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“I Shall Give Thee the Heathen for Thine Inheritance”

Psalms, Parishioners, and Propagating the Gospel in the Protestant Atlantic World, c. 1649–1660

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Abstract

Taking the scriptural concept of the ‘heathen’ as its starting point, this article investigates the attitudes of Protestant ministers and parishioners in England towards the conversion of indigenous non-Christian people in colonial New England during the years of the English republic from 1649 to 1660. The article examines Psalm 2 as a framework within which churchgoers interpreted non-Christianity, before turning to the fragmentary prosopography of parishioners who donated money towards the cause of religious expansion. Illuminating the practical strategies that the new government developed as its pursuit of legitimacy intersected with attitudes towards evangelism overseas, the article demonstrates the ways in which liturgical, pastoral, political and socio-economic circumstances shaped local engagement with the wider Atlantic world. It suggests that English support for the propagation of the gospel emerged from profound theological ambivalence as animosity towards non-believers co-existed with the conviction that some among them could convert and might be saved.

Keywords

heathen – Protestantism – psalms – Interregnum – New England – Atlantic

1 Introduction

Desire of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance: and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession.

ps. 2:8, *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662)¹

By the advent of the Restoration, multiple generations of parishioners throughout England had performed a version of this verse together during worship. As the Proper Lessons of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* specified, congregants were expected to recite the psalm in the morning on the first day of each month and on Easter Day in accordance with the liturgical calendar of the established church.² Along with much of psalmody, and indeed the Bible as a whole, this psalm was at once a solemn reflection on the sacred past, an emphatic reminder of God's enduring connection to a chosen people, and a providential prospectus for His unfolding will. What set this psalm apart was its vision of the relationship between believers and non-believers. As they sang and heard about the 'heathen,' parishioners in local communities during the Elizabethan and Stuart period contemplated a kind of non-Christianity that was as immediate to their own lives as it was foundational to scriptural history. Confronting the 'heathen' with both ambivalence and resolve, animosity and ambition, the psalm also anticipated – and continually informed – English Protestant attitudes towards the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

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- 1 Brian Cummings (ed.), *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 465–66.
 - 2 Ibid., 221, 783–85. Multiple texts shaped the devotional culture of post-Reformation England, producing several different renderings of Psalm 2. For example, the *Whole Booke of Psalmes* (first published 1562) stated, at Psalm 2:1, "Why did the Gentiles tumultes raise? what rage was in their braine? Why dyd the Iewish people muse, seyng all is but vayne?" and, at Psalm 2:8, "All people I will geue to thee, as heires at thy request: The endes and coastes of all the earth, by thee shall be possesst." See Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins, *The whole booke of Psalmes collected into Englysh metre* (London, 1562, STC 2430), 3. This language was used in later editions, including one published in 1649 that corresponds to the chronological beginning of this article. This version stated, at Psalm 2:1, "Why did the Gentiles tumults raise? what rage was in their braine? Why did the Jewish people muse, seeing all is but vaine?" and, at Psalm 2:8, "All people I will give to thee, as heires of thy request: The ends and coasts of all the earth by thee shall be possesst." See Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins, *The whole book of Psalmes collected into English meeter* (London, 1649, STC Wing B2437), 8. For the history of the psalms and English Protestantism, see Hannibal Hamlin, "'Very Mete to be Used of All Sortes of People': The Remarkable Popularity of the 'Sternhold and Hopkins' Psalter," *Yale University Library Gazette* 75 (2000), 37–51; Ruth Ahnert, "Introduction: The Psalms and the English Reformation," *Renaissance Studies* 29 (2015), 493–508. See also, the language used in the King James Version (1611) and the *Book of Common Prayer*, discussed below.

The history of encounters between English colonists and indigenous peoples in the Atlantic world has generated a vast literature.³ Within this framework, scholarship has frequently characterised Protestant evangelism prior to the nineteenth century as relatively limited and ineffective, contrasting the apparent quantitative 'success' of Catholic missionaries with the seeming 'failure' of godly ministers to produce more than a meagre few converts by comparison.⁴ Where historians have focused on Protestant efforts to convert indigenous peoples in the pre-modern Americas, they have often been drawn to prominent advocates such as John Eliot (1604–1690), a minister of New England who undertook particularly well-publicised missionary work in Massachusetts during the seventeenth century.⁵ More recent studies have investigated the underlying ideas that motivated Protestant ministers to preach among

3 For some earlier examples of this scholarship, see Louis B. Wright, *Religion and Empire: The Alliance between Piety and Commerce in English Expansion, 1558–1626* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1942); Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620–1675*, 3rd edn (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995, first published 1965); Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians: The Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America, 1580–1640* (London: J.M. Dent, 1980); James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Neal Salisbury, "Religious Encounters in a Colonial Context: New England and New France in the Seventeenth Century," *American Indian Quarterly* 16 (1992), 501–9.

4 For discussion of this historiographical interpretation, see Ulinka Rublack, "Introduction," in Ulinka Rublack (ed.), *Protestant Empires: Globalizing the Reformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1–29, esp. 3–4; Alec Ryrie, "Mission and Empire: An Ethical Puzzle in Early Modern Protestantism," in Dorothea Wendebourg and Alec Ryrie (eds.), *Sister Reformations II, Schwesterreformationen II: Reformation and Ethics in Germany and in England, Reformation und Ethik in Deutschland und in England* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 181–206. See also Dane Anthony Morrison, *A Praying People: Massachusetts Acculturation and the Failure of the Puritan Mission, 1600–1690* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995); Charles L. Cohen, "Conversion Among Puritans and Amerindians: A Theological and Cultural Perspective," in Francis J. Bremer (ed.), *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith* (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993), 233–56, 233–34, and 237 for the limitations of this assessment.

5 Francis Jennings, "Goals and Functions of Puritan Missions to the Indians," *Ethnohistory* 18 (1971), 197–212; Neal Salisbury, "Red Puritans: The 'Praying Indians' of Massachusetts Bay and John Eliot," *William and Mary Quarterly* 31 (1974), 27–54; Richard W. Cogley, *John Eliot's Mission to the Indians Before King Philip's War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Annie Parker, "Conversion in Theory and Practice: John Eliot's Mission to the Indians," in James Muldoon (ed.), *The Spiritual Conversion of the Americas* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004), 78–98; Kristina Bross, *Dry Bones and Indian Sermons: Praying Indians in Colonial America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); Kathryn N. Gray, *John Eliot and the Praying Indians of Massachusetts Bay: Communities and Connections in Puritan New England* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2013). For the arguably more prolific

indigenous peoples, increasingly seeking to firmly resituate these labours within the context of Reformed theology.⁶ This article seeks to further reframe the history of Protestant evangelism. Instead of focusing solely on the objectives and activities of individual ministers or dwelling upon the number of converts and the validity of their spiritual experiences, it takes a cue from historians of the English Reformation by re-examining what Protestant ministers and parishioners in England believed about evangelism as well as how their experiences shaped their engagement with the Atlantic world.⁷

Focusing on the years of the English republic beginning in 1649, until 1660 when the monarchy was restored under Charles II, this article freshly illuminates the practical religious strategies that the new government developed as its pursuit of legitimacy intersected with local English perceptions of evangelism overseas. It builds on recent studies that have investigated the 'broad,' 'flexible,' and 'localized' national church over which the republican government presided following the dismantling of episcopacy.⁸ Questions of continuity, change, reach and reception, have saturated the historiography

endeavours of Eliot's contemporaries elsewhere in New England, see Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, 252.

- 6 See Catherine Ballériaux, *Missionary Strategies in the New World, 1610–1690: An Intellectual History* (London: Routledge, 2016). Cf. James Axtell, "Were Indian Conversions Bona Fide?," in James Axtell (ed.), *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 100–21. The effort to reassess Protestant evangelism in this article contributes to the burgeoning scholarship on the global dimensions of Protestantism more broadly. This in turn has emerged partly as a counterbalance to the more developed history of Catholicism as a 'world religion.' For global aspects of Protestant and Catholic reformation, see Nicholas Terpstra, *Global Reformations: Transforming Early Modern Religions, Societies, and Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2019). For global Protestantism in particular, see Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Ulinka Rublack (ed.), *Protestant Empires: Globalizing the Reformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). For the Catholic perspective, see Luke Clossey, *Sabvation and Globalization in the Early Jesuit Missions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Simon Ditchfield, "Decentering the Catholic Reformation: Papacy and Peoples in the Early Modern World," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 101 (2010), 186–208.
- 7 For the recent move away from debate about the success or failure of the English Reformation, towards a renewed emphasis on the extent and depth of religious beliefs and lived experiences, see Peter Marshall, "(Re)defining the English Reformation," *Journal of British Studies* 48 (2009), 564–86. For a wide-ranging example of this approach in practice, see Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). See also, Linford D. Fisher, "Native Americans, Conversion, and Christian Practice in Colonial New England, 1640–1730," *Harvard Theological Review* 102 (2009), 101–24.
- 8 Bernard Capp, "Introduction: Stability and Flux: the Church in the Interregnum," in Fiona McCall (ed.), *Church and People in Interregnum Britain* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2021), 1–16, 1–2, quotes at 2.

surrounding this period. Scholarship has emphasised that 'traditional' elements of the established church persisted, while also demonstrating the sporadic spread of godly reformation and the variable responses it elicited. However, studies have also indicated the diminishing influence of pre-Civil War church dynamics as well as the persistence and amplification of godly endeavours.⁹ Amidst the broader disruption that the church faced, ecclesiastical organisation relating to financial matters and the duties of the ministry endured at the local level.¹⁰ The state intervened in religion via legislation that secular judicial authorities monitored and interpreted in the absence of royal and episcopal oversight.¹¹ Legal proceedings facilitated performative reassertions of religious stability and godliness.¹²

Further illuminating these developments, this article investigates "the clergy and officers who served their parishes," as well as the strategies that ministers and parishioners used to navigate religious change.¹³ Godly interventions in the English church during the Interregnum varied geographically.¹⁴ Examining evidence of experiences in local parishes indicates connections and commonalities alongside differences and tensions within communities. It also further illuminates the ways in which these communities shaped as well as responded to colonisation and the propagation of the gospel in the Americas, revealing that, while 'religious localism' characterised the Church of England during the Interregnum, its members were nonetheless highly attuned to global and expansionist concerns.¹⁵ In this sense, local support in England for evangelism overseas signals instances in which the interests of local ministers, their parishioners, and the government could have aligned. To explore these dynamics, the article first isolates the English psalms, specifically Psalm 2, as a conduit through which English churchgoers engaged with ideas about non-Christian peoples in the Americas. Turning to an initiative that the republican government undertook to support the propagation of the gospel, the article then investigates the fragmentary prosopography of local parishioners who donated money towards the cause of evangelism in New England.

9 For a succinct overview of this historiography, see Fiona McCall, "Breaching the laws of God and man": secular prosecutions of religious offences in the interregnum parish, 1645–60, in McCall (ed.), *Church and People*, 137–70, 137–39.

10 *Ibid.*, 138.

11 *Ibid.*, 139.

12 *Ibid.*, 168–70.

13 Andrew Foster, "What Happened in English and Welsh Parishes c. 1642–62?: A Research Agenda," in McCall (ed.), *Church and People*, 19–39, 38.

14 Capp, "Introduction," in McCall (ed.), *Church and People*, 14.

15 Judith Maltby, "The Good Old Way': Prayer Book Protestantism in the 1640s and 1650s," *Studies in Church History* 38 (2004), 233–56, 255.

The article thus develops the Atlantic dimensions of recent scholarship that has emphasised the role of psalmody in expressing the priorities of English Protestantism, while also complementing new research that has uncovered examples of writers, merchants, nobles, political elites and royals in Europe who financially supported global Protestant expansion.¹⁶

The language of this expansion reflected the entanglement of theology and nature in the Protestant historical imagination. A crucial conceptual thread of sacred history embedded within Reformed religious culture, the scriptural figure of the ‘heathen’ likely has etymological origins in the uncultivated environment of the ‘heath,’ as in ‘dweller on the heath,’ while the term ‘propagation’ has roots in Latin words that describe the reproduction of plants.¹⁷ The Old Testament frequently associated ‘heathen’ people with idolatry, the wilderness, and the veneration of nature, while the New Testament cast them as potential beneficiaries of apostolic evangelism.¹⁸ Within the postlapsarian framework of original sin, the ‘heathen’ existed in a state of natural corruption, remaining ignorant and untamed in the uncultivated wilderness while awaiting civilisation and the gospel. Just as Adam had been consigned to agrarian labour after the fall, God’s people had a duty to tame and work the land. This process was intertwined with spiritual planting and cultivating that governed Protestant attitudes towards the non-Christian inhabitants of the Americas. In accordance with predestination, which held that God had already distinguished the elect, those people bound for heaven, from the reprobate, those bound for hell, Protestants believed that some among the ‘heathen’ might be the prospective beneficiaries of divine grace, while others would succumb to diabolism and damnation, as sacred history continued to unfold in the Americas.¹⁹

16 For the potency of the psalms among English Protestants, see Alec Ryrie, “The Psalms and Confrontation in English and Scottish Protestantism,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 101 (2010), 114–37. For an analysis of German efforts to finance missions in southeast India, see Ulrike Gleixner, “Globalizing the Protestant Reformation through Millenarian Practices,” in Rublack (ed.), *Protestant Empires*, 254–74, 264–67.

17 See ‘heathen’ and ‘propagation,’ *OED* (accessed 06 April 2022). “For hee shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good commeth, but shall inhabite the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited” (Jer. 17:6, KJV). See also, “Flee, save your lives, and be like the heath in the wilderness” (Jer. 48:6, KJV).

18 Evidence of this can be found in 2 Kgs. 16–21, KJV, as well as in Gal. 1:15–16, 2:9, 3:6–9, KJV.

19 For the Protestant view of nature and sacred history, see Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of Berkeley Press, 1967), 153–54; Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 379–80; David Harris Sacks, “Discourses of Western Planting: Richard Hakluyt and the Making of the Atlantic World,” in Peter C. Mancall (ed.), *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550–1624* (Chapel Hill,

This article thus suggests some of the ways that ordinary parishioners in England gathered information about the Atlantic world, highlights aspects of colonisation that reached their lives, and identifies the scriptural and liturgical elements of religious culture that shaped their attitudes towards non-Christianity. Proponents of evangelism in New England actively channelled information about their endeavours to England, where in turn ministers and congregants actively sought to intervene in a trans-Atlantic effort to propagate religion overseas. Evidence from the psalms, colonial narratives, sermons, legislative documents and financial records demonstrates that English Protestants possessed a sophisticated conceptual framework within which to interpret indigenous non-Christian peoples in the Americas. The aim of this article is not to replace narratives of failure with ones of success, but rather to show that Protestant evangelism was the product of fundamental theological ambivalence in which animosity towards non-Christians co-existed with an ambitious conviction that some among them could convert and might be saved. This was the memory and the promise of sacred history that resonated so powerfully with godly ministers and their congregants as they confronted the wilderness of North America and its indigenous inhabitants.

2 Psalm 2, the ‘Heathen’ and Protestant Evangelism

In Psalm 2, the subjugation of the ‘heathen’ signals the wider co-existence of love and fear, worship and conquest that characterises the relationship between God and His people as related in the English Bible. In the King James Version (1611), the psalm began with a question: “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?” This rhetorical lament that kings and rulers rebelled against God preceded a description of divine ‘derision’ and ‘wrath,’ as well as an address to the Son of God, who would come into possession of the world and restore order: “I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance [...] Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” Finally, earthly rulers were commanded to “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are

NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 410–53. For the Reformed approach to the conversion of indigenous peoples in the Americas, see James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1985), 222–23; Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 304.

all they that put their trust in him.”²⁰ Inviting churchgoers to join in the castigation of non-believers, this language illustrates the intermingling of unity and militancy that Alec Ryrie has detected as central to the pervading popularity of English psalmody among Protestant congregations from the Elizabethan era through the mid-seventeenth century.²¹ It also expressed a combination of animosity towards the enemies of God and ambitious efforts to expand His dominion that set the stage for English Protestant ambivalence towards indigenous non-Christian peoples in the Americas.

Recent scholarship has explored the trans-Atlantic dimensions of Protestant psalm-singing. As Glenda Goodman has shown, psalmody in colonial New England facilitated personal engagement with God while also reinforcing cultural ties to England. During the seventeenth century, ministers took an interest in sorting the psalms thematically based on the relevance of certain verses to particular themes and circumstances. Moreover, congregants developed personal ways of singing that reflected their own attunement to divine experience.²² At the same time, the psalms informed Protestant efforts to expand Christianity in the Americas. While examples of indigenous peoples singing the psalms might indicate the progress of evangelism, this could also draw attention to the liminal space that converts occupied as they moved from a condition of non-belief towards faith and adherence to scripture.²³ Some indigenous peoples even recited psalms they had absorbed as a form of rebellious parody when they renounced Christianity.²⁴

20 Ps. 2 (KJV). Reflecting the language of the Great Bible of 1540, the *Whole Booke of Psalmes* was published as a separate text in numerous successive editions from 1562 onwards, but it did not refer to the ‘heathen’ in Psalm 2. While the psalter had often been bound with earlier versions of the *Book of Common Prayer*, the psalms were officially printed as part of the 1662 version, which also referred to the concept of the ‘heathen’ in Psalm 2. See Brian Cummings, “Note on the Texts,” in Cummings (ed.), *The Book of Common Prayer*, lv–lvi, 751, 783–85. This article focuses on Protestant sermons about the Americas that quoted Psalm 2 as referring specifically to the ‘heathen,’ thereby echoing the language of the KJV. It might also be noted that, although the government proscribed the *Book of Common Prayer* in 1645, its content remained a touchstone for many local ministers and parishioners. See Foster, “What Happened in English and Welsh Parishes,” in McCall (ed.), *Church and People*, 33.

21 Ryrie, “The Psalms,” 131.

22 Glenda Goodman, “‘The Tears I Shed at the Songs of Thy Church’: Seventeenth-Century Musical Piety in the English Atlantic World,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65 (2012), 691–725.

23 Glenda Goodman, “‘But they differ from us in sound’: Indian Psalmody and the Soundscape of Colonialism, 1651–75,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 69 (2012), 793–822, 799, 803.

24 *Ibid.*, 820.

These insights invite further study of the ways in which specific psalms shaped English perceptions of evangelism in the Americas. The colonial focus of psalm-singing on individual spirituality, combined with the “malevolent Indian psalmody” of subversive former converts, might well have contributed to a growing sense in the latter half of the seventeenth century that English Protestants and indigenous peoples were diametrically opposed and that non-Christianity was a fixed, intractable condition impervious to evangelism.²⁵ However, it is likely that the seeds of Protestant ambivalence towards indigenous peoples had already been sown, alongside more optimistic perceptions of prospective converts, in the language and assumptions of the psalms themselves. Investigating the ways in which English Protestant ministers and congregants read, performed, and interpreted psalms illuminates their perceptions of evangelism. Specifically, psalmody might have emphasised the relationship of the individual believer to God, but it also described the relationship of believers to non-believers. Psalms furnished Protestants in New England with arguments that became increasingly conducive to colonisation and evangelism not only because singing selected psalms promoted individual spirituality, but also because the language of the psalms pointed towards the unfixed nature of non-Christianity. More than merely suggestive or instructive, the psalms could be prophetic and served to remind Protestants that the propagation of the gospel was a duty of sacred historical significance. Prominent ministers in New England invoked ideas embedded within the psalms to communicate the importance of evangelism to audiences in England. Reflecting on one of John Eliot’s letters reporting progress in the religious instruction of indigenous peoples, Henry Whitfield (1590/91–1657), who arrived in New England himself in 1639 and ministered there before returning to England in 1650, concluded in 1651 that “I see plainly the fulfilling of that Divine truth and promise spoken of by *David*, Psal. 138. 2. *Thou hast magnified thy Word above all thy Name*, i.e. The Word in the Gospel brought and preached to men.”²⁶ This language emerged from scriptural history, but Protestant engagement with indigenous peoples in the Atlantic world imbued it with additional urgent meaning in the present. Consequently, it is likely that singing or contemplating certain psalms in English parishes increasingly recalled the ongoing efforts of missionaries in the Americas and served as a resonant link with New England.

25 Ibid., 822.

26 Henry Whitfield, *The light appearing more and more towards the perfect day. Or, a farther discovery of the present state of the Indians in New-England, concerning the progresse of the Gospel amongst them. Manifested by letters from such as preacht to them there* (London, 1651, STC Wing W1999), 44. For Whitfield, see *ODNB*.

This is evident in the use of Psalm 2 during the Interregnum. As Ryrrie has emphasised, Psalm 2 reflected a preoccupation with the providential retribution that awaiting rebellious or malevolent non-believing rulers.²⁷ At the same time, ministers often cited the psalm while celebrating the conversion of non-believers. Prefacing accounts of evangelism that Eliot published in a work dated 1653, the minister of Dorchester in New England, Richard Mather (1596–1669), emphasised that,

The Amplitude, and large Extent of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ upon Earth, when *the Heathen shall be his Inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the Earth his Possession; and when all Kings shall fall down unto him, and all Nations do him service, all contrary Kingdoms and Powers being broken in pieces and destroyed*, is a thing plainly and plentifully foretold and promised in the Holy Scriptures; Psal. 2. 8. and 22. 27. and 72. 11. and 86. 9. Dan. 2. 35. 44, 45. and 7. 26, 27. Zech. 14. 9.²⁸

In at least one English parish, a minister cited Psalm 2 during a sermon to advocate the propagation of the gospel in the Americas. In a work published in 1660 and drawn from sermons to the congregation at the church of Mary Magdalene in the town of Taunton, Somerset, the minister George Newton (1601/2–1681) explained to his audience that evangelism fulfilled a psalmodic promise about the enlargement of Christ's kingdom throughout the world. Evoking scriptural narratives of apostolic evangelism, Newton observed that "Christ doth not send his Ministers particularly or restrictively to any Countrey, or to any Nation, but their Commission leaves them free to all the world."²⁹ He elaborated:

You heard even now of many zealous Instruments of Christ, who have had the same design, *viz*, to preach the Gospel in *America*, where Christ was never named till within these few years. To lay the first stone of the Foundation of Religion there, to gather Churches, and to erect the

27 Ryrrie, "The Psalms," 134.

28 Richard Mather, "To the Christian Reader," in John Eliot, *Tears of Repentance: Or, A further Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel Amongst the Indians in New-England: Setting Forth, Not Only their Present State and Condition, but Sundry Confessions of Sin by Diverse of the Said Indians, Wrought upon by the Saving Power of the Gospel; Together with the Manifestation of their Faith and Hope in Jesus Christ, and the Work of Grace upon their Hearts* (London, 1653, STC Wing E524), sigs B2r–C4r, sig. B3r.

29 George Newton, *An exposition with notes, unfolded and applyed on John 17th delivered in sermons preached weekly on the Lords-day, to the congregation in Tavnton Magdalene* (London, 1660, STC Wing N1044), 414.

Kingdom of the Lord Christ among the poor blind *Indians*, in the remotest quarter of the world, That so the Fathers promise may at length be made good to Jesus Christ, Psal. 2.8. *Ask of me and I will give thee the Heathen for thine Inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.* And verily in this my Brethren, they have not gone beyond their line, they have not strayed beyond the bounds of their Commission. Christ doth not send his Ministers, as you have heard, particularly or restrictively to any Countrey, or to any Nation, but their Commission leaves them free to all the world: Even the Commission, not of Apostles only, but of the ordinary Ministers of Christ [...] so that they are within their compass still, though they be among the *Indians*, even at the other end of all the Earth.³⁰

According to Mather and Newton, the language of inheritance and possession in Psalm 2 confirmed that God had granted dominion over non-believers to Christ, thereby bestowing an apostolic duty upon ministers to expand Christianity across the world. For these ministers, the effort to propagate the gospel in the Americas was one pertinent example of what should ideally have constituted a truly global endeavour towards this end. As the potential beneficiary of these efforts, the scriptural figure of the ‘heathen’ succinctly conveyed to parishioners underlying theological assumptions about the uncultivated condition of non-Christian peoples and the evangelistic means through which Protestants could enlarge the boundaries of the true religion so that some among the indigenous peoples of the Americas might convert and discern salvation.

Examples such as these help to explain an apparent paradox within global Protestantism in which hostile attitudes towards enemies of God ostensibly co-existed with benevolent efforts to convert non-Christian peoples. They suggest that there was no inherent contradiction between these attitudes. Indeed, Protestant ministers often appeared to express the two sentiments in the same breath and Psalm 2 seemed to encapsulate both simultaneously. In the context of postlapsarian and predestinarian theology, this language logically reflected the exclusionary and expansionist dimensions of Protestantism as it developed in North America and facilitated the co-mingling of English animosity, ambivalence and ambition towards indigenous peoples in the Atlantic world. After the fall, human beings were steeped in natural corruption and ignorance from which only the true religion could wrest them. In accordance with predestination, only a small minority of people were expected to convert and be

³⁰ Ibid., 417. Emphases in original.

saved. Just as embracing Reformed religion might indicate election, refusing the gift of the Word could point towards damnation. Some indigenous peoples in the Americas might become civilised by following the example of English believers, subsequently detecting the working of grace within and converting to Christianity, but many, if not most, others would not. Meanwhile, some Christians were exemplars of godliness, while others displayed signs of reprobation by sliding back into error and superstition, becoming like the 'heathen' themselves by emulating unconverted non-believers.³¹

All of this reinforced a sense in which Christian and non-Christian identities were unfixed, and that indigenous 'heathen' peoples, like English Protestants themselves, might be the potential beneficiaries of God's grace or damned souls awaiting eternal torment; the grateful recipients of His mercy or the deserving victims of His providential wrath.³² That Reformed piety so often involved the performance of godly devotion alongside the recognition of one's own sinfulness and unbelief only intensified this sense of spiritual precariousness. The psalms help to explain the foundations of this ambivalence towards the conversion of indigenous peoples in the Americas. In Psalm 2, the 'heathen' was made subject to the people of God and Protestant ministers elaborated the nature and function of this subjugation as they advocated the propagation of the gospel. As they contemplated the figure of the 'heathen,' many English parishioners likely perceived non-Christianity not only as an aspect of the biblical past, but also as a contemporary phenomenon of unfolding salvific significance that their brethren were actively confronting overseas. In the case of Taunton, the minister had even strategically timed his sermon so that his congregation would keep the sacred historical necessity of evangelism at the forefront of their minds at a particularly important moment: A marginal

31 In 1631, the scholar Edward Howes expressed this concern in a letter to the colonist John Winthrop Jr., anticipating that Christ would "make ye wise to the salvation of your owne soules, your generations after you and the poore heathen with you," but also praying "ye become not a prey to the spoyler, and your children turne heathen." See Edward Howes to John Winthrop, Jr., 9 November 1631, in *Winthrop Papers*, 6 vols., eds. Stewart Mitchell, Allyn Bailey Forbes, and Malcolm Freiberg (Boston, MA, 1929–1992), vol. III, 1631–1637, ed. Allyn Bailey Forbes (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1943), 54–55.

32 For the unfixed condition of non-Christianity as a prelude to both evangelical ambition and the castigation of those who failed to convert, see Denise Kimber Buell, "Early Christian Universalism and Modern Forms of Racism," in Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac and Joseph Ziegler (eds.), *The Origins of Racism in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 109–31, 123–30. Cf. Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); Heather Miyano Kopelson, *Faithful Bodies: Performing Religion and Race in the Puritan Atlantic* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

notation directly adjacent to Newton's discussion of Psalm 2 explained that the sermon had been "Preached when a Collection was made for propagation of the Gospel in New-England."³³ In this way, the psalmic figure of the 'heathen' could have amplified the sacred significance of a pivotal legislative intervention that itself echoed the liturgical content of the Church of England in order to galvanise English support for evangelism in the Atlantic world.

3 English Parishioners and the Propagation of the Gospel

In the last two decades, historians have increasingly investigated the Atlantic dimensions of the Interregnum. As well as emphasising that the interventions of the republican government shaped political structures and intensified religious division in colonial settlements, they have also examined local English and colonial networks that galvanised intertwined imperial and theological ambitions.³⁴ As the English revolution reverberated throughout the British Isles and beyond, new approaches to evangelism also emerged. There was a widening gulf in the 1640s between the reformation of the church in revolutionary England, which witnessed growing toleration amidst religious fragmentation, and the congregational priorities of puritan New England, where godly efforts to preserve conformity in the Massachusetts Bay Colony appeared increasingly draconian.³⁵ Following the efforts of former Plymouth governor Edward Winslow (1595–1655) to galvanise popular and political support for evangelism, which might in turn rehabilitate the reputation of Massachusetts, parliament passed an "Act for the Promoting and Propagating the Gospel of Jesus Christ in New England" in 1649. Envisioning trans-Atlantic affinity and cooperation between the English government and the colonies, the Act sought to unify Protestants by establishing a programme of fundraising in English parishes that would in turn support the efforts of ministers to facilitate the conversion of indigenous peoples in New England.³⁶

33 Newton, *An exposition*, 417.

34 John Donoghue, *Fire Under The Ashes: An Atlantic History of the English Revolution* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 5–6, and passim; Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640–1661* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 1–2, and passim. See also, Stephen K. Roberts, "Cromwellian Towns in the Severn Basin: A Contribution to Cis-Atlantic History?," in Patrick Little (ed.), *The Cromwellian Protectorate* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), 165–87.

35 Pestana, *The English Atlantic*, 53–54, 66–75.

36 *Ibid.*, 80–81; Linda Gregerson, "The Commonwealth of the Word: New England, Old England, and the Praying Indians," in David J. Baker and Willy Maley (eds.), *British*

Efforts to galvanise religious expansion continued to develop in multiple directions during the 1650s. The Commission for the Propagation of the Gospel in Wales operated from 1650 to 1653 and also encompassed the English counties of Northumberland, Durham, Westmorland and Cumberland.³⁷ This was another initiative of the republican government that sought to extend the reach of godly religion and civilization to remote rural regions, many of which appeared ignorant and profane as well as barren and uncultivated.³⁸ This intervention reflected the culmination of puritan aspirations towards evangelism that had developed over the course of the Elizabethan and early Stuart period.³⁹ However, the commission in Wales struggled to replace ejected clergymen with an effective preaching ministry, thus leaving parishes without spiritual support and generating animosity towards the government that endured into the late seventeenth century.⁴⁰ The attempt to revitalise Protestant evangelism during the years of the republic also involved encounters with Islam. As Nabil Matar has noted, “the zeal for converting Muslims to Christianity reached its climax in England during the Interregnum,” reflecting efforts to exert godly influence over the established church in anticipation of the apocalyptic fulfilment of sacred history.⁴¹ Considered together, these mid-century initiatives point towards the wide-ranging ambitions of Protestants eager to pursue evangelism overseas as well as the practical challenges they faced in reinforcing the reformation in local English communities.

A collection of papers held at the Bodleian Library contain a printed copy of the “Act for the Promoting and Propagating the Gospel of Jesus Christ in New England”, originally issued 27 July 1649.⁴² This document established the

Identities and English Renaissance Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 178–93, 178–79.

37 Lloyd Bowen, “This Murmuring and Unthankful Peevish Land: Wales and the Protectorate,” in Little (ed.), *The Cromwellian Protectorate*, 144–64; Christopher Hill, “Puritans and ‘the Dark Corners of the Land,’” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13 (1963), 77–102, 95–96, n. 1.

38 Hill, “Puritans,” 102.

39 *Ibid.*, 102.

40 Bowen, “This Murmuring and Unthankful Peevish Land,” in Little (ed.), *The Cromwellian Protectorate*, 146–47, 149–55. See also Sarah Ward Clavier, “God’s vigilant watchmen: The Words of Episcopalian Clergy in Wales, 1646–60,” McCall (ed.), *Church and People*, 217–41, 230–31.

41 Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558–1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 143–44.

42 “An Act For the promoting and propagating the Gospel of Jesus Christ in New England,” 27 July 1649, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson Manuscripts, MSS. Rawl. C. 934, Papers relating to the proceedings of the Corporation for Propagating the Gospel in New England, between 1649 and 1656, 1–4.

Society for Propagating the Gospel in New England and set out its organisational structure. The language of this legislation articulated a recurring effort among Protestant writers to ensure that conversion reflected religious orthodoxy and zeal as well as civility and morality.⁴³ The Act explained that godly ministers there were in the midst of preaching the Word to "divers the Heathen Natives of that Country," many of whom "do now call upon the Name of the Lord, and give great testimony of the power of God drawing them from death and darkness, into the life and light of the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ."⁴⁴ In light of this, the Act declared, "we cannot but in behalf of the Nation, represent, rejoyce and give glory to God, for the beginning of so glorious a propagation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ amongst those poor heathen."⁴⁵ The act identified a range of provisions and projects on which the Society would spend the funds, including "Universities, Schooles, and Nurseries of literature settled for further instructing and civilizing them," as well as "Instruments and Materials fit for labor, and clothing, with other necessaries."⁴⁶ Since the settlers of New England had channelled their energies and resources into "laying the Foundations of many hopeful Towns and Colonies in a desolate Wilderness," the Act called on the people of England to raise money that would be spent "as shall best and Principally conduce to the Preaching and propagating the Gospell of Jesus Christ amongst the Natives."⁴⁷ In order to facilitate this process, the Act set out a scheme of local fundraising:

And forasmuch as we cannot but be induced from the consideration of the Premises, to recommend the furthering thereof to the charity of all such whose hearts God shall incline thereunto, by their Christian and charitable contributions, to be as the Foundation of so Pious and great an undertaking; Be it therefore, and it is hereby Enacted by the Parliament assembled, and by the authority thereof, That a gene[r]all Collection be made for the purposes aforesaid, in and through all the counties, cities, Towns and Parishes of England and Wales. And for the more speedy and better effecting thereof, Be it Enacted by the authority aforesaid, That the severall Ministers within the said severall places, are hereby required to read this Act or a copy thereof, in the presence of their

43 Alec Ryrie and D.J.B. Trim, "Four Axes of Mission: Conversion and the Purposes of Mission in Protestant History," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (2022), 1–21.

44 "An Act For the promoting and propagating the Gospel of Jesus Christ in New England," MSS. Rawl. C. 934, 1.

45 *Ibid.*, 2.

46 *Ibid.*

47 *Ibid.*, 2–3.

severall congregations, upon the next Lords Day after the same shall be delivered unto them, and to exhort the People to a chearfull and lyberall contribution, and are to give their best asistance to so pious a worke; and the Ministers and church-wardens, or Overseers of the Poor of every such Parish and place, together with such other well-affected Persons as God shall stir up to be active in such an undertaking, and as shall be nominated and aproved by the Minister for that purpose, are hereby authorised after the reading hereof, to go with all convenient speed from house to house, to every of the Inhabitants of the said Parishes and Places respectively, and to take the Subscription of every such person in a Schedule to be presented by them for that purpose, and accordingly at the same time to collect and gather the same.⁴⁸

Reading the Act to the congregation would have further amplified the importance of the 'heathen.' Pointing towards the local dimensions of evangelism, the language of the Act also evokes a sense of spiritual and neighbourly charity. It envisages a parish community actively and collaboratively participating in the propagation of the gospel by donating to a divinely mandated cause, not only in the formal space of the church, but also through door-to-door donation drives. When sung, read, and heard aloud, the language of the 'heathen' embedded in the psalms, sermons, and the Act was designed to resonate with congregants and galvanise local English communities into action.

Some of the consequences of this are evident in assorted documents and correspondence pertaining to the operations of the Society itself. The collection contains lists of individuals from several English parishes who made financial contributions towards propagating Christianity between 1649 and 1656. These materials have been the subject of some scholarship. Identifying the formation of the Society as a rare example of tangible progress towards evangelism amidst pervasive English lip service, William Kellaway situated the Act and the collections in the context of efforts to generate political support in England for the preaching efforts of godly ministers among indigenous peoples in New England.⁴⁹ As Kellaway pointed out, Cromwell supported the Society during the Interregnum as it lobbied representatives and officials in London, marshalled county treasurers for assistance in carrying out collections, and liaised with ministers responsible for encouraging parishioners to

48 Ibid., 3.

49 William Kellaway, "The Collection for the Indians of New England, 1649–60," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 39 (1957), 444–62, 444–46, 448.

donate.⁵⁰ Observing that "from the few returns which have survived, average contributions seem to have been very small," Kellaway offered a brief summary of total amounts collected in particular parishes for which records exist, before turning to the challenges that this fundraising faced.⁵¹ As Kellaway noted, the money raised through collections during the 1650s represented the most substantial source of the Society's income and financed a range of projects relating to evangelism, from administration, promotional materials, salaries and expenses, to the production of proselytising tools and texts such as John Eliot's indigenous translation of the Bible.⁵² Meanwhile, David Cressy has cited the donations to illustrate that English parishioners were at least aware of the efforts being made to propagate the gospel in New England, even if they had to contend with many competing priorities besides.⁵³ More recently, Kathryn N. Gray has explored the varying experiences of ministers involved in the collections, as well as identifying individuals and amounts to emphasise the role of English men and women across the socio-economic spectrum as prospective contributors towards evangelism.⁵⁴ These interpretations suggest the value of using this evidence as a window into the lives of people who gave money and invite further consideration of what donating might have meant to individual contributors.

Alert to the methodological challenges that such materials present, historians are increasingly uncovering the religious character of local parish churches and religious communities during the Interregnum. They have emphasised the formative role of interactions between ministers and their parishioners while also highlighting that ministers struggled against a range of spiritual adversaries such as seemingly ignorant and ungodly individuals as well as those whose radicalism might herald instability or separatism.⁵⁵ As Bernard Capp has suggested, historians can perhaps more clearly discern the experiences of individuals whose predilection for non-conformity has rendered them more visible in the historical record, while "the spiritual lives of ordinary parishioners remain largely hidden from us."⁵⁶ Nevertheless, there remain fragmentary echoes of conforming lay experiences in the records and correspondence that local churches produced.⁵⁷ Though fragmentary, the lists of donations offer a

50 Ibid., 449–50.

51 Ibid., 451.

52 Ibid., 461–62.

53 See Cressy, *Coming Over*, 30–32, 57–58.

54 Gray, *John Eliot*, 38–40, 98, and the discussion at n. 30 on 118.

55 Capp, "Introduction," in McCall (ed.), *Church and People*, 4–5, 9.

56 Ibid., 10.

57 Ibid.

glimpse into the dynamics of local parish communities during the Interregnum as individuals contemplated religious change and evangelism in England and overseas. The collapse of monarchical and episcopal authority following the Civil War threatened to disrupt the hierarchical structures of the church, leading local ministers to disagree about whether and how to recognise the republican government depending on their own theological and ecclesiastical preferences.⁵⁸ Scholarly efforts to discern contemporary responses to these developments have emphasised the intensification of apocalyptic anticipation, spiritual anxiety, and sectarian fragmentation alongside a renewal and reassertion of godly expression, regulation, and edification.⁵⁹ Simultaneously, the destabilisation of established parish structures invited the reaffirmation of identity tied to the local congregational community.⁶⁰

The donations serve as an important reminder of individual lives and personal experiences that intersected with these developments. Often only names and amounts are specified, which in themselves are revealing. However, occasional pieces of biographical information and socio-economic commentary offer a glimpse into the kinds of people who involved themselves in the work of evangelism overseas from their own pews and doorsteps. Moreover, brief contextual notes by the creators of the documents indicate a range of attitudes towards evangelism among ministers and churchwardens. These lists provided functional records of donations made, but they could also serve as a shorthand forum for social and economic commentary. Politicians demonstrated their generosity, while some wealthy congregants abstained altogether. Gentry women, widows, and servants made known their financial and spiritual autonomy amidst religious and social pressure to demonstrate Christian virtue. Some in the ministry strove to set a worthy example with their contributions, while others passed quiet judgement on their more frugal parishioners. Although the amount that an individual donated cannot necessarily be interpreted as a straightforward barometer of support for the Church of England, the republican government or the colony of Massachusetts, ministers and congregants would have been aware of the political and religious structures that underpinned this initiative. Without overstepping the boundaries of speculation, it is reasonable to assume that some donations expressed a broad endorsement of the religious and political priorities that the Act represented, even as others could result from a commitment to enduring scriptural

58 Foster, "What Happened in English and Welsh Parishes," in McCall (ed.), *Church and People*, 36.

59 Ibid., 37–38.

60 Ibid., 38.

and sacred historical imperatives regardless of the shifting circumstances of church and state. Even trivial acts of charity can have profound personal or shared meaning irrespective of the amounts given. They can carry multifarious and ambiguous connections to the causes in question. Moreover, room must be made for the possibility that some individuals wished they could have donated more, or indeed that others begrudgingly gave more than they might have preferred.

The title assigned to each list varied slightly depending on the community from which funds were gathered, perhaps indicating subtly different regional interests and priorities. For example, the longest list of contributions in the collection recorded "The names of those in the Parrish of Winterslowe who freely contributed towards the propagation of the Gospell amonge the poore Indians in New England."⁶¹ Among the individuals named on the list were "Alex: Thistlethwayte Esq[ui]re" and, further down, "Edward Thistlethwayte Gent[leman]."⁶² While the majority of names appeared without title or status, these examples point towards a recurring, though sporadic effort to indicate the socio-economic background of contributors. Specifically, the contribution of the gentleman might suggest a performative paternalism consonant with the charitable activities that the gentry organised for their local communities to stabilise and reassert their socio-economic authority as well as to demonstrate engagement with the world beyond England. Just as the gentry household itself was a site of intricate financial manoeuvres that sustained social and familial networks, so the doorstep and the church represented spaces in which gentlemen could participate in a communal endeavour by making economic contributions that carried significant spiritual implications for their reputations and relationships.⁶³ Within a Protestant spiritual framework hyper-sensitive to excess, greed, and covetousness, the accumulation and possession of wealth invited generosity and charity and pointed towards godliness and virtue.⁶⁴

61 Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson Manuscripts, mss. Rawl. C. 934, Papers relating to the proceedings of the Corporation for Propagating the Gospel in New England, between 1649 and 1656, fol. 52r. [This list appears to be undated].

62 Ibid. For the Thistlethwayte family of Winterslow, Wiltshire, see the entry for Robert Thistlethwayte (bap. 1690, d. 1744) in the *ODNB*.

63 Henry French, "Gentlemen: Remaking the English Ruling Class," in Keith Wrightson (ed.), *A Social History of England, 1500–1750* (Cambridge, 2017), 269–89, 272, 276–77, 281–82; Craig Muldrew, "Class and Credit: Social Identity, Wealth the Life Course in Early Modern England," in Henry French and Jonathan Barry (eds.), *Identity and Agency in England, 1500–1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 147–72.

64 Jordan J. Ballora and Cornelis van der Kooib, "The Moral Status of Wealth Creation in Early-Modern Reformed Confessions," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 21 (2019), 188–202.

Often, a list would directly identify the local minister. At Walberton in Sussex, the minister Henry Jordan and the churchwarden Thomas F[o]wler collected money from parishioners and recorded the names of those who had contributed “towards the propagating of the Gospell among the Indians in New England.”⁶⁵ The list of contributions also notes that Jordan, who contributed 0 : 2 : 6, had also “subscribed already in another place.”⁶⁶ It is possible to engage in some cautious speculation about this minister’s emphasis on his second donation. In the first half of the seventeenth century, Sussex was a largely conformist county strongly associated with puritanism and some pockets of non-conformity as well as Catholic recusancy.⁶⁷ According to prescriptive godly literature, often penned by ministers themselves, coordinating and administering charity were counted among the many spiritual duties that parishioners should expect of the local ministry.⁶⁸ As the laity embarked upon the search for assurance of salvation, the minister not only offered pastoral guidance and comfort to their congregants, but also set a crucial example of godly living and devotional practice.⁶⁹ Charity provided an opportunity to model this behaviour, especially given the myriad social and communal dynamics of charitable acts.⁷⁰ Contributing towards charitable causes could demonstrate the godliness of the minister, while galvanising and coordinating his congregants in charitable projects enriched their spiritual lives through a shared experience that emulated his own pious actions.⁷¹

While some individuals lived up to the ideal of the minister-philanthropist, the majority struggled to do so and indeed many experienced financial difficulties of their own.⁷² Nevertheless, the contributions that ministers made towards the propagation of the gospel in New England, even when relatively limited, suggest that they aspired to such a model of charity, conscious of the expectation that they should lend financial support to godly causes, and eager to be seen doing so. As Helen M. Whittle has argued, the proliferation of social and marital networks that connected numerous ministers across parishes in

65 Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson Manuscripts, mss. Rawl. C. 934, Papers relating to the proceedings of the Corporation for Propagating the Gospel in New England, between 1649 and 1656, fol. 54r. [This list appears to be undated].

66 Ibid.

67 Helen M. Whittle, “The Clergy of Sussex: The Impact of Change, 1635–65,” in McCall (ed.), *Church and People*, 111–34, 113–14.

68 Neal Enssle, “Patterns of Godly Life: The Ideal Parish Minister in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century English Thought,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997), 3–28, 4.

69 Ibid., 5.

70 Ibid., 7.

71 Ibid., 10.

72 Ibid., 11.

Sussex might gesture towards some shared theological priorities during the Interregnum despite the variation that characterised religion in the county.⁷³ In this context, donations in support of propagating the gospel can illuminate not only the priorities of specific ministers in isolation, but also the commonalities between them, as well as the extent to which their values were reflected in the behaviour of their parishioners.

In contrast, another individual on the list of contributors in Walberton was simply recorded as "Anonymos."⁷⁴ Analyses of early modern literary works such as pamphlets and poetry show that anonymity in manuscripts could be intentional and strategic, often deployed as a component of satirical or libellous writing.⁷⁵ Yet, this donation suggests that the expression of anonymity could be less conspicuous, reflecting the unspoken religious and social preoccupations of an individual in a small community rather than a dramatic act of surreptitious sedition. Scripture commanded that Christians should carry out charitable acts discretely and indeed secretly lest they fall into the hypocrisy of boasting their own generosity.⁷⁶ In a spiritual environment of godliness that involved the introspective examination of inner thoughts and outward actions, a heightened degree of self-consciousness or even an inflated ego could inflect the decision to conceal one's choices in the administrative records of charity within the church.

Another donor recorded in Walberton was "Magdalen Whit[t]ington".⁷⁷ While most names on these lists were male, numerous entries for women across parishes suggest their spiritual and financial engagement with the Atlantic world through the act of contributing towards evangelism. On 14 December 1656, parishioners in the West Sussex village of Clapham and Patching contributed "towards the Promoting and propagating the gospell of Jesus Christ in New-England."⁷⁸ The Independent minister Samuel Wilmer contributed the

73 Whittle, "The Clergy of Sussex," in McCall (ed.), *Church and People*, 134.

74 Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson Manuscripts, MSS. Rawl. C. 934, Papers relating to the proceedings of the Corporation for Propagating the Gospel in New England, between 1649 and 1656, fol. 54r. [This list appears to be undated].

75 Marcy L. North, "Anonymity in Early Modern Manuscript Culture: Finding a Purposeful Convention in a Ubiquitous Condition," in Janet Wright Starner and Barbara Howard Traister (eds.), *Anonymity in Early Modern England: "What's In A Name?"* (Farnham: Routledge, 2011), 13–42, and *passim*.

76 See Matthew 6:1–4, KJV. I am grateful to Alec Ryrie for suggesting this connection.

77 Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson Manuscripts, MSS. Rawl. C. 934, Papers relating to the proceedings of the Corporation for Propagating the Gospel in New England, between 1649 and 1656, fol. 54r. [This list appears to be undated].

78 MSS. Rawl. C. 934, fol. 57r.

most with 10s.⁷⁹ This list also recorded numerous female donors, including widows “Wid: Grantham,” “Wid: Pane,” “Wid Waller,” and “Wid: Seawell,” as well as “An [and] Joyce Stone,” “Mary Albery,” and “Eliz[:] Seawell.”⁸⁰ In addition to recording this initial round of donations, the list was amended to acknowledge “More giuen since by Tho[mas] Brigden” in the amount of 2s.⁸¹ The document was signed by the minister Wilmer, and his brother, Isaac Wilmer, as well as Thomas Lucas.⁸² These examples suggest the financial autonomy of women in their local church. The majority of those who gave money to New England across the English parishes for which records exist in this collection were men. Yet, the status of widowhood could dramatically amplify the agency of women in England by furnishing them with legal flexibility and financial stability through which they might craft and assert a distinctive social identity.⁸³ Channelling this newfound economic agency into religious projects such as the propagation of the gospel might have resonated with the Protestant expectation that good widows should aspire to godly virtue through an introspective effort to endure affliction as a manifestation of divine will alongside a renewed commitment to Christian piety, duty, and charity.⁸⁴

At the same time, the possibility cannot be discounted that some of these donations were the product of the very economic and spiritual constraints from which widowhood supposedly freed women. Given the considerable number of widows recorded, far exceeding the number of married or unmarried women who contributed, the scenario evoked by these documents of male ministers or churchwardens – figures of considerable local authority – turning up at the door and asking for money, carries a whiff of exploitative preying upon the bereaved, solitary, and vulnerable, even if only through subtle religious and social cues. Yet, the circumstances of the donations recorded in these parishes suggest that the interventions of widows exceeded and perhaps even subtly subverted early modern expectations and pressures. They were engaging in community-oriented fundraising and made substantive contributions that often matched or surpassed those of many male donors. While the

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid. For the Wilmer brothers, see Whittle, “The Clergy of Sussex,” in McCall (ed.), *Church and People*, 115.

83 See the argument advanced in Alyson D. Alvarez, “Against the Good Widdow No Harm We Doe Know’: Examining Aristocratic and Gentry Widows’ Roles and Influence in England from 1500–1650,” Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Nebraska (2019).

84 Barbard J. Todd, “The Virtuous Widow in Protestant England,” in Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner (eds.), *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (New York, NY.: Longman, 1999), 66–83.

records suggest that only ministers and churchwardens knew precisely who had donated what in each parish, this in itself indicates that contributing money towards evangelism in New England was a simultaneously spiritual and social transaction through which parishioners in the Church of England could signal their commitment to the godly causes of the Interregnum government.

While most donations were explicitly framed as contributions to evangelism in New England, one of the documents suggests a subtly different approach. The title for the list of contributors in the village of Plaitford, Wiltshire began by emphasising that "the inhabitants" had "giuen their benevolence for the releife of new England."⁸⁵ In contrast with the lists produced in other parishes, this phrasing omitted any reference to the indigenous peoples of North America or the effort to convert them. Instead, the title framed the contributions as part of an effort to provide support for New England in general. This deliberate choice of language might point towards subtle regional variation in degrees of local enthusiasm for evangelism overseas. Through its silence with regard to 'propagation' or 'Indian' peoples, the document implies an effort on the part of the collectors who recorded donations to play down the foreign, non-Christian beneficiaries of the funds, instead emphasising that parishioners were providing their compatriots in New England with financial support in order to relieve them of some of the hardship involved in colonial life. This focus on benevolent Christian intervention chimes with the language of the Act, which had stressed the considerable financial toll that the process of establishing colonial settlements was already taking on Protestants in New England.⁸⁶ This is not to say that the parishioners of Plaitford were indifferent towards evangelism, which might well have remained a key motivation to donate. At the same time, stressing the alleviation of the burdens that English colonists faced in the region likely reminded communities in England that they were spiritually connected to their brethren across the Atlantic Ocean and that charity towards them was a religious duty.

The list of contributors in Plaitford also offers insights into the identity of parishioners. Occasionally, the name of an individual is accompanied by their socio-economic status. In this instance, Samuel Tarrant was identified as the curate and contributed 6d. Meanwhile, Anne Rose was identified as "widow" and also gave 6d.⁸⁷ These fragmentary glimpses into the lives of contributors are striking not so much because of the amounts given, although this

85 mss. Rawl. C. 934, fol. 59r.

86 "An Act For the Promoting and Propagating the Gospel of Jesus Christ in New England," Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson Manuscripts, Mss. Rawl. C. 934, 1-4.

87 mss. Rawl. C. 934, fol. 59r.

information perhaps indicates something about the value and worth that parishioners attributed to evangelism. More interesting is that these biographical snippets reflect the spiritual and financial agency of individuals in their local communities. We have already seen that the list for Walberton was revised to reflect the supplementary donation of the minister. In the case of Plaitford, specifying pastoral contributors once again suggests a preoccupation in the ministry with setting an example to congregants.

The lists also offer some insights into local strategies of coordinating charity. At Salehurst Church in Sussex, a collection was made on 9 July 1654, intended “For the Propagation of the Gospell in Newe-England.”⁸⁸ The list concluded by indicating a further wave of donations: “Collected more in the after noone in the body of the church uppon a second motion July 1654.”⁸⁹ The additional amount accumulated was 1l 6s 6d, bringing the overall total amount collected to 2l 12s 8d.⁹⁰ Providing a glimpse into the operations of local fundraising over time, these brief notes reaffirm that individuals were conscious of the spiritual significance of evangelism both on the doorstep and within the boundaries of the church, which represented a particularly resonant space of performative godliness.⁹¹

As well as providing insights into the financial options and obligations of widowhood, papers in the collection also illuminate the involvement of women in other socio-economic conditions. In the parish of Alderbury in Wiltshire, contributors towards “the propagation of the gosple [sic] in new England” raised ‘the summe of fiue pounds seventeene shillings’. They included “Mrs Elizabeth Doue the wife of John Doue.” Notably, Elizabeth Dove gave 3l, which was the largest single donation towards the project on this list by far.⁹² Although the motivation for Dove’s singular generosity relative to her neighbours is not disclosed in the document, she appears to have been the wife of the parliamentary politician John Dove of Ivy Church in Alderbury who died between 1664 and 1665, and was perhaps acting on his behalf.⁹³ If this was the case, the assertiveness of Elizabeth’s presence on this list might be emblematic of her status in the Alderbury church. In his will, produced in 1664, John Dove did not give the name of his spouse, but bequeathed her property, furniture and materials

88 MSS. Rawl. C. 934, fol. 61r.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 Kellaway, “The collection for the Indians,” 451.

92 MSS. Rawl. C. 934, fol. 63r. [This list appears to be undated].

93 *ODNB*.

"in [case] my dearly [and] beloved wife shall be minded to liue and reside at Ivy Church aforesaid."⁹⁴ He also granted her:

free ingresse egress and regresse into the Gardens belonging to Ivy Church aforesaid for her retreatiue and takeing of herbs and fruits to vse for terme of her life Prouided Shee continue a Widdow in my name and unmarried I haueing made a sufficient Ioynture already to her hoping She wilbe both helpful and loueing to my dear Children [...]⁹⁵

The evidence of this will further suggests that Elizabeth had established herself as a prominent member of the church over the course of her marriage to John Dove. Taking this into account alongside her reputation as the wife of a notable politician and supporter of the republican regime, Elizabeth's considerable donation might have been intended to lend the weight of her standing in the parish community and her close engagement with the local church to the simultaneously religious and political cause of propagating the gospel in New England. Conversely, another parishioner identified on the list of contributors in Alderbury was "Anne Howard servant."⁹⁶ Since John Dove included 'the Maids Chambre' in the list of spaces bequeathed to his wife in his will, it is possible that Howard was affiliated with the Dove household.⁹⁷ However, the identity of Anne Howard beyond the scant details provided on the list is unclear. Along with the interventions of Elizabeth Dove and the widowed women whose names appear on the lists, however, Howard's appearance demonstrates the considerable extent to which English women in different socio-economic circumstances could intervene in the trans-Atlantic process of evangelism.

Records of donations from elsewhere in England further hint at socio-economic status. Contributors from the village of Winterbourne Gunner in Wiltshire raised 11, 4d "for the promotinge and propagatinge of the Gospell of Iesus Christ in New England."⁹⁸ The minister Anthony Hillary and the churchwardens Leonard and William Bowles recorded that the two largest sums donated were those of Hillary himself, who gave 5s, and one "Mathew Bee gent," who matched the Hillary's donation.⁹⁹ Moreover, a woman named

94 National Archives, PROB 11/316/264, Will of John Dove of Ivy Church, Wiltshire. See also, *ODNB*.

95 *Ibid*.

96 MSS. Rawl. C. 934, fol. 63r. [This list appears to be undated].

97 National Archives, PROB 11/316/264, Will of John Dove of Ivy Church, Wiltshire.

98 MSS. Rawl. C. 934, fol. 64r.

99 *Ibid*.

Susanna Hutfield donated 2d and “Widow Reinoldes” gave 6d.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, on 31 January 1652, the collectors William Bragge and William Doting recorded a total of 18s and 4d “Giuen by the parish[ion]ers of Laverstock towards the propagating of the gospell in New-England.”¹⁰¹ The minister Francis Bushell gave the most (5s), while Dorothy Bragge and Jane Wether gave 1s 6d and 1s respectively.¹⁰² Valentine and Nichola[u]s Arnold contributed 6d each, while “Widdow Batchelor” gave 4d and “Widdow Palmer” gave 3d.¹⁰³ Signalling a community’s effort to capture the kind of neighbourly collaboration that the Act had envisioned, these entries reaffirm that parishioners in a range of socio-economic, familial, and marital circumstances sought to participate in the trans-Atlantic process of evangelism. As in other parishes, these examples of donations not only testify to the willingness of congregants to provide financial support for evangelism, but also indicate eagerness on the part of the ministry and lay representatives of local churches to demonstrate that they had successfully gathered a significant base of support for the propagation of the gospel from throughout the community. Usually, identifying contributors and recording the amounts that they had given was a sufficient means to complete this task, fulfilling the formal obligations of the Act and providing the administrative information necessary for the Corporation to organise the logistics of the project. At the same time, the lists of contributions could become vessels for the performance of subtle social dynamics that originated in the parish.

Inferring socio-economic relations and attitudes from these lists perhaps runs the risk of ascribing intent and meaning to notes that would not necessarily have registered with contemporaries. However, additional evidence from the collection suggests that those who created these documents were aware that the process of recording contributions afforded them the opportunity to implicitly or explicitly critique the behaviour of their fellow parishioners. The lists usually stated little more than the amount of money ascribed to each contributor with the occasional allusion to their socio-economic status. However, the documents sometimes referred to people who had avoided donating at all. In a strikingly terse display of muted indignation, the list for Laverstock included the observation that “Mr Thomas Hau[...]is a Rich man gaue nothinge.”¹⁰⁴ Other parishes also contended with seemingly stingy resistance to the collection of funds in support of evangelism, as reflected in the “schedule of the Names of

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid., fol. 66r.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

the Inhabitants of Idmiston that gaue to the collection for the propagating the Gospell of Jesus Christ amonge the Naciones in New England.”¹⁰⁵ In this parish, John Sharpe, the minister, contributed the most. Two widows, Woodford and Chaundler, also donated. However, a note appended to the list of donors read: “Mr Iohn Rede Mr Boales Mr Chandler these 3 Riche men gaue nothing and their example hindered oth[ers].”¹⁰⁶ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Protestant writers frequently stressed that those blessed with wealth had a divinely ordained duty to provide their neighbours with financial aid and undertake generous charitable acts.¹⁰⁷ Accordingly, these appended notes reveal the irritation of the collectors towards wealthy, yet parsimonious parishioners, who might have been expected to give something towards supporting evangelism overseas, yet refrained from participating in this godly endeavour of the republican regime.

The laity were not the only ones who failed to donate. Ministers might have been expected to live exemplary lives of godly charity, but they often struggled financially themselves.¹⁰⁸ While some ministers were able to donate the most money, others found themselves unable to raise funds or give anything. As Richard Bigge, the minister of Winterbourne Dauntsey in Wiltshire, explained in a letter to William Cooke of Farledge on 21 May 1653:

My seruice I haue accordinge to the order sent me, publikly in the Church in the parish of Winterborne Dantsy read your bookes and pap[er]s. Sir of my selfe I am not able any way to promote soe religiouse a worke hauing but thirty shilling yearly settled on me for my cure. I went with both the Church wardens and desyred gratuities at euery mans house; But could force noe man nor persuade any man or woeman to be soe charitable as to give one peny Thus with my Loue to you and your wife hauing I hope discharged my duty I rest.

Yours in all Christian
Loue and Seruice
Rich Bigge¹⁰⁹

As well as suggesting the challenges facing ministers in local communities, this letter testifies to the significance of offering and gathering financial support for

105 Mss. Rawl. C. 934, fol. 69r.

106 Ibid.

107 Ballora and van der Kooib, “The Moral Status of Wealth Creation,” 192–93, 197, 200.

108 Enssle, “Patterns of Godly Life,” 11.

109 Mss. Rawl. C. 934, fol. 72r. See Kellaway, “The collection for the Indians,” 444–46, 451.

the propagation of the gospel. While other ministers had eagerly set examples by donating large amounts, often surpassing other donors, Bigge could not do so, and felt obligated to explain himself lest he appear apathetic to the cause.

The relatively constrained economic status of ministers appears equally pronounced when their contributions are set against the substantial donations of particularly generous parishioners, as evidenced in “A subscription of the benevolence of the Inhabitants of West Deane and East Grimsted for the promoting and propagating the gospell of Iesus Christ in new England.”¹¹⁰ This list records an overall total of 5l 14s 10d.¹¹¹ While “Mr Iohn Newham minister” gave 20s, the list showed that “Sir Iohn Euelin Rt” gave 5l, which was more than the other donors combined.¹¹² This appears to have been Sir John Evelyn (1601–1685), the cousin of the diarist, his namesake, John Evelyn (1620–1706).¹¹³ This appears to have been the largest single donation across the lists included in this collection. Much of Evelyn’s political career was associated with the county of Wiltshire. He had become the parliamentary representative of Wilton in 1626, and later Ludgershall from 1640, and his father had been from West Dean. An advocate of ecclesiastical reform, Evelyn’s political fortunes during the 1640s might illuminate the rationale for his donation. Having drawn the ire of Royalists, a perception of Evelyn as an Independent began to take shape, yet he argued against Presbyterianism and was involved in efforts to secure peace with Charles I, withdrawing from politics in 1648 following Pride’s Purge.¹¹⁴ The regicide took place in January 1649 and the parliamentary act for the propagation of the gospel materialised later that year. In the wake of these dramatic developments, amidst the uncertainties and tensions of the early Interregnum, it is possible that Evelyn’s contribution towards Protestant evangelism overseas represented a recalibration of his spiritual priorities and an effort to affirm his political allegiance to the new regime.

4 Conclusion

In local English parishes, Protestants sang, heard, and read the history and expectation of their divine duty towards – and triumph over – the ‘heathen.’ Through psalmody, concepts and narratives long embedded in English religious

110 MSS. Rawl. C. 934, fol. 73r.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.

113 ODNB.

114 Valerie Pearl, “The ‘Royal Independents’ in the English Civil War,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 18 (1968), 69–96, 87–89.

culture informed hegemonic attitudes towards the indigenous peoples of the Americas by reinforcing theological and biblical precedents for the conversion of 'heathen' peoples. Even as the psalms articulated an ambitious programme of sacred expansion in the name of Christ's kingdom, they also set out strategies of exclusion and animosity that differentiated between Christians and non-Christians, thereby contributing to the formation of distinct, yet unfixed religious identities and framing the boundaries of an assertive, yet unstable empire. In 1649, the new commonwealth called upon the English people to aid their brethren in New England, where godly preachers were now engaged in the sacred endeavour of propagating the gospel among the 'heathen.' The ensuing efforts among local English ministers and churchwardens to collect money in support of this project afforded many parishioners the opportunity to assert autonomy, negotiate relationships, and communicate ideas. Crucially, the records of local financial support for evangelism demonstrate that many individuals believed the task to be important and worthwhile. Evident across these documents was the conviction that some indigenous non-Christian peoples in the Americas could convert to the true religion and might be saved, thereby realising the expectations of scripture in accordance with postlapsarian and predestinarian doctrine.

This indicates the extent to which the development of Reformed religion in New England could inform pastoral theology, the liturgy, and the lived experiences of ordinary people in England. As Gabriel Glickman has demonstrated, the propagation of the gospel in New England continued following the Restoration, but struggled to gain momentum amidst conflict between colonists and indigenous peoples during King Philip's War, as well as ongoing ecclesiastical divisions among Protestants that obstructed the pursuit of a unified approach to evangelism.¹¹⁵ The evidence of the psalms and donation records considered in this article invites further study of local parish communities in order to compare attitudes towards evangelism during the Interregnum with those of the Restoration and beyond, especially given the appearance of a new version of the *Book of Common Prayer* in 1662 and the creation of the New England Company in the same year.¹¹⁶ Whether the interests and activities of parishioners, preachers, and politicians aligned or diverged, the prospect of religious expansion overseas continued to shape beliefs and practices by

115 Gabriel Glickman, "Protestantism, Colonization, and the New England Company in Restoration Politics," *Historical Journal* 59 (2016), 365–91.

116 For the importance of integrating analysis of the post-Restoration period in order to illuminate religious change in the Church of England during the Interregnum, see Foster, "What Happened in English and Welsh Parishes," in McCall (ed.), *Church and People*, 39.

offering Protestants a significant place in unfolding sacred history and providing them with a palpable link to the wider Atlantic trajectories of Christianity.

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