's school would be a well-rounded liberal arts education, aiming to "ground these young Americans thoroughly in religion and morality, and to give them a good tincture of other learning; particularly of eloquence, history, and practical mathematicks: to which it may not be improper to add some skill in physick." According to Berkeley, not only would knowledge of those subjects enlighten the students' minds, but it would spark "a zeal for religion, and love of their country" in their hearts, especially if these sentiments were "early and constantly instilled into their minds, by repeated lectures and admonitions." Berkeley hoped that his American pupils would "not only be incited by the common topics of religion and nature, but

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<sup>61</sup> Berkeley, *A Proposal* (1724), 6.

farther animated and enflamed by the great examples, in past ages, of publick spirit and virtue.” So educated, the Indians would be returned to their respective communities, bearing a degree of masters of arts, and poised “to rescue their countrymen from their savage manners, to a life of civility and religion.”<sup>62</sup> In this way, the savage Indians would soon become Christianized by the missionary work of their own people. Berkeley’s end goal was in fact in harmony with Bray’s—both men wanted to impose civilization and Christianity on these savage Americans. The question, however, was what method would best accomplish this end.

To Berkeley’s contemporaries, the most famous aspect of the dean’s plan for a college was that it was to be located on the Bermuda Islands. Berkeley had long imagined the marvelous characteristics of these islands to have justified “a judicious choice of the situation, where the seminary is to stand.” The seminary needed to be located “in a good air; in a place where provisions are cheap and plenty; where an intercourse might easily be kept up with all parts of America and the islands; in a place of security, not exposed by the insults of pyrates, savages, or other enemies.” It also needed to be located where there was little trade that might distract the students from their studies, and “where the inhabitants...are noted for innocence and simplicity of manners.”<sup>63</sup>

Berkeley ruled out Barbados as a site for the seminary on account of its wealth, and

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7. Bray also thought that the lives of exemplary men would inspire virtue in those who studied them. That is why he included his *Life of Bernard Gilpin* in his *Missionalia*. He wrote, “It is allow’d by all, that the Example of Excellent Persons has a wonderful Force in it to form us into a like Temper and Disposition of Mind, and is apt Insensibly to incline us to imitate them in their Noble and Heroick Attempts to excel in the Laudable Actions of Life,” *Missionalia* (1727), 14-15. But he deemed this kind of study more appropriate for the instructors than the instructed.

<sup>63</sup> Berkeley, *A Proposal* (1724), 8. Berkeley wrote about Barbados: “a place of so high trade, so much wealth and luxury, and such dissolute morals, (not to mention the great price and scarcity of provisions;) must at first sight seem a very improper situation for a general seminary intended for the forming missionaries, and educating youth in religion and sobriety of manners. The same objections lie against the neighbouring islands,” 8-9.

mainland America on account of the many vices of the inhabitants there.<sup>64</sup> He thought that while it was difficult to travel through mainland America, Bermuda was easily accessible by sea from other islands, from the coastal cities in America, and even from Britain.<sup>65</sup> Berkeley wanted his seminary to be positioned toward America (rather than Britain), so that the missionaries—and the Christian knowledge they exported—could easily expand over the continent through the channels of commerce.<sup>66</sup> As Berkeley explained it, “the general course of trade and correspondence lies from all those colonies [on the American mainland] to Great Britain alone: Whereas, for our purpose, it would be necessary to pitch upon a place, if such could be found, which maintains a constant intercourse with all the other colonies, and whose commerce lies chiefly or altogether (not in Europe, but) in America.” Such a place, for Berkeley, was Bermuda.

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<sup>64</sup> Berkeley wrote about mainland America: “And if we consider the accounts given of their avarice and licentiousness, their coldness in the practice of religion, and their aversion from propagating it, (which appears in the withholding their slaves from baptism) it is to be feared, that the inhabitants in the populous parts of our plantations on the continent are not much fitter, than those on the islands, above-mentioned, to influence or assist such a design. And as to the more remote and less frequented parts, the difficulty of being exposed to the inroads of savages, and above all, the want of intercourse with other places, render them improper situations for a seminary of religion and learning,” 9. He continued, interestingly citing from a sermon given to the SPG: “I remember to have seen in an abstract of the proceedings, &c. annexed to the Dean of Canterbury’s sermon, before the society for the propagation of the gospel in foreign parts; that the savage Indians, who live on the continent, will not suffer their children to learn English or Dutch, lest they should be debauched by conversing with their European neighbours: which is a melancholy, but strong confirmation of the truth of what hath been now advanced,” *A Proposal* (1724), 9.

<sup>65</sup> Explaining that many places on mainland America were cut off from networks of commercial and intellectual exchange, Berkeley wrote, “on the continent, where there are neither inns, nor carriages, nor bridges over the rivers, there is no traveling by land between distant places. And the English settlements are reputed to extend along the seacoast for the space of fifteen hundred miles. It is therefore plain, there can be no convenient communication between them, otherwise than by sea; no advantage therefore, in this point, can be gained by settling on the continent,” *A Proposal* (1724), 10.

<sup>66</sup> For Berkeley, Bermuda provided the perfect location for his school because it was positioned at the center of commercial networks within the Atlantic: “as the commerce of Bermuda renders it a very fit place, wherein to erect a seminary, so likewise doth its situation, it being placed between our plantations on the continent, and those in the isles, so as equally to respect both. To which may be added, that it lies in the way of vessels passing from America to Great Britain; all which makes it plain, that the youth, to be educated in a seminary placed in the Summer Islands, would have frequent opportunities of going thither and corresponding with their friends. It must indeed be owned, that some will be obliged to go a long way to any one place, which we suppose resorted to, from all parts of our plantations; but if we were to look out a spot the nearest approaching to an equal distance from all the rest, I believe it would be found to be Bermuda,” *A Proposal* (1724), 11.

He described it as the “one spot that I can find, to which this circumstance agrees.”<sup>67</sup>

Bermuda was also, in Berkeley’s view, temperate in climate, abundant in natural resources and safe from outside threats. The dean wrote, as if having discovered utopia, that since Bermuda was “situated near the latitude of thirty-three degrees, no part of the world enjoys a purer air, or a more temperate climate, the great ocean which environs them, at once moderating the heat of the south winds, and the severity of the north-west.” He had read travel literature affirming that “the air in Bermuda is perpetually fanned and kept cool by sea breezes, which render the weather the most healthy and delightful that could be wished, being, (as is affirmed by persons who have long lived there) of one equal tenour almost throughout the whole year, like the latter-end of a fine May; insomuch that it is resorted to as the Montpelier of America.” The Islands were also “remarkable for plenty...there being, besides beef, mutton, and fowl, great abundance of fruits, and garden-stuff of all kinds in perfection: To this, if we add the great plenty and variety of fish, which is every day taken on their coasts, it would seem, that a seminary could no where be supplied with better provisions, or cheaper than here.”<sup>68</sup> And finally,

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<sup>67</sup> Berkeley, *A Proposal* (1724), 10. Berkeley also wrote about the inhabitants in Bermuda: “These having no rich commodity or manufacture, such as sugar, tobacco, or the like, wherewithal to trade to England, are obliged to become carriers for America, as the Dutch are for Europe. The Bermudans are excellent shipwrights and sailors, and have a great number of very good sloops, which are always passing and repassing from all parts of America. They drive a constant trade to the islands of Jamaica, Barbadoes, Antigo, &c. with butter, onions, cabbages, and other roots vegetables, which they have in great plenty and perfection. They have also some small manufactures of joyner’s work and matting, which they export to the plantations on the continent. Hence Bermudan sloops are oftener seen in the ports of America, than any other. And indeed, by the best information I could get, it appears they are the only people of all the British plantations, who hold a general correspondence with the rest,” 10-11.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. And Berkeley further wrote about the inhabitants in Bermuda: “The trade of Bermuda consists only in garden-stuff, and some poor manufactures, principally of cedar and the palmetto-leaf. Bermuda hats are worn by our ladies: They are made of a sort of mat, or (as they call it) platting made of the palmetto leaf, which is the only commodity that I can find exported from Bermuda to Great Britain; and as there is no prospect of making a fortune by this small trade, so it cannot be supposed to tempt the fellows of the college to engage in it, to the neglect of their peculiar business, which might possibly be the case elsewhere. Such as their trade is, such is their wealth; the inhabitants being much poorer than the other colonies, who do not fail to despise them upon that account. But if they have less wealth, they have withal less vice and expensive folly than their neighbours. They represented as a contented, plain, innocent sort of people, free from avarice and luxury, as well as the other corruptions that attend those vices,” 13-14.

Bermuda was protected from pirates and enemies by a wall of rocks, so that it would be “impossible to find any where, a more secure retreat for students.”<sup>69</sup>

Not least of Berkeley’s concerns was that Bermuda be a place suited to the retirement of elite professors, such as himself. He imagined that here he would find “a retirement, so sweet, and so secure, and every way so well fitted for a place of education, and study.”<sup>70</sup> He was sure that the benefits of Bermuda would entice the best scholars to his seminary—“men of prudence, spirit, and zeal, as well as competent learning, who should be led to it by other motives than the necessity of picking up a maintenance.” Of his potential fellow professors, he wrote, “the governing part would be easier, and better contented with a small stipend, and a retired academical life, in a corner from whence avarice and luxury are excluded.”<sup>71</sup> Berkeley thus contrasted two visions of America—one of a peaceful and plentiful Bermuda, another of a loose and disorderly mainland.<sup>72</sup> Finally, he thought that the isolation of Bermuda would ensure that “young Americans [Indians], educated in an island at some distance from their own country, will more easily be kept under discipline till they have attained a complete education, than on the continent.” If they were near their families, he thought, they might be tempted to run back to

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 15; 14. He claimed that there were “at this time several gentlemen, in all respects very well qualified, and in possession of good preferments, and fair prospects at home, who having seriously considered the great benefit that may arise to the church and to mankind from such an undertaking, are ready to engage in it, and to dedicate the remainder of their lives to the instructing the youth of America, and prosecuting their own studies upon a very moderate subsistence in a retirement, so sweet, and so secure, and every way so well fitted for a place of education, and study, as Bermuda,” 16. “This much the writer hereof thought himself obliged to say of his associates: for himself, he can only say, that as he values no preferment upon earth, so much as that of being employed in the execution of his design; so he hopes to make up for other defects, by his industry and zeal,” 16.

<sup>72</sup> On the mainland, professors and students, Berkeley said, would be in “the midst of a full trade and great riches, attended with all that high living and parade which our planters affect, and which, as well as all fashionable vices, [which] should be far removed from the eyes of the young American missionaries,” *Ibid.*, 14.

their homes, “returning to their brutal customs, before they were thoroughly imbued with good principles and habits.”<sup>73</sup>

**Bray contra Berkeley: “the most Unchristian, or rather the most Anti-Christian Method to propagate the Gospel”**

Berkeley raised thousands of pounds to build and maintain his seminary in Bermuda.<sup>74</sup> Not surprisingly, Bray, having devoted years to collecting funds for his various projects overseas, marveled at the great sums Berkeley had raised in a very short time. Bray could not help but think that Berkeley’s money would yield much greater results if it were used to fund more practical schemes than the one in Bermuda. He wrote, “methinks either a part at least of that vast Grant of Charity already given, for the Conversion of *Indians*, might be apply’d this Way,” namely, according to his own scheme.<sup>75</sup>

However, as Bray bitterly acknowledged, few dared to criticize the dean’s famous proposal—“it being a Design so Noble in itself, and propos’d with such an Air of Christian Zeal, and sincere Intentions, that it has so Captivated good People throughout the Nation.” Berkeley had convinced people “of both Sexes, and of all Ranks and Degrees, from the highest to the lowest,” to make voluntary contributions to his scheme. “It is really become too Invidious a Thing, and perhaps too dangerous to one’s Peace and Quiet to dissent from it, and not most readily to give into it,” Bray wrote rather disingenuously, for he went on to voice his dissent to Berkeley’s plan, explaining why it was vastly inferior to his own.<sup>76</sup> In doing so, Bray hoped “not

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<sup>73</sup> Berkeley, *A Proposal* (1725, expanded edition), 17.

<sup>74</sup> See Gaustad, *George Berkeley in America* (New Haven, 1979), 33-41.

<sup>75</sup> Bray, *Missionalia* (1727), 62.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.



only to prevent, if possible, the Disappointment in, but what is worse, the very many bad Consequences which may follow from Prosecuting, even this one of the most noble Designs in the World, on this Plan.” Bray asked his readers (the Maryland clergy) to give their opinion—“I appeal to the great Searcher of Hearts”—which plan “you take to be most Practicable” and would have “some greater likelihood of reducing those Barbarians to Civil Life, and to Embrace our most holy Faith and Religion” when the two were compared to each other.<sup>77</sup>

While Berkeley imagined Bermuda to be healthy, bountiful, and well located, Bray knew it to be quite the reverse. In fact, it was “very Barren, the Soil being so wash’d away by Hurricanes” so that the inhabitants of the islands were forced to import many provisions from the Bahamas and Carolinas. Bray wrote, “their Beef and Pork being brought from the Continent above Two Hundred Leagues Distance, thro’ the contrary Winds, and Losses at Sea, the Inhabitants themselves are not seldom reduc’d to great Distress.” Furthermore, there was not much available land on the Bermudas, making property there particularly expensive to obtain. This was to say nothing of the fact that the islands were “fill’d with none but the roughest and rudest Sort of People, Sailors,” so that it seemed to Bray that of all the regions in America, Bermuda was “the least fitted for Retirement, Contemplation or Study.”<sup>78</sup>

Most damaging to Berkeley’s scheme, according to Bray, was Bermuda’s remote location. What was one of Bermuda’s greatest assets in Berkeley’s mind, could also be its greatest drawback. Bray explained, “it being so vastly Distant, even upwards of Two Hundred Leagues, and in Sailing ordinarily seven or eight Hundred Miles from the Places where the Conversions are Propos’d to be wrought, it even Astonishes those who know those Parts, or closely consider the Incongruity, why this of all Places shou’d be pitch’d upon as most

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

conveniently Situated.”<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, Bray’s own plan to carry out missionary work on the American mainland—“in the midst of the *Indians*”—had none of these difficulties. There, “the Climate and Country itself, when become a little Cultivated, is neither unhealthy, nor disagreeable.” There, food and other necessities were plentiful. Bray thought life within the Indian communities would be peaceful and conducive to study, for “the *Indians*, the most silent and sedate People in the World, will not Interrupt or Dissipate with Clamour or Noise the Thoughts of the Studious.” Finally, it would be far less expensive to make settlements within the Indian lands than transport students back and forth between their homes and a college on Bermuda.<sup>80</sup>

Perhaps the most distressing element of Berkeley’s design was the method recommended for obtaining students for the school. Bray thought that it was unrealistic to expect that Indian parents would agree to send their children so far away from home, and “over the Seas, the Element they so much dread, and this at so great a Distance, to this College.”<sup>81</sup> Yet Berkeley’s

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-71.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 71. Bray explained that there already had been little success of getting the Indians to attend the colleges in America like William and Mary: “The Reverend Dean, besides that before he had cast his Reproaches so plentifully against the Clergy in *America*, for being so much wanting in their Endeavours to Convert the Indians, ought to have better inform’d himself about several Steps some Time since taken. He might, with the greatest Ease in the World have Known, that besides the College of *New-Cambridge*, in *New-England*, and another lately raised in *Connecticut*, there has been founded by those most Excellent Princes, King *William* and Queen *Mary*, a Noble one at *Williamsburg* in *Virginia*; and which would have been greatly to his Purpose to know; he might have been inform’d, how the unparallel’d Mr. *Boyle* added, of himself, and Endowment of Six Scholarships, as I remember, for the Education of Indian Youth in this College, to be sent thence, after a sufficient Instruction, among their own Nation respectively, to Convert Them,” 71-72. He continued: “But alas! it is not without Expensive Gifts to the Parents, that the President and Governors of the said *William* and *Mary*’s College can induce them to send their Youth to the College, where some of those Indians Parents, not distant above Forty or Fifty Miles, may come and see their Children, and be satisfy’d by their own Eyes how kindly they are us’d. It is found so Difficult however to get any of these Youths, that sometimes the College has been in a manner without any, notwithstanding earnest Entreaties: And can it then be thought they will Voluntarily send them Six Hundred Miles, nay from some Places a Thousand over Sea, thence scarcely ever to hope for a Return! The most candid Construction which can be put upon this Error in Judgment, is through want of Experience, and unacquaintedness with the Temper of the Indian Parents, their Fondness of their Children above most People in the World. (But alas! besides so crude a Scheme, more Things

other method—that Indians “may be forc’d, or Bought as Captives of the Conquering Indian Nations, in order to be Instructed”—was, in Bray’s view, far more troubling. He called it “the most *Unchristian*, or rather the most *Anti-Christian* Method to propagate the Gospel.”<sup>82</sup>

Bray was sure that taking Indian children as captives would provoke a never-ending war between the Indian nations and the English. Rather than promoting civilization, these actions would instigate violence and disorder. “How would the Deist Triumph over us,” Bray exclaimed, “if we should be found encouragers of such Methods?” The missionary’s goal was to spread Christian moral law; such brutal means of converting the Indians by force ignored the moral law altogether, and was better suited to a Hobbesian state of nature, than a civilized empire. Indeed, Bray pointed out, “those who are concern’d in the *Slaving Trade* in *Africa*, do put the Negroe Nations together by the Ears, the better to get Slaves,” but this was surely criminal behavior, he thought, and a very bad way to propagate Christianity.<sup>83</sup> The point was not to exploit the Indians, but “to cultivate, by the kindest Offices, a perpetual Peace and Friendship with the Indian Nations.” To be sure, when Englishmen had the opportunity to instruct the Indians peacefully, Bray thought they should take it. But missionaries could “have no Hand in such Means of bringing [the Indians], nor any others, into Servitude, be the End never so Good.”<sup>84</sup> Bray’s own method of converting the Indians required not direct force, but rather, the gradual transformation of their culture through the everyday inculcation of English manners and habits within the Indian communities.

Bray had other problems with Berkeley’s plan. He compared that plan with his own. On

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than this ought to have been previously Consider’d, before the D. had spread throughout the Nation such a Libel, against a very worthy Clergy, as he has done.)” 72-73.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 74; 73.

the question of financing, the differences were striking, Bray said. Under Berkeley's scheme, all the money raised would go to creating one magnificent building where professors and the few select students would lodge. Under Bray's scheme, that same money would go to building "many Hundreds of Houses...for many Hundred Indian Families." Bray was convinced that the goal of civilizing the Indians would be advanced much further if the English resolved "to build many Houses, or Habitations among the *Indians* themselves, than one College six or seven hundred Miles distant from them."<sup>85</sup>

The real problem for Bray was that Indians were not *yet* fit for higher education. He wrote, "It need not be repeated the absolute Necessity of Civilizing, nay, Humanizing those Savages, in order to, or rather concurrently with the Christianizing of them."<sup>86</sup> And he continued: "For tho' Colleges no doubt are of admirable Use, and on many Accounts necessary to advance Learning, and the Liberal Arts, and Sciences in Countries already cultivated, and in some Measure Polished; yet among Savages, I cannot conceive, but even a *Charity School*, or Schools, taught tho' by old Women, would answer the Ends better than by Professors of Sciences. And the Mechanicks would be more usefully taught among such than the Liberal Arts."<sup>87</sup>

Finally, Bray objected to the idea that sending educated Indians back to their communities would prove effective. These Indians would want to express to their families the lofty ideas they attained at school, but these ideas could have no meaning for those who were still savages. He wrote, "their then State of Life will be so vastly different from the squalid wretched way of living they must return to...that it may be much question'd whether they will

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 74; 70.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 71. Bray continued: "And how that shou'd be done without bringing them off from their wild Rambles on Hunting and Warring, far and wide over so vast a Continent, and without inducing them to betake themselves to a settled Way of Life; nor yet this without having Houses to live in, is beyond our Comprehensions." 71.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.

return to live among their Clans, without as much Force as was suppos'd must be first us'd to bring them to be Humaniz'd and Instructed by those Gentlemen.”<sup>88</sup> These civilized Indians would no longer belong to their original communities. These two groups of people—with different cultures—would not be able to understand each other. Those who did return would inevitably also return to their “Wild and Savage Ways.” As Bray put it, “We have suppos'd it...Inconceivable how Persons, for some Time inur'd to the Sweets and Comforts of Civil Life, should forsake that, and Chuse to live in a Squalid Miserable Manner, as the Indians do: But yet too often it has been found, they do return to their former way of Living.”<sup>89</sup> For Bray, people were shaped by their society, thus society itself had to change if the manners and habits of the individuals were to change. Bray did not however explain why he thought the English artificers would have more success progressively molding Indian culture than the educated Indians would have. The English men and women living with the Indians might instead of civilizing the Indian community, become themselves more heathen, as Berkeley claimed was in fact often the case. But Bray saw a key distinction: the artificers would be instilling new manners and skills gradually through practical methods, while the educated Indians only had ideas to impart.

The appropriate role for someone of Berkeley's stature, according to Bray, was not as some professor living in retirement on Bermuda, but as “curator and inspector” of the clergy and artificers in America. Bray wrote, “There would be Business, and indeed Business enough proper for the Dean to employ himself in for some Time.” First, he would be responsible for selecting (as Bray had done for many years) artificers to go into the Indian communities.<sup>90</sup> Then,

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 98. As Bray put it, “When Arrived to the *Indian* Nations proposed to be Instructed, it may be the Part of the Dean (And who so Proper and Capable as the Dean?) To settle such Sort of Artificers in their several Stations, and

he would make enquiries into which Indian communities it would be profitable to send the artificers. He continued: “To him may be Committed, and to none so properly as himself, the whole Cargoe, not only of the necessary Utensils, to be Distributed among the several Artificers, but the Allotment of their Salaries, and the Premiums, and Gifts of Present to the *Indians*, who shall be found most Teachable and Tractable, in Cloaths, Utensils, &c.”<sup>91</sup>

As inspector of missionary affairs (rather than professor in Bermuda), Bray envisaged Berkeley would settle “*within the Verge* of any one of the *Indian Nations* even the most *Civiliz’d* amongst them.” For, to Bray, it only made sense that “he should take up his Place of Abode, not in *Bermudas*, 1000 Miles off an *Indian Nation*, but in some noted Place, or Town, if it may be, *within the British Settlements* upon the Borders of the *Indians* where Conversions shall be Attempted.” From that location, Berkeley could easily enter the Indian lands. Bray explained: “He and his Associates may make Progresses into several Nations, *First*, to *Inspect* the Proceedings of Artificers set on Work by them, next to *Direct* and *Conduct* them by fresh Advices, as Occasion shall require; And *Lastly*, to *Reward* severally as Reasons shall be given.” Finally, Bray imagined Berkeley in the role of professor: “when the Artificers shall have brought the *Indians* to some Measure of Knowledge, not only of our Language, but of the Principles of Religion, It will be requisite, He should be near at hand to go himself among them, in order to Perfect the Instruction of the *Indians* to greater Degrees of Knowledge, than perhaps their Mechanick Instructors could give them; and then at length to Baptize them.”<sup>92</sup> Berkeley never responded to Bray’s *Missionalia*, and Bray died only a few years later.

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to Conduct them in the same Design afterwards,” 99. Bray indicated that “Religious Societies” were “ready and Capable to Assist him [Berkeley]” in this endeavor, 98.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-101.

By comparing these two plans for the conversion of American Indians, we can begin to see some of the ways members of the Church of England began to fashion a role for themselves in aiding the progress of civilization and the spread of Empire. Bray always had imperial goals in mind: “If all the Contiguous Nations of Indians should at length be induced, from reaping the inestimable Advantages of a *Civiliz’d Life*, and of the most *Excellent Religion*, which, the better it is understood, the more it promotes even Mens Temporal Happiness,” he was sure the Indians would “surrender themselves willingly, without War or Bloodshed, to the *British Governments*.”<sup>93</sup>

Berkeley’s view that America needed an elite school that would provide a sophisticated education to American settlers and Indians is in sharp contrast to Bray’s view that manners and rudimentary habits of civilization had to be present in any population before it was ready to embrace more complex religious and philosophical ideas. Bray was part of a larger intellectual movement, one that this dissertation aimed to bring into focus, that emphasized manners, habits and customs as the necessary foundation of social life. For Bray and many of his contemporaries, civilizations had to pass through stages of development. Men might, at bottom, share a universal nature, but their manners and habits had everything to do with their particular circumstances. Thus, men like Bray thought that by shaping the manners and habits of

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 94. Bray further wrote on the benefits of his plan for the British Empire: “Or it might be worth while, for the several Governments upon the Borders on which these Nations of *Indians* do lie, to be at some Charge in order to have these Nations of *Indians* brought under the Protection of the *British* Provinces wou’d become thereby farther extended, and these Converted *Indians* wou’d be a good Barrier to the *English* against the Incursions of the Wild and Savage *Indians*, and against the *French* of *Canada*, who halloo them to fall upon us in the Out-skirts of our Colonies. And if thus, one after another, the Neighbouring Nations of *Indians*, and after them by Degrees the Remoter and more Barbarous shou’d be Civiliz’d and Instructed in that Blessed Gospel, which by the Testimony of a Heathen, *nil nisi lene suadet*; Good God! How Glorious wou’d this be to the *British* Nation in General, and what Security to its foreign Plantations in particular, lying as now they do, too much expos’d to the Inroads and Ravages of the *Indians*, and their Instigators the *French*!” 62-63.

peoples—in both savage and civilized countries—they could ultimately form them into united subjects of a British Empire.



## Conclusion

This dissertation has argued that the philosophical discussions of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century reformers in England can illuminate how views, still rooted in religious dogma, could nevertheless contribute to the rise of secular thought and the development of a “Science of Man” in the early Enlightenment. The first chapter set up the context of these societies; it showed how they drew on the “latitudinarian” thought of the restoration period. The second, third, and fourth chapters looked at three voluntary societies respectively: Societies for the Reformation of Manners (1691), the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (1698), and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (1701). The first of these encouraged the prosecution of moral crimes such as prostitution, swearing, excessive drinking and gambling in the courts of law; the second established charity schools and distributed books on both sides of the Atlantic; the third sent missionaries to the remote frontiers of civilization—to the American colonies. Finally, by looking at Thomas Bray’s unrealized plan to convert American Indians, this dissertation discussed some of the larger implications of reforming thought for a civilizing process that would be carried out throughout the British Empire in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It is now a commonplace to describe the British Empire of the late eighteenth century as a rational, modern state. But how did this transformation occur? This dissertation offers one way that we can see Englishmen discussing and implementing new techniques for the rationalization of a growing British state and overseas Empire. By looking at reforming rhetoric, we can witness how policing, prison reform, and public institutions of education such as schools and libraries were developed in England, and how these institutions were transferred to the colonies.

The ideas expressed in the writings of the voluntary societies had profound implications for the history of British thought from Shaftesbury to David Hume. In particular, the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment emphasized manners and habits as the essential framework of human beings and their societies. David Hume's ideas were certainly more radical than those of the reformers. However, these reformers made possible a new way of looking at the organization and progress of society: social development could be understood as dependent not on God's providence, but on society's own particular customs and mores. In this way, the religious voluntary societies of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries unintentionally helped advance a more secular worldview.

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- and Disorder, or as Whores, Night-Walkers &c. And who have thereupon been Sentenced by the Magistrates as the Law directs, and have accordingly been Punished... All which (besides the Prosecution of many Notorious Coursers, Swears, Sabbath-breakers, and Drunkards, not here incerted) hath been effected by the Society aforesaid. Published for the satisfaction of such as are Contributors towards the necessary Charges of this Undertaking, and for the Encouraging others to give further Assistance for the more effectual carrying on so great and so hopeful a Design.* London, 1698.
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