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The Bishop Controversy, the Imperial Crisis, and Religious Radicalism in New England, 1763-74

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AS the Seven Years' War drew to close, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Secker, set in motion a plan to appoint a bishop for the American colonies. Word of Secker's project soon reached Boston, where a pamphlet controversy was already underway over the proselytizing activities of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG). Alarmed, the Congregationalist clergyman Jonathan Mayhew published a tract to warn New-Englanders of this latest effort to impose the Church of England on America. The ensuing pamphlet war forced Secker to abandon his proposal, and continued to rage on both sides of the Atlantic and throughout the American colonies before petering out at the end of the decade.

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The prospect of an American bishop has had a similar effect on historians. Robert Ingram calls it “one of the most exhaustively examined issues in the religious history of the eighteenth century.”¹ Yet for all the ink spilled on the controversy, it has been framed as a story about the religious origins of the American Revolution. Seen, instead, in a wider imperial perspective, it reveals much about the political management of religion in the eighteenth-century British Empire and the religious tensions introduced after the Seven Years’ War. Both Secker’s proposal and the subsequent political unrest were closely related to concurrent debates about whether and how the British Empire should incorporate the French Catholic populations of Grenada and Quebec, a debate that called into question the empire’s religious character.²

Scholarship on the controversy has been preoccupied with debating whether it constituted one of the causes of the American Revolution. John Adams believed that it did. Writing in 1815, he recalled that “the apprehension of Episcopacy contributed . . . as much as any other cause” to mobilize popular opposition to Parliament.³ Carl Bridenbaugh, its most prominent proponent, argued in 1962 that the Revolution was provoked less by the prospect of political tyranny than by the religious tyranny the Church of England represented.⁴ His

¹Robert G. Ingram, *Religion, Reform and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century: Thomas Secker and the Church of England* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2007), 234. See also, Frederick V. Mills, “The Colonial Anglican Episcopate: A Historiographical Review,” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 61 (1992): 325-44.

²Hannah Weiss Muller, “Bonds of Belonging: Subjecthood and the British Empire,” *Journal of British Studies* 53 (2014): 29-58; Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 57-74; Jessica Harland-Jacobs, “Incorporating the King’s New Subjects: Accommodation and Anti-Catholicism in the British Empire, 1763-1815,” *Journal of Religious History* 39 (2015): 202-23.

³John Adams to Jedidiah Morse, December 2, 1815, in *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, 10 vols. (Boston, MA: Little & Brown, 1850-56), 10:185.

⁴Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics, 1689-1775* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1962). Bridenbaugh’s thesis has been restated by James B. Bell, *A War of Religion: Dissenters, Anglicans, and the American Revolution* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). See also Charles W. Akers, *Called unto Liberty: A Life of Jonathan Mayhew, 1720-1766*

assessment made the controversy over an Anglican bishop an important part in textbook accounts of the Revolution's origins.⁵ This interpretation has not stood the test of time. Bridenbaugh's insistence on the patriot movement's religious origins is empirically problematic: while prominent radicals such as John and Samuel Adams were active opponents of the bishop proposal, the controversy was quickly eclipsed by growing protests over Parliamentary taxation. Moreover, Bridenbaugh's depiction of a founding moment of national unity is out of step with current interpretations of the Revolution as a divisive and destructive civil war and has been criticized for adopting the radicals' paranoid and hysterical language of Anglican "plots," "aggression," and enmity to "the American environment and temper." As Bridenbaugh's interpretation has fallen out of favor, historians have been left unsure what to make of the subject.⁶

The bishop controversy was not the product of a simple contest between colonial liberty and imperial authority, but rather of the tensions between the multiple and sometimes competing forms of religious establishment that operated in the eighteenth-century British Empire. Bridenbaugh assumed

(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 180-97; Bernhard Knollenberg, *Origin of the American Revolution: 1759-1766* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 75-86; Claude H. Van Tyne, *The Causes of the War of Independence: Being the First Volume of a History of the Founding of the American Republic* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1922), 346-54.

⁵Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), 215-18; Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, enl. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992), 95-98, 246-72.

⁶Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 57, 207, 307. For the current status of Bridenbaugh's thesis, see Katherine Carté Engel, "Revisiting the Bishop Controversy," in *The American Revolution Reborn*, ed. Patrick Spero and Michael Zuckerman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 132-35. For interpretations sympathetic to colonial Anglicans, see Nancy L. Rhoden, *Revolutionary Anglicanism: The Colonial Church of England Clergy during the American Revolution* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 37-63; Donald F. M. Gerardi, "The Episcopate Controversy Reconsidered: Religious Vocations and Anglican Perceptions of Authority in Mid-Eighteenth-Century America," *Perspectives in American History*, n.s., 3 (1987): 81-114; John Frederick Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism in North America* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 220-33; Frederick V. Mills, *Bishops by Ballot: An Eighteenth-Century Ecclesiastical Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Jack M. Sosin, "The Proposal in the Pre-Revolutionary Decade for Establishing Anglican Bishops in the Colonies," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 13 (1962): 76-84.

that the Church of England was a pillar of the British imperial state. In fact, the empire was an ecclesiastical conglomerate, in which the government supported different churches in different places.⁷ Although the Church of England was generally supported by the state in the southern colonies and most of the Caribbean colonies, the New England colonies levied taxes to support Congregationalist churches, while various forms of religious pluralism or partial establishment were recognized in the mid-Atlantic colonies.⁸ The lack of a unifying imperial church establishment was the legacy of domestic religious turmoil and sporadic imperial expansion during the seventeenth century.⁹ It was grounded in the composite nature of the bi-confessional British state created by the 1707 Act of Union, comprising the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland and the (Episcopalian) Church of England.¹⁰ It is therefore unsurprising that Parliament did not appoint a bishop for the colonies until after American independence had significantly altered the religious

⁷David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9; Ned Landsman, "The Episcopate, the British Union, and the Failure of Religious Settlement in Colonial British America," in *The First Prejudice: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Early America*, ed. Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Grenda (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 75-97; Katherine Carté Engel, "Connecting Protestants in Britain's Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Empire," *William and Mary Quarterly* (forthcoming). I am grateful to Prof. Engel for providing me with access to this forthcoming article.

⁸Jeremy Gregory, "'Establishment' and 'Dissent' in British North America: Organizing Religion in the New World," in *British North America in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Stephen Foster (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 136-69.

⁹Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Evan Haefeli, "Toleration and Empire: The Origins of American Religious Pluralism," in Foster, *British North America*, 103-35; Evan Haefeli, "Pluralism by Accidents: England, Empire, and the Failure of American Religious Unity, 1497-1662." I am grateful to Prof. Haefeli for providing me with access to his unpublished book manuscript.

¹⁰Ned C. Landsman, "British Union and American Revolution: Imperial Authority and the Multinational State," in *The American Revolution Reborn*, ed. Spero and Zuckerman, 107-31; J. G. A. Pocock, "Empire, State and Confederation: The War of American Independence as a Crisis in Multiple Monarchy," in *A Union for Empire: Political Thought and the British Union of 1707*, ed. John Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 318-48; H. G. Koenigsberger, "Composite States, Representative Institutions and the American Revolution," *Historical Research* 62 (1989): 135-53.

composition of the empire.¹¹ Before then, the Church of England was the national church of just one component of an extended, diverse, complicated empire riven by denominational tensions within and among the different colonies.

The expansion of the empire as a result of the Seven Years' War exacerbated these tensions. With peace, Parliament began taxing the American colonies to pay for the increasingly expensive defense of the enlarged empire. Having acquired not only swathes of new territory but also tens of thousands of new subjects from the French, Spanish, and Mughal Empires, the British Empire became more diverse and harder to govern. Should the empire's new subjects be treated the same as the old ones, or should they be treated differently? Both options posed problems. The inhabitants of the older colonies were not only alarmed by Parliamentary taxation but also by the corrupting influence of Orientalized "nabobs" and cheap tea from Bengal, the favors shown to French Papists in Grenada and Quebec, and the creation of authoritarian government in North America by the 1774 Quebec Act. Imperial expansion thus created a general turn towards more authoritarian government as well as a series of local conflicts.¹² The bishop controversy should be integrated into this scholarship on the post-war imperial crisis.

Britain's efforts to win the hearts and minds of its new Catholic subjects, particularly by allowing a French Catholic bishop for Quebec, explain the timing and extent of the bishop controversy. That decision set in motion a chain of events that would aggravate denominational tensions and fuel political unrest elsewhere in the empire. For Secker, the Peace of Paris represented an opportunity to claim an enlarged role for the Church of England in an increasingly diverse empire.

¹¹Peter M. Doll, *Revolution, Religion, and National Identity: Imperial Anglicanism in British North America, 1745-1795* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000), 155-236.

¹²The key work here is P. J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America, c.1750-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). See also Eliga H. Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000).

For Anglo-American radicals such as Mayhew, the indulgences shown to Catholics in Quebec heightened apprehensions of Secker's ecclesiastical tyranny and threatened an older ideal of the empire as "Protestant, commercial, maritime, and free."¹³ Finally, the news that the British government would permit a French Catholic bishop in the empire mobilized American Anglicans to campaign for a bishop of their own.

Supporters of the campaign were drawn from the Anglican clergy in the northern colonies: a radical, disruptive, and disaffected group who have been consistently misunderstood by historians. Bridenbaugh thought they represented the British imperial establishment.¹⁴ Indeed, they thought of themselves as members of the national church, they felt entitled to special favor from government, and their ties to imperial elites alarmed their denominational rivals. Yet they were also continually frustrated that the political support they expected was not forthcoming, leading them to feel abandoned and vulnerable. They found the British Empire's ecclesiastical pluralism intolerable. Their mounting disaffection reached a breaking point with the indulgences shown to the conquered population of Quebec. While Secker quickly dropped his proposal, the northern pro-bishop clergy continued to fan the flames of political unrest by continuing the pamphlet controversy on their own. The failure of their efforts left them profoundly alienated, not only from colonial Dissenters, but also from the British politicians who had sided with their rivals, and even the English bishops whose professed concern for the American Church seemed meaningless in practice. These were not the foot-soldiers of the British Empire. Rather, they were among its most trenchant and insightful critics.



The bishop controversy started in New England where the British Empire's ecclesiastical contradictions were manifested

¹³Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 8.

¹⁴Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 57, 335-38.

most strongly. The controversy began as a local quarrel between Anglicans and Congregationalists in Connecticut and Massachusetts. Jonathan Mayhew feared that the appointment of an American bishop would import wholesale the persecuting, hierarchical state churches of the Old World, the very churches that had driven New England's first settlers to seek religious liberty in the wilderness. His opponents were convinced that the absence of an American bishop caused them an unconscionable degree of suffering and constituted a form of religious persecution, a theme that saturates their sermons, political publications, and day-to-day correspondence. These incompatible and equally sincere convictions were the product of a genuine constitutional paradox. Anglicans, while a religious minority in New England, were also—arguably—representatives of the national church of the British Empire.

From New England Anglicans' perspective, the Church of England's failure to appoint an American bishop revealed the lack of state support for the colonial Church and the problems caused by the British Empire's ecclesiastical pluralism. The British monarch was the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, but King-in-Parliament also governed a religiously diverse, far-flung empire in which the interests of the Church were not always a political priority. The Church's leaders attempted to appoint a bishop on more than one occasion. Prior to the public controversy of the 1760s, quieter efforts were made in the 1710s and 1750s, but failed to win the support of British politicians. The bishops were reluctant to push the subject, which threatened to upset Protestant Dissenters, provoke political opposition, and destabilize the religio-political equilibrium of the Church.¹⁵ In the absence of a colonial bishop, a precedent had emerged that placed the colonial Church within the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London, but his administrative and spiritual functions were not easily exercised across the

¹⁵Alfred Lyon Cross, *The Anglican Episcopate and the American Colonies* (New York: Longmans & Green, 1902); Stephen Taylor, "Whigs, Bishops and America: The Politics of Church Reform in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England," *Historical Journal* 36 (1993): 331-56.

Atlantic. While the latter could be delegated to resident “commissaries,” their authority did not encompass the administration of the sacraments of confirmation and ordination.¹⁶ For New England Anglicans, the failure to appoint a bishop revealed the spiritual costs of the Church’s established status. Establishment was central to eighteenth-century Anglicanism’s identity, but strains of high church theology (though desiring establishment in principle) feared that the costs outweighed the benefits, especially when politicians neglected the Church.¹⁷

New England Anglicans were uniquely vulnerable and therefore felt the lack of an American bishop more keenly than anyone. The Church of England had expanded dramatically in the region since the early eighteenth century. In 1722, four Congregationalist ministers—including the rector Timothy Cutler—publicly declared their conversion to the Church at the Yale commencement ceremony. This group converted to a particularly high church version of Anglican theology that emphasized the indispensable role of the clergy, bishops, and sacraments. Both a product of and reaction against the disruptions associated with the Great Awakening, Anglican growth in the region continued to be driven by converts from Congregationalism, many of whom were shepherded into the Church by one of the “Yale apostates,” Samuel Johnson. Many converted clergy took up missionary postings in New York and New Jersey, carrying their distinctive theological agenda with them.¹⁸ Nancy Rhoden has recently suggested that, as Britain’s American colonies became more assimilated to the metropole

¹⁶J. H. Bennett, “English Bishops and Imperial Jurisdiction, 1660-1725,” *Hist. Mag. of the Prot. Episcopal Ch.* 32 (1963): 175-88.

¹⁷Peter B. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship, 1760-1857* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Peter Doll, “The Idea of the Primitive Church in High Church Ecclesiology from Samuel Johnson to J. H. Hobart,” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 65 (1996): 6-43.

¹⁸Jeremy Gregory, “Refashioning Puritan New England: The Church of England in British North America, c. 1680-c. 1770,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 20 (2010): 85-112; Donald F. M. Gerardi, “Samuel Johnson and the Yale ‘Apostasy’ of 1722: The Challenge of Anglican Sacramentalism to the New England Way,” *Hist. Mag. of the Prot. Episcopal Ch.* 47 (1978): 153-75; Don R. Gerlach and George E. DeMille, *Samuel Johnson of Stratford in New England, 1696-1772* (Athens, GA: Anglican Parishes Association Publications, 2010); Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to*

in the eighteenth century, colonial churchmen increasingly came to resemble Anglicans in England. Yet these Congregationalist converts brought something of New England's puritan traditions with them to the Church of England. Their ultra-orthodox theology and uncompromising determination to obtain an American bishop were out of step with contemporaneous English Anglicanism.¹⁹

Although they enjoyed the political support of various colonial governors and the financial support of the SPG,²⁰ these sections of the colonial Church of England were convinced that the lack of a resident bishop hindered Anglican growth. Most seriously, American candidates for the ministry had to travel to England to receive ordination from a bishop. Without this "tedious expensive & dangerous voyage . . . the Church would be double to what it now is, within 7 or 10 years time," Johnson explained to Thomas Secker in 1745.²¹ These considerations weighed less heavily upon Anglicans in the south—the vast majority of the colonial Church—who were less preoccupied with the bishops' and clergy's distinctive theological role and whose priests were more likely to be supplied from England.²²

Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), 164-82.

¹⁹Nancy Rhoden, "Anglicanism, Dissent, and Toleration in Eighteenth-Century British Colonies," in *Anglicizing America: Empire, Revolution, Republic*, ed. Ignacio Gallup-Díaz, et al. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 125-52, and "The American Revolution (I): The Paradox of Atlantic Integration," in Foster, ed., *British North America*, 255-88. For more on Anglicization, see John Murrin, "A Roof Without Walls: The Dilemma of American National Identity," in *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*, ed. Richard Beeman, et al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 333-48; Ned C. Landsman, *From Colonials to Provincials: American Thought and Culture, 1680-1760* (New York: Twayne, 1997).

²⁰James B. Bell, *The Imperial Origins of the King's Church in Early America, 1607-1783* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

²¹Samuel Johnson to Thomas Secker, July 25, 1745, MS1123/1 n. 35. Lambeth Palace Library, London [henceforth LPL].

²²Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism*, 232-33; Frederick V. Mills, "The Internal Anglican Controversy Over an American Episcopate, 1763-1775," *Hist. Mag. of the Prot. Episcopal Ch.* 44 (1975): 257-76. For more on the Church of England in the southern colonies, see James B. Bell, *Empire, Religion and Revolution in Early Virginia, 1607-1786* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); John K. Nelson, *A Blessed Company: Parishes, Parsons, and Parishioners in Anglican Virginia, 1690-1776*

The bishop question also concerned status and honor. Anglicans in New England and the Mid-Atlantic were aggrieved by the political strength of Congregationalism and Presbyterianism in those colonies.²³ What made these political conflicts especially galling was the perceived lack of recognition afforded to the national church. Anglicans in these colonies hoped that an American bishop would restore the proper order of things. Scholarship on the controversy has debated whether they wanted a “purely spiritual” bishop, as they asserted, or one equipped with the political powers of the English church establishment, as their opponents alleged.²⁴ Yet what their white-hot rhetoric expressed most strongly was their sheer anger and indignation at the prevailing social and political order, which subordinated members of the national church to Protestant Dissenters.

Johnson repeatedly raised this issue in his correspondence with Secker. In 1759, complaining of the injustice of Dissenters’ resistance to an American bishop, he insisted that “the Church is really in a State of Persecution under them here, where they have . . . pretended to establish themselves.” Dissenters would think it “utterly intolerable” if they were “obliged to send their candidates a 1000 leagues for ordination,” he explained. Churchmen only asked to enjoy “our Ecclesiastical Government & Discipline here upon as good a foot as they, without any preeminence.” He concluded, “for that which is the established Church of our Nation, to be in these Colonies in a State that is so much inferior to them, is very, very hard indeed.”²⁵

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); S. Charles Bolton, *South-ern Anglicanism: The Church of England in Colonial South Carolina* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982); Nelson Waite Rightmyer, *Maryland’s Established Church* (Baltimore, MD: Church Historical Society for the Diocese of Maryland, 1956).

²³Milton M. Klein, *The American Whig: William Livingston of New York*, rev. ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993); Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism*, 107-35; Donald F. M. Gerardi, “The King’s College Controversy and the Ideological Roots of Toryism in New York,” *Perspectives in American History* 11 (1977-78): 145-96; Patricia U. Bonomi, *A Factious People: Politics and Society in Colonial New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971).

²⁴Doll, *Revolution, Religion, and National Identity*, 207-208; Sosin, “Proposal in the Pre-Revolutionary Decade,” 84; Cross, *Anglican Episcopate*, 256-58.

²⁵Samuel Johnson to Thomas Secker, March 20, 1759, MS1123/2 n. 130, LPL.

Johnson's conviction that the colonial Church was persecuted was grounded in the real dangers that Americans faced making the round trip to England for ordination. The most serious of these was smallpox, to which anyone born in the Americas was especially vulnerable.²⁶ Among the candidates who died making the ordination voyage was Samuel Johnson's son William. In 1751 Johnson told the Bishop of London that William was preparing for orders, complaining, "it is somewhat shocking to me that he must go a thousand leagues for orders when of twenty-five within my knowledge who have gone that voyage on that errand five have died or been lost."²⁷ The next year, following another candidate's death, he wrote to a friend, "would to God those who oppose sending bishops would consider the guilt they contract thereby."²⁸ His worst fears came to pass when William died of smallpox after travelling to England for orders in 1755. In a letter to Secker, Johnson tempered his grief with hope that his son's death might be providentially useful: "I should scarce have thought his Life ill-bestowed, if it could have been an occasion of awakening this stupid age to a sense of the necessity of sending Bishops. . . This is now the seventh precious Life that has been sacrificed to the unaccountable politics of this apostatising age."²⁹ These deaths created a martyrology that embodied the sufferings of the American Church and invested the bishop question with enormous emotional and spiritual significance.

These aggrieved churchmen hoped that, with the end of the Seven Years' War, the British government would finally take notice of the Church of England in the increasingly important American empire. Secker, who had taken a particular interest in America as Bishop of Oxford, was promoted to Canterbury

²⁶Elizabeth A. Fenn, *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2001), 13-43.

²⁷Samuel Johnson to Thomas Sherlock, September 25, 1751, in *Samuel Johnson: President of King's College. His Career and Writings*, ed. Herbert and Carol Schneider (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), 1:151 (hereafter *Johnson, Career and Writings*).

²⁸Samuel Johnson to J. Berriman, October 30, 1752, *Johnson, Career and Writings*, 1:159.

²⁹Samuel Johnson to Thomas Secker, December 5, 1757, MS1123/2 n. 111, LPL.

in 1758.³⁰ He promised his support to the New England clergy while urging them to avoid antagonizing their opponents: “this I have long had at heart,” he told them, “but pushing it openly at present would certainly prove both fruitless and detrimental.”³¹ In 1761, Johnson sent Secker a “draught of an address for bishops on a peace.” Secker reined Johnson in, telling him, “the right time to try is certainly when a peace is made, if circumstances shall afford any hope of success. . . . But this is a matter of which you in America cannot judge.”³² Secker continued to promise Johnson that the government would soon be considering “schemes . . . for the settlement of his Majesty’s American dominions” while repeating his instructions to avoid antagonizing American Dissenters: “what relates to Bishops, must be managed in a quiet, private manner.”³³ For the moment, Johnson and his brethren were happy to leave the issue in Secker’s hands. With the promised support of the Archbishop of Canterbury, a new king on the throne, and the war drawing to an end, they were confident that the hour of their deliverance was finally at hand.



Although the end of the Seven Years’ War was celebrated enthusiastically throughout the British Empire, disagreements soon arose over the nature of peacetime government. Alongside the familiar disputes over imperial sovereignty and taxation, peace heralded discussions of the empire’s religious character. Britain’s conquest of Quebec brought unprecedented security, but the acquisition of so many new Catholic subjects

³⁰For Secker’s interest in America, see Ingram, *Religion, Reform and Modernity*, 209–59.

³¹Thomas Secker to Samuel Johnson, September 27, 1758, Johnson, *Career and Writings*, 3:259.

³²Thomas Secker to Samuel Johnson, December 10, 1761, Johnson, *Career and Writings*, 3:261.

³³Thomas Secker to Samuel Johnson, December 10, 1761, Johnson, *Career and Writings*, 3:269; Secker to Johnson, May 22, 1764, in Thomas Bradbury Chandler, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, D.D., the First President of King’s College, in New-York, Containing Many Interesting Anecdotes* (New York: T. & J. Swords, 1805), 198.

also disrupted an empire in which anti-Catholicism had long provided social cement and ideological purpose.³⁴ These new subjects unsettled the confessional balance of power, alarming Protestants who opposed the toleration of Catholicism and generating conflicts among different Protestant groups, including a debate about how far the government should support the Church of England in America. Thus, the bishop controversy was one of the unanticipated consequences of Britain's conquest of Quebec.

The British Empire was compelled to reach some kind of accommodation with its new Catholic subjects because of their sheer numbers as well as the stipulations of the peace treaty. In Grenada, ceded to Britain by the Treaty of Paris, the large majority of around 1,200 white inhabitants were French Catholics. The problem was more serious in Quebec, where the population comprised between 60,000 and 70,000 French Catholics against a few hundred British merchants and traders.³⁵ The Peace of Paris required George III to allow these new subjects to "profess the worship of their religion," but what exactly that meant was not specified.³⁶ Catholics were subject to severe penal laws everywhere in the British Empire, although these were often mitigated in practice by a policy of "connivance" or non-enforcement.³⁷ The Royal Proclamation of 1763 explicitly promised the importation of the English legal system, but Quebec's governors believed the policy unworkable. Even the most expansive policy of "connivance" would struggle to accommodate the gap between principle and reality while the size of the

³⁴Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, 3rd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 10-54.

³⁵Muller, "Bonds of Belonging," 35-36.

³⁶Charles H. Metzger, *The Quebec Act: A Primary Cause of the American Revolution* (New York: The United States Catholic Historical Society, 1936), 207-12.

³⁷Colin Haydon, "Parliament and Popery in England, 1700-1780," *Parliamentary History* 19 (2000): 49-63; James Kelly, "Sustaining a Confessional State: The Irish Parliament and Catholicism," *The Eighteenth-Century Composite State: Representative Institutions in Ireland and Europe, 1689-1800*, ed. D. W. Hayton and James Kelly (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 44-77; Joanna Innes, *Inferior Politics: Social Problems and Social Policies in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 279-341.

Catholic population precluded the mass expulsions enacted in Acadia at the start of the war.³⁸

Whether a Catholic bishop would be permitted in Quebec was of particular interest to the Church of England. The office had been vacant since the last incumbent died in 1760. Soon after the end of the war, the Catholic population of Quebec began petitioning for a bishop, citing the peace treaty's guarantee of religious freedom.³⁹ The Privy Council sought the advice of Robert Hay Drummond, Archbishop of York, who reported that a Catholic bishop with powers limited to ordination would be acceptable. According to Drummond, the Catholic bishop and clergy should take the oaths of allegiance and pray for the king, the Jesuits' property should be transferred to the SPG, and Catholic missionaries to Indians replaced by Protestant ones. Such policies would secure religious freedom for the Catholic population, maintain the ecclesiastical supremacy of the British monarch, and encourage the Church of England in the colony.⁴⁰ Quebec's governors agreed that tolerating a Catholic bishop was the only way to win over the colony's population. In summer 1766, a new Bishop of Quebec, Jean-Olivier Briand, was consecrated in Paris with the British government's unofficial sanction.⁴¹ Briand, in exchange, would act as a vocal loyalist in the 1770s.⁴² Here, as elsewhere, the British Empire operated in cooperation with the local religious majority.

Many churchmen in Britain and America believed that the acquisition of Quebec necessitated an Anglican bishop for the colonies. In 1760, the Boston minister Henry Caner wrote to Secker, observing that the conquest of Quebec promised "an Opportunity for reviving the happy Scheme of appointing

³⁸Mary Louise Sanderson, "'Our Own Catholic Countrymen': Religion, Loyalty, and Subjecthood in Britain and its Empire, 1755-1829" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2010), 72-105.

³⁹"Extracts from the Address of the Chapter of Quebec to the King," September 12, 1763, SPG Papers vol. 11, f. 24, LPL.

⁴⁰"Thoughts upon the Ecclesiastical Establishment in Canada by the ABps of York", April 11, 1764, Shelburne Papers, 59:43-49, Clements Library, Ann Arbor, MI.

⁴¹Doll, *Religion, Revolution, and National Identity*, 92-122.

⁴²Luca Codignola, "Roman Catholic Conservatism in a New North Atlantic World, 1760-1829," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 64 (2007): 722-25.

Bishops for America.” By the Articles of Capitulation, “the French at Canada have insisted upon being allowed a Bishop, though to be dominated by his Majesty.” Caner asked, “shall these forced Subjects, the Fruit of Conquest be indulged a Blessing, which cannot be permitted to his Majesty’s natural born subjects? In what Light . . . shall we be viewed by the Christian world?” Caner proposed appropriating the revenues of the Catholic Church in Quebec for the support of an Anglican bishop, thereby sidestepping Dissenters’ principal objection, the fear of being taxed for the bishop’s support.⁴³ A similar scheme was proposed by Josiah Tucker, the Dean of Gloucester and well-known political economist.⁴⁴

Secker agreed that the ecclesiastical settlement of Quebec created an opportunity to negotiate a more generous toleration for colonial Anglicans. In May 1764, he reported to Johnson, “I see not how Protestant Bishops can decently be refused us, as in all probability a Popish one will be allowed, by connivance at least, in *Canada*.”⁴⁵ Secker was then in the midst of drawing up a manifesto for the creation of American bishops that was presented to the King’s ministers concurrently with Drummond’s proposals for Quebec.⁴⁶ Secker and Drummond hoped that the extension of toleration to Catholics in Quebec and the strengthening of the colonial Church of England would be two sides of the same coin.

Secker and Drummond presented the bishop question as a matter of religious toleration for American Anglicans while promising that any bishop would be tolerant of American Dissenters. The proposal insisted there could never be “any sort of Grounds to foresee consequence of exorbitant Church Power,

⁴³Henry Caner to Thomas Secker, October 6, 1760, MS1123/2, n. 205, LPL. Contemporaries used “Quebec” and “Canada” interchangeably.

⁴⁴[Josiah Tucker], “Queries humbly offered to ye Consideration of the Friends of Protestant Episcopacy in North America,” June 1765, SPG Papers vol. 11, ff. 28-29, LPL; Samuel Johnson to Ebenezer Dibble, February 9, 1764, Johnson, *Career and Writings*, 3:283.

⁴⁵Thomas Secker to Samuel Johnson, May 22, 1764, in Chandler, *Life of Samuel Johnson*, 196.

⁴⁶*The Autobiography of Thomas Secker, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. John S. Macauley and R. W. Greaves (Lawrence: University of Kansas Libraries, 1988), 58.

of any Spiritual Tyranny or Intolerancy.” The proposed bishops would not be supported by tithes and their authority would be limited to their spiritual functions. They would not be sent to New England: Anglicans in the region would have to be content with a bishop in neighboring New York. The proposal acknowledged that “the Church of England is Established in many Colonies,” but avoided making this claim about New England: “without considering it as Established [in New England], it seems . . . to have an equitable claim” to the freedom of conscience enjoyed by “every other religious Persuasion.” Secker thus avoided the assertion, repeatedly made by the New England clergy, that a colonial bishop was necessary to demonstrate the established status of the Church of England in America. Instead, he hoped to make the issue as uncontroversial as possible, a strategy that entailed a deliberate use of silence and ambiguity.⁴⁷



Secker was wholly unsuccessful in his effort to avoid public controversy. The prospect of an American bishop exploded into a rancorous political conflict. Just as the end of the Seven Years’ War offered Secker an opportunity to renegotiate the status of the colonial Church of England, it heightened denominational tension in New England, as various Protestant groups reacted differently to the opportunities created by France’s defeat. Most seriously, the war and its aftermath raised the stakes of missionary diplomacy to Native Americans. During the war, the SPG had commanded its missionaries to win the friendship of potential Native American allies by active proselytizing.⁴⁸ New England Congregationalists also began organizing a “Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge among the

⁴⁷“Thoughts on the Present State of the Church of England in America,” June 1764, SPG vol. 10, ff. 174-79, LPL. An annotation by Archbishop John Moore attributes the proposal to Drummond with corrections by Secker.

⁴⁸Frederick Cornwallis, *Sermon Preached before the Incorporated Society, for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts . . . on Friday February 20, 1756*

Indians of North America,” also known as the New England Society, with the aim of converting France’s Native American allies from Catholicism.⁴⁹ These divergent responses to the common enemy of French Catholicism fueled the controversy over Secker’s proposal for bishops.

Supporters of the New England Society mistrusted the SPG’s professed concern with Native Americans given the fact that most its missionaries only ministered to European Protestant colonists. In a sermon celebrating the providential conquest of Quebec in 1759, Jonathan Mayhew digressed to criticize the SPG for “supporting many missionaries at a great annual expence, in all the oldest, the principal, and richest cities and towns in these Northern colonies” instead of “gospelizing the savages.”⁵⁰ Mayhew’s skepticism about the SPG’s agenda was confirmed when the society opened a new mission in the Congregationalist stronghold of Cambridge in 1761. The directors of the SPG were generally cautious about opening new missions in direct competition with other Protestants but were eager to secure the proposed missionary, East Apthorp, the son of a wealthy Boston merchant.⁵¹ To make matters worse, the New England Society encountered organized opposition from churchmen in Britain and America. Henry Caner wrote to warn Secker that the new society was intended as a “Check to the Progress of the Church of England,” and Secker immediately began discussing strategies for opposing its foundation.⁵² The New England Society was incorporated by the Massachusetts General Court in February 1762, but when the Act was sent

(London: E. Owen, 1757), 43-49 (“Instructions from the Society, for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, to their Missionaries in North America”).

⁴⁹Jasper Mauduit to Harrison Gray, October 27, 1762, in *Jasper Mauduit: Agent in London for the Province of the Massachusetts Bay, 1762-1765*, ed. Charles G. Washburn, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 74 (1918): 74-76.

⁵⁰Jonathan Mayhew, *Two Discourses Delivered October 25th, 1759 . . . a Day of Public Thanksgiving, for . . . the Reduction of Quebec* (London: A. Millar, 1760), 46-47.

⁵¹Thomas Secker to Samuel Johnson, July 19, 1759, MS1123/2 n. 145, LPL.

⁵²Henry Caner to Thomas Secker, August 9, 1762, MS1123/3 n. 269, and Thomas Secker to Richard Osbaldeston, October 5, 1762, n. 276, LPL.

to England for confirmation, it was vetoed by the Lords of Trade.⁵³ The society's supporters were convinced the veto was Secker's work. They were appalled: not only was the Church of England failing to minister to the Indians, it was blocking others' attempts to do so.⁵⁴

This was the highly combustible context in which New Englanders received reports of Secker's plan for the colonial bishop. Apthorp's wealth made him appear a likely candidate for the appointment, and the mission was soon attracting accusations about the SPG's misplaced priorities.⁵⁵ Apthorp defended the mission, arguing that it was necessary to provide for colonial churchmen's "Liberty of Conscience."⁵⁶ Mayhew responded by accusing the SPG of "a formal design to root out *Presbyterianism*, &c. and to establishing both *Episcopacy* and *Bishops* in the colonies."⁵⁷ Secker chided Caner, "this controversy will increase the Difficulty of obtaining Bishops for America. . . I hope our American Friends will behave, in the mean time, as prudently as possible."⁵⁸ Rather than trusting the hot-headed American clergy, Secker published his own reply to

⁵³Chapter 32: 'An Act to Incorporate Certain Persons by the Name of the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge among the Indians of North America' (February 11, 1762)," in *The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay to which are Prefixed the Charters of the Province*, 21 vols. (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1869-1922), 4:520-23. Secker's role in the Lords of Trade's decision is unclear. No bishop was present at the meeting of the council; however, Secker closely followed the progress of the bill, and the council's objections were very similar to those he had raised. Robert Hay Drummond to Secker, December 11, 1762, MS1123/3 n. 287, and "Extract from the Council Books concerning the Act of the Assembly at Boston for a Society to Propagate Christian Knowledge among the Indians," May 1763, n. 308, LPL.

⁵⁴Jonathan Mayhew to Thomas Hollis, April 6, 1762, in "Thomas Hollis and Jonathan Mayhew: Their Correspondence, 1759-1766," ed. Bernhard Knollenberg, *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, 3rd ser., 69 (1947-50): 130-31; Charles Chauncy to Jasper Mauduit, May 4, 1763, Washburn, ed., *Jasper Mauduit*, 116-17.

⁵⁵Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 220-29; Bell, *War of Religion*, 67-80.

⁵⁶East Apthorp, *Considerations on the Institution and Conduct of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (Boston: Green & Russell, and Fleet, 1763), 14.

⁵⁷Jonathan Mayhew, *Observations on the Charter and Conduct of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, Designed to Shew their Non-Conformity to Each Other* (Boston: Draper, Edes & Gill, and Fleet, 1763), 103.

⁵⁸Thomas Secker to Henry Caner, September 15, 1763, MS1123/3 n. 319, LPL.

Mayhew in which he publicly defended the case for an American bishop.⁵⁹

As the ensuing debate between Secker and Mayhew reveals, it was unclear what the appointment of a bishop would mean for the constitutional status of the Church in America. Mayhew warned his readers that “the church of England might become the established religion here.”⁶⁰ Secker retorted that resident bishops were simply necessary for colonial Anglicans to practice their religion. The proposed bishops would hold no political power. The opponents of such a scheme were opposing “such Indulgence as they would claim themselves,” and could not then “call themselves Patrons of religious Liberty.”⁶¹ In response, Mayhew agreed that a purely spiritual bishop would be unobjectionable, but doubted whether such a bishop would be content without the political powers held by his English peers.⁶² In brief, Secker insisted that an American bishop would be different from the English bishops; Mayhew thought this unlikely.

Secker’s efforts to placate Mayhew were hampered by the New England clergy’s contributions to the pamphlet debate. They hoped that the appointment of a bishop would vindicate their long-standing claims to represent the established church of the British Empire.⁶³ Caner argued that “the [Congregationalist] churches of New England are not established in the colonies”; rather, “the Church of England is and all along has been established here.” Mayhew had appealed to the British principle of ecclesiastical pluralism, pointing out that the SPG did not send missionaries to Scotland and would not tolerate the Scottish Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge

⁵⁹[Thomas Secker], *An Answer to Dr. Mayhew’s Observations, on the Charter and Conduct of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (Boston: Draper, Edes & Gill, and Fleet, 1764). Secker’s pamphlet was published anonymously but his authorship was widely known.

⁶⁰Mayhew, *Observations*, 156.

⁶¹Secker, *Answer*, 51, 52, 57.

⁶²Jonathan Mayhew, *Remarks on an Anonymous Tract, Entitled An Answer to Dr. Mayhew’s Observations . . . Being a Second Defence of the Said Observations* (Boston: Draper, Edes & Gill, and Fleet, 1764), 59-60.

⁶³Bell, *War of Religion*, 3-66.

sending Presbyterian missionaries to the Anglican colonies. Caner offered a different reading of the Act of Union, by which, he claimed, “all other his Majesty’s dominions (Scotland excepted) are made a part of the constitution of the English *nation*.” Mayhew seized on the contradiction between the different positions taken by Secker and Caner: Secker had pleaded for toleration for New England Anglicans, and yet “many, if not most of our [Anglicans], triumph exceedingly in a presumption, that their church, exclusive of all others, is established here; and consequently that, not they, but we, *need toleration*.” Highlighting the conflicts over social status which underpinned the controversy, Mayhew argued that the Anglican clergy in New England were “haughty, disdainful and over-bearing” dissenters.⁶⁴

Secker’s proposal was definitively ended with the passage of the Stamp Act in 1765. An attempt to make the enlarged empire pay for its own defense, the Act provoked unanticipated opposition. Soon after its passage, the English radical Thomas Hollis warned Mayhew that the “Episcopizing scheme” was necessarily connected with “that System of Politics which [British politicians] have adopted.”⁶⁵ In fact, the ministers had never been particularly enthusiastic about Secker’s proposal, and political support quickly evaporated. In September, Johnson complained to Secker, “had it been done last spring . . . and the Stamp Act postponed till the next, it would have been but a nine days wonder.” Johnson was frustrated with the opposition made by the likes of Mayhew but truly outraged by the apathy of the Church’s supposed friends in Britain. He despaired of “this apostatizing age” which “considers religion itself only as a mere worldly thing, that may be modelled and regarded or

⁶⁴[Henry Caner], *A Candid Examination of Dr. Mayhew’s Observations on the Charter and Conduct of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (Boston: Fleet, Green & Russell, and Edes & Gill, 1763), 22, 27; Mayhew, *Observations*, 73 and *Remarks*, 42. For the importance of the Act of Union to the bishop controversy, see Landsman, “The Episcopate, the British Union, and the Failure of Religious Settlement,” 77–88.

⁶⁵Thomas Hollis to Jonathan Mayhew, March 4, 1765, in “Hollis and Mayhew Correspondence,” 166.

not, just as it suits worldly conveniences,” and wished that the friends of the Church of England would soon “rouse up and exert a spirit of zeal, courage and activity” in its behalf.⁶⁶ He would not have to wait long for the American clergy to take matters into their own hands.



The acquisition of Quebec and Grenada also radicalized opposition to Secker's proposal. The most inveterate opposition came from the network surrounding the English radical and freethinker Thomas Hollis. Members included the Boston Congregationalist ministers Jonathan Mayhew and Andrew Eliot, the English Presbyterian minister Caleb Fleming, and the heterodox churchman Francis Blackburne, a key figure in the emergence of English Unitarianism.⁶⁷ This circle were antagonized by Secker's efforts to combat heterodoxy in the Church of England, particularly his role in organizing a campaign against Blackburne's *The Confessional*, a pro-Unitarian tract.⁶⁸ Hollis considered Secker's proposal for American bishops an attempt to “kindle the flame of *AntiReformation* in the Colonies” while Blackburne believed the project was an attempt to prevent “all prospect of any reformation” in England.⁶⁹ Their objections to Secker proceeded from an overriding fear of popery. In their eyes, the insufficiently-reformed Church of England retained elements of popery, a religious and political evil that was

⁶⁶Johnson to Richard Terrick, Daniel Burton, and Thomas Secker, September 5 1765, Johnson, *Career and Writings*, 1: 354-55.

⁶⁷Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959); Bartholomew Peter Schiavo, “The Dissenter Connection: English Dissenters and Massachusetts Political Culture: 1630-1774” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1976).

⁶⁸Ingram, *Religion, Reform and Modernity*, 71-113.

⁶⁹Thomas Hollis to Andrew Eliot, December 18, 1767, and Francis Blackburne to Andrew Eliot, January 23, 1767, in “Letters from Thomas Hollis of Lincoln's Inn to Andrew Eliot, ed. William H. Bond, *Mass. Hist. Soc. Proceedings*, 3rd ser., 99 (1987): 105, 130.

associated with, but transcended, the Catholic Church.⁷⁰ They believed that the growing number of Catholics in the empire was responsible for the increasingly popish character of both the Church of England and the British government.

A number of circumstances converged after 1763 to convince the Hollis circle that the empire's Protestant character was under threat. Popery, an ever-present menace, seemed to be making particularly significant advances in the 1760s. Hollis repeatedly wrote to warn Mayhew of the growth of the "Hydra Popery," noting the construction of Catholic chapels, rumors of a "Popish Vicar General" operating in England, the proselytising activities of Catholic priests, and the publication of pro-Catholic tracts. Hollis observed that the Anglican bishops were too busy stifling reformation to respond to popish publications, and, as a result, "their own People . . . were perverting yearly to Popery, by hundreds and thousands, and ten thousands."⁷¹ Hollis and Blackburne sent a stream of letters to British newspapers calling for Protestants to be vigilant against popery, including a call for a census of Catholics that Parliament adopted in 1767.⁷² In 1768, Blackburne published a lengthy tract arguing against the toleration of Catholics, copies of which Hollis sent to New England.⁷³

⁷⁰James E. Bradley, "Anti-Catholicism as Anglican Anticlericalism: Nonconformity and the Ideological Origins of Radical Disaffection," in *Anticlericalism in Britain, c. 1500-1914*, ed. Nigel Aston and Matthew Cragoe (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 2000), 67-92. For an authoritative analysis of antipopery and anti-Catholicism, see Peter Lake, "Antipopery: The Structure of a Prejudice," in *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics, 1603-1642*, ed. Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (Harlow, UK: Longman, 1989), 72-106.

⁷¹Thomas Hollis to Jonathan Mayhew, December 6, 1763, and October 10, 1764, in "Hollis and Mayhew Correspondence," 143-44, 158; Andrew Eliot to Hollis, May 13, 1767, in "Letters from Andrew Eliot to Thomas Hollis," *Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll.*, 4th ser., 4 (1858): 406.

⁷²[Francis Blackburne], *Memoirs of Thomas Hollis* (London: [J. Nichols], 1780), 269, 297-98, 316, 351-53, 690-92, 700-701, 706-8; for the Parliamentary census, see *Returns of Papists, 1767*, ed. E. S. Worrall, 2 vols. (London: Catholic Record Society, 1980-89).

⁷³Francis Blackburne, *Considerations on the Present State of the Controversy Between the Protestants and Papists of Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Millar and Cadell, 1768); Thomas Hollis to Elizabeth Mayhew, n.d. [Dec 1767 or Jan 1768?], in "Letters from Thomas Hollis to Andrew Eliot," 132-33; Andrew Eliot to Hollis, January 29, 1769, in "Letters from Andrew Eliot to Thomas Hollis," 435.

As the outlines of British religious policy in Quebec became known, the Hollis circle reacted with alarm and pursued systematic efforts to link opposition across the Atlantic. They believed that the acquisition of so many new Catholic subjects encouraged popery in Britain. Indeed, British Catholics and their supporters argued that the conquest of Quebec necessitated the relaxation of the anti-Catholic penal laws.⁷⁴ Hollis found the proposal “detestable”; he sent the offending tract to Mayhew, who thought it so absurd he mistook it for a piece of satire. Two years later, in June 1766, Hollis warned Mayhew that Catholics were being admitted to the government in Canada.⁷⁵ The news that a Catholic bishop would be settled in Quebec confirmed his fears. The following November, he sent Eliot a paper warning of the danger posed by the Canadian bishop, asking that it be published in New England.⁷⁶ In February 1770, Eliot provided Hollis with a report from a traveler returned from Quebec who attested that “the popish interest in that Province had gained ground amazingly, since the introduction of a bishop.” Eliot concluded, “there is certainly, of late years, a secret influence in the British court in favor of the Romish Church.”⁷⁷

Hollis was also alarmed by the favors shown to Catholics in Grenada. After 1763, Grenada saw a series of political contests between the old French and new English inhabitants over the former’s participation in elections. The Board of Trade ultimately sided with the French, providing a precedent for the 1774 Quebec Act.⁷⁸ These conflicts generated a newspaper and pamphlet debate in Britain. One pamphlet warned that the French party, “men born in an absolute monarchy, accustomed

⁷⁴*Considerations on the Penal Laws against Roman Catholics in England, and the Newly Acquired Colonies in America* (London: Dodsley, 1764), 2, 58-63.

⁷⁵Jonathan Mayhew to Thomas Hollis, October 17, 1764, and Hollis to Mayhew, June 24, 1765, in “Hollis and Mayhew Correspondence,” 158, 170.

⁷⁶“Hanovius,” *London Chronicle*, June 30, 1767–July 2, 1767, 7; Blackburne, *Memoirs*, 317; Andrew Eliot to Thomas Hollis, November 14, 1766, “Letters from Andrew Eliot to Thomas Hollis,” 400.

⁷⁷Blackburne, *Memoirs*, 422, 430-31; Andrew Eliot to Thomas Hollis, February 1, 1770, “Letters from Andrew Eliot to Thomas Hollis,” 448-49.

⁷⁸Muller, “Bonds of Belonging” 38-43.

all their lives to the yoke of oppression,” would always be “ready instruments to reduce his majesty’s natural born subjects to the same state.”⁷⁹ Hollis followed the debate closely, and published a newspaper advertisement warning that “these indulgences to the Roman Catholics” in Grenada were intended as “a balance of the liberal spirit of the colonists.”⁸⁰ In his view, popery was like a virus, and the toleration of Catholicism in a single colony posed dangers that extended throughout the empire.

The challenge Quebec and Grenada posed to the empire’s religious character polarized Anglo-American Protestants, dividing conservative churchmen such as Secker from radicals like Hollis. For Secker, the Church of England’s capacity for tolerance and latitudinarianism equipped it to manage the increasing religious diversity of the empire. Moreover, the Church’s willingness to tolerate Catholicism demonstrated that Dissenters’ fears of Anglican persecution were overblown, and therefore demanded that New England’s Congregationalists tolerate Anglicanism there. In his published response to Mayhew, Secker proclaimed that Anglicans “are Friends to a Toleration even of the most Intolerant.” As evidence, he noted that “Popish Bishops reside here, and go about to exercise every Part of their Function, without Offence and without Observation.” If the Church of England tolerated Catholics, it would certainly not persecute Dissenters, who were far less objectionable.⁸¹ Mayhew was hardly flattered by the comparison. He retorted that Secker’s statement “has a much less tendency to reconcile us to the proposal about American bishops, than to give us an alarm for the welfare of our mother country . . . I hope never to see popish bishops thus going about *without offence*, in New-England.”⁸² Mayhew thought the toleration of

⁷⁹*Observations upon the Report made by the Board of Trade against the Grenada Laws* (London: Flexney, 1770), 45.

⁸⁰Caroline Robbins, “The Strenuous Whig: Thomas Hollis of Lincoln’s Inn,” *WMQ*, 3rd ser., 7 (1950): 436; Blackburne, *Memoirs*, 431.

⁸¹Secker, *Answer*, 57-58.

⁸²Mayhew, *Remarks*, 70-71. See also Mayhew’s *Popish Idolatry: A Discourse Delivered in the Chapel of Harvard-College in Cambridge, New-England, May 8 1765* (Boston: Draper, Edes & Gill, and Fleet, 1765), 50-51.

Catholicism unthinkable, and believed that Secker's reasoning indicated the extent of his popery.

Other churchmen appealed to imperial policy in Canada as an argument for an Anglican bishop. Preaching at the SPG's annual meeting in 1767, the Bishop of Llandaff, John Ewer observed, "even the Romish superstition, within a province lately added to the British dominions, is completely allowed in all points." Ewer regretted colonial Anglicans had been left without a bishop, which he considered essential to the "full enjoyment of their religion." Absurdly, this right was enjoyed by "all churches in our colonies, except only the church here by law established."⁸³ Hollis sent the printed sermon to Eliot, annotating the offending passage with the words, "Completely allowed in all points! Weep Ye Protestants! Ye North Americans, the whole Continent through, Weep bitterly!"⁸⁴ Eliot was outraged: "They first . . . send a bishop to encourage the inhabitants of this newly conquered country in their fatal superstitions . . . and they argue from thence, that the hierarchy must be established in the other Colonies."⁸⁵

Eliot passed the annotated sermon on to his fellow Congregationalist minister Charles Chauncy, an influential critic of the Great Awakening, who published a rebuttal. Chauncy reminded Ewer that the "proper business" of the SPG was "the prevention, or extirpation of Popery in the Colonies!"⁸⁶ Eliot added his condemnation in an unpublished manuscript pamphlet. Rather than taking "this public opportunity" to denounce popery, he noted that "this eminent prelate only made use of this unhappy indulgence as an argument for sending a bishop of

⁸³John Ewer, *A Sermon Preached before the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts . . . on Friday February 20, 1767* (London: Owen and Harrison, 1767), 23.

⁸⁴On Chauncy's acquisition of Ewer, see William H. Bond, "A Dated Binding by Andrew Barclay of Boston," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 34, no. 4 (1986): 415-20.

⁸⁵Andrew Eliot to Thomas Hollis, November 13, 1767, "Letters from Andrew Eliot to Thomas Hollis," 410.

⁸⁶Charles Chauncy, *Letter to a Friend, Containing, Remarks on Certain Passages in a Sermon Preached, by . . . John Lord Bishop of Landaff . . . In which the Highest Reproach is Undeservedly Cast upon the American Colonies* (Boston: Kneeland & Adams, and Leverett, 1767), 50-51.

the church of England into the colonies.”⁸⁷ Viewing Anglicanism as a milder form of popery, Secker’s opponents had good reasons for believing that Anglicanism and Catholicism were advancing hand in hand after 1763.

Religious peace in Britain’s diverse empire necessitated a series of compromises, ambiguities, and unspoken disagreements. The incorporation of a large Catholic population into the empire upset this delicate balance. While churchmen such as Secker hoped the religious diversification of the empire demanded and justified a greater imperial role for the Church of England, Dissenters such as Mayhew and Hollis believed that the toleration of Catholicism was dangerous, jeopardized the empire’s Protestant character, and threatened to tip the confessional balance in favor of the Church of England. The government’s decision to allow a Catholic bishop in Quebec explains why Anglo-American Protestants began to debate the bishop question after 1763 and why that debate became so acrimonious. Existing scholarship on the bishop controversy flows from a traditional focus on the thirteen colonies that subsequently became the United States of America, and gives only a passing acknowledgement to the role played by Quebec in galvanizing both supporters and opponents of the proposal.⁸⁸ Yet this context was crucially important to the bishop controversy. New England Congregationalists were not simply reacting against the encroachments of a centralizing, authoritarian state church; they were also reacting against Britain’s efforts to integrate Quebec, and to a lesser extent Grenada, into the empire.



The Hollis circle were not the only ones radicalized by the British conquest of Quebec. The British government’s efforts

⁸⁷Andrew Eliot, “Remarks on the Bishop of Oxford’s Sermon Preached before the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1740, 1,” *Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll.*, 2nd ser., 2 (1814): 215.

⁸⁸Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 236-37, 274.

to accommodate its Catholic population also radicalized many American Anglicans. Churchmen in New England and the Mid-Atlantic were already concerned by the government's failure to give the colonial Church of England the unambiguous political support that its status as the national church demanded. Then, these churchmen were humiliated by the news that the government would tolerate a Catholic bishop in Quebec while continuing to prevent the creation of an Anglican one. While they were frustrated by the opposition of Dissenters such as Mayhew, their biggest quarrel was with British politicians who were failing to discharge their responsibilities towards the established church. Just as the pamphlet debate between Mayhew and Secker was starting to blow over, American churchmen reignited the controversy by launching their own appeal to public opinion—with disastrous results.

Throughout 1764 and 1765, while Secker attempted to muster political support for a colonial bishop, American supporters of the project grew increasingly restive. The accession of a new Bishop of London, Richard Terrick, prompted a flurry of petitions from colonial churchmen. While Anglicans in the southern colonies remained unconcerned by the lack of a resident bishop, the northern clergy were convinced that the absence of official support from Britain jeopardized their already vulnerable status. The Mid-Atlantic clergy reminded Terrick that unlike “the Dissenters of different Denominations . . . the Church of England in these Parts labours under the unhappy Disadvantage of being deprived of several essential Rights.” Likewise, Samuel Johnson explained that Congregationalists in Connecticut “established themselves by Law” and “treat us of the Church as Dissenters.” Anglicans “suffer the Contempt & triumph of our neighbours, who even plume themselves with Hopes . . . that the Episcopate is more likely to be abolished at home than established abroad.”⁸⁹

⁸⁹Clergy of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania to Richard Terrick, September 20, 1764, Samuel Johnson to Terrick, July 15, 1765, Fulham Papers (Colonial Series) vol. 8 ff. 10-11, vol. 1 ff. 302-303, LPL.

Colonial churchmen's growing impatience was tied to the shift in leadership, away from the aging Samuel Johnson and towards the younger and more militant Thomas Bradbury Chandler, a Connecticut-born convert from Congregationalism, SPG missionary in New Jersey, and one of Johnson's protégés.⁹⁰ In October 1765, the New York and New Jersey clergy met in convention. Johnson was not present, and Chandler took the lead in composing a set of petitions to the king and English bishops. These petitions expressed reluctance at receiving a "purely spiritual" bishop without political powers: "altho' this is less than could be reasonably expected in a Christian Country . . . yet we shall be glad to accept of it." They also complained of the lack of activity in England: "the Trial, we presume, has not of late been fairly made, although much has been said." They warned the king that if the hardships suffered by the American Church continued, "she must finally sink, and with her the firmest Security for the Loyalty of your Majesty's American Subjects."⁹¹ Chandler informed Johnson of what had transpired, explaining, "you will see that we have used great freedom with our superiors, but we were all of opinion that without speaking freely we might as well be silent." Asking "what has the Church ever gained . . . by that thing which the courtesy of England calls prudence," Chandler concluded "the Church would not suffer so much under open persecution, as it now does by the irresolution and pusillanimity of its friends." Other churchmen criticized Chandler for petitioning at a time of political unrest over the Stamp Act.⁹²

⁹⁰Samuel Clyde McCulloch, "Thomas Bradbury Chandler: Anglican Humanitarian in Colonial New Jersey," in *British Humanitarianism. Essays Honoring Frank J. Klingberg*, ed. Samuel Clyde McCulloch (Philadelphia: Church Historical Society, 1950), 100-23.

⁹¹Clergy of New Jersey and New York to Richard Terrick, October 2, 1765, Fulham Papers (Colonial Series) vol. 6 ff. 156-57, LPL; Clergy of New Jersey and New York to the King and Frederick Cornwallis, October 2, 1765, in Thomas Bradbury Chandler, *The Appeal Farther Defended; in Answer to the Farther Misrepresentations of Dr. Chauncy* (New York: Gaine, 1771), 21-27.

⁹²Thomas Bradbury Chandler to Samuel Johnson, November 12, 1765, Samuel Auchmuty to Johnson, June 12, 1766, Johnson, *Career and Writings*, 1:356-57, 362-63.

Events in the spring of 1766 tipped American churchmen into open disaffection. In April, two recently-ordained clergymen, Samuel Giles and Hugh Wilson, drowned in a shipwreck in the Delaware Bay. Johnson reminded Secker that the number of clergymen who had died making the ordination voyage now stood at ten out of fifty-one, "which is a much greater loss to the Church here in proportion than she suffered in the times of popish persecution in England!"⁹³ The same month, news reached America that Briand had arrived in Quebec as the Catholic bishop. The New York clergyman Charles Inglis wrote to the SPG, "this I hope is a Prelude to the like Indulgence" to American Anglicans. "Surely it would sound very strange, & the Politics must be preposterous, that denied them an Indulgence which is granted to Moravians & Papists."⁹⁴ Finally, Johnson received word from Secker that his scheme had been dropped and the petitions sent the previous year would not be presented to the king. An Anglican bishop might have been sent to Quebec before the Stamp Act, Secker explained, but there was now no hope in the immediate future. American churchmen reacted with disbelief. Chandler asked Johnson how it was possible that a scheme allegedly supported by the king, ministers, and bishops had proved unworkable, concluding that their English correspondents seemed to hold no "other intention than to delude and baffle us."⁹⁵

The American clergy immediately made their anger known. Sending an indignant letter to Secker, Henry Caner lamented "the glaring reproach to a protestant kingdom of admitting a Popish bishop . . . and at the same time [to] deny or reject the repeated earnest desires of ten times their number" of Anglicans. He predicted that the continued failure to support the national church in America would lead Dissenting colonists to rebel against Britain: "Revolutions in a kingdom are always to

⁹³Samuel Johnson to Thomas Secker, May 2, 1766, Johnson, *Career and Writings*, 1:361.

⁹⁴Charles Inglis to the SPG, July 10, 1766, USPG Archive, B2 n. 59, Bodleian Library, Oxford (hereafter referred to as USPG).

⁹⁵Thomas Secker to Samuel Johnson, July 31, 1766, Thomas Bradbury Chandler to Johnson, September 5, 1766 Johnson, *Career and Writings*, 3:286-87, 1367-68.

be dreaded, and for my part I cannot separate in my mind the apprehensions of this nature from a rejection of the essential and original institutions upon which the constitution is founded.”⁹⁶ Johnson went further still, suggesting that American Anglicans should renounce the empire’s governors who manifestly had failed to protect the established church. In a letter to Secker, he advanced a remarkable demand: bishops should be sent without the permission of Parliament, even if it meant the Church had to give up its established status in England. “It is certainly the Church’s duty, my Lord, to do all that is possible . . . to secure the protection and favour of the state,” he argued. “But episcopacy being the original and apostolical constitution of the church, I must think it too sacred and venerable a thing to give up.” He proclaimed, “if the Church must go into a state of open persecution . . . she must and ought, rather than let her bishops cease to be.”⁹⁷ Exemplifying the extent of New England Anglicans’ religious radicalism, Johnson proposed an ecclesiastical revolution, decreeing to the Archbishop of Canterbury that the Church of England should separate from the state.

When Secker proposed a compromise that would have sent commissaries instead of bishops, the increasingly belligerent American clergy actively opposed the idea. In autumn 1766, the New Jersey clergy declared to Terrick that they would refuse to accept commissaries, fearing that they would prevent the appointment of full-fledged bishops.⁹⁸ The convention’s insubordination was unambiguous: “although we have the highest veneration of the wisdom of our superiors, yet as members and clergymen of the Church of England, we are very unhappy, and we know not how to be silent, while it continues to suffer

⁹⁶Henry Caner to Thomas Secker, October 16, 1766, SPG Papers vol. 12 f. 119, LPL.

⁹⁷Samuel Johnson to Thomas Secker, November 10, 1766, Johnson, *Career and Writings*, 1:378-81.

⁹⁸Henry Compton, Bishop of London 1675-1713, began delegating administrative authority to “commissaries” residing in the colonies. This compromise alleviated the practical difficulties caused by the absence of a bishop. Thomas Sherlock, who held the post from 1748 to 1761, stopped the practice to bolster the case for a bishop. Cross, *Anglican Episcopate*, 113-38.

in such an unprecedented manner.” They deplored the humiliating disregard shown to them: “the world sees, that if we had been Dissenters, or Moravians, or Papists, we should not have been so long labouring for an episcopate to so little purpose. And yet . . . we belong to the national church.”⁹⁹

Other American churchmen criticized the New Jersey clergy’s insubordination. The Philadelphia clergyman William Smith warned Terrick that the petition manifested the “strange” notion of “an independent Church of England,” which “gains too much ground here.” Richard Peters, also of Philadelphia, explained to Terrick that the convention had been full “of a kind of resentment that Bishops . . . had been so long denied them.” “They cannot observe any temper in the affairs of Bishops,” he sniffed.¹⁰⁰ In a letter to the SPG, Auchmuty also criticized the convention. “I was not at it, but I find it high time to check their career a little – they take too much upon them, and will, unless they are soon convinced of their Error endeavour to Rule the Society & their Superiors . . . it is high time that some subordination should take place.”¹⁰¹ For more conservative clergymen such as Smith, Peters, and Auchmuty, the rebelliousness of the New Jersey convention was deplorable.

In this context, the northern clergy abandoned their reliance upon their ecclesiastical superiors and launched their own campaign for a bishop. Johnson had first proposed an appeal to the public at the end of 1765. Samuel Johnson’s eldest son, William Samuel Johnson, explained to his father’s successor at King’s College, Myles Cooper, that the pamphlet would be aimed at “our Brethren in the southern Colonies,” since “we have much to fear from [their] lukewarmness, prejudice or ignorance.” He thought the project stood little chance of success, but acknowledged “in so important a Cause it is honourable even to have

⁹⁹Thomas Bradbury Chandler, “Summary of Address of New Jersey Convention to the Bishop of London”, December 1766 Johnson, *Career and Writings*, 1:389-91.

¹⁰⁰William Smith to Richard Terrick, November 13, 1766, and Richard Peters to Terrick, November 14, 1766, Fulham Papers (Colonial Series) vol. 8 ff. 25-26, 27-28, LPL.

¹⁰¹Samuel Auchmuty, December 20, 1766, USPG B2 n. 22.

attempted.”¹⁰² Samuel Johnson proposed that Thomas Bradbury Chandler undertake the publication. Chandler agreed on the need “to bring the Dissenters and some of the Church people, and . . . some of our clergy into a just way of thinking on the subject.” Chandler sent Terrick the completed tract in October. He explained that he had tried to avoid antagonizing Dissenters, noting, “there are some other Facts and Reasons, which could not be prudently mentioned in a work of this nature, as the least Intimation of them would be of ill Consequence in this irritable Age and Country.” He nevertheless hoped that “my feeble Attempt might be a Means of engaging some Person at Home . . . to take the Cause in Hand.”¹⁰³

The resulting publication, Chandler’s *Appeal to the Public*, sought to tread the thin line between appeasing the American Church’s opponents and mobilizing its friends, though the latter was clearly his priority. Chandler repeated the familiar line that “*that the Bishops to be sent to America, shall have no Authority, but purely of a Spiritual and Ecclesiastical Nature*”; therefore, “Opposition to such a Plan, has the Nature of Persecution.” At the same time, he warned “those who have the Direction of the national Affairs” that if “the national Religion is not made . . . a national Concern” they will be “negligent of the Duty they owe to God and the Public.” He emphasized the peculiar political merits of the Church of England, whose members were bound “by the most sacred Ties of our religious Principles and Christian Duty, to support, to the utmost, the National Civil Establishment.”¹⁰⁴

Chandler’s *Appeal* provoked a renewed storm of protest. His insistence that the Church of England was the national church

¹⁰²W. S. Johnson to Myles Cooper, December 20, 1765, W. S. Johnson to Cooper, February 12, 1766, Clarence Haydon Vance Papers, MS#1283, Butler Library, Columbia University, NY.

¹⁰³Thomas Bradbury Chandler to Samuel Johnson, September 5, 1766, January 19, 1767, Johnson, *Career and Writings*, 1: 366, 387-88. Chandler to Richard Terrick, October 21, 1767, Fulham Papers (Colonial Series) vol. 6 ff. 164-67.

¹⁰⁴Thomas Bradbury Chandler, *An Appeal to the Public, in Behalf of the Church of England in America; wherein . . . Reasons for Sending Bishops to America . . . are Assigned . . . and the Objections Against Sending Them are Obviated and Confuted* (New York: Parker, 1767), 41, 46, 79, 82.

alarmed many American Congregationalists and Presbyterians. Charles Chauncy provided the most influential answer to Chandler's *Appeal*, warning that the advocates of a bishop "have in view nothing short of a complete CHURCH HIERARCHY after the pattern of that at home . . . with the allowance of no other privileges to dissenters but that of a bare toleration."¹⁰⁵ Chandler replied, insisting "we want not an Episcopate on the Footing of a *State-Establishment*; we desire no more than a complete Toleration."¹⁰⁶ In response, Chauncy explained that American Dissenters had no objection to a bishop with "PURELY SPIRITUAL powers," but argued that such a bishop was unknown in the Church of England.¹⁰⁷ Like Mayhew, Chauncy did not believe that the Church of England would create a bishop with different powers from those in England. Chandler explained that English bishops' political powers were only incidental to their spiritual authority, but also persisted in stressing that the Church of England's "Constitution . . . peculiarly harmonises with the civil Government of the Nation" and its members were "therefore entitled to the peculiar Affection of Government." For Chauncy, this insistence that the Church of England was the national church was precisely what made the demand for a bishop so objectionable.¹⁰⁸

In addition to Chauncy, Chandler's *Appeal* provoked a massive newspaper debate. Much of the criticism levelled at Chandler's *Appeal* was carried out in "The American Whig" essays, published by William Livingston in *Parker's New York Gazette*, and "The Centinel" essays in the *Pennsylvania Journal*, to which John Dickinson contributed. Chandler, along with the New York ministers Charles Inglis, Samuel Seabury, and

¹⁰⁵Charles Chauncy, *The Appeal to the Public Answered, in Behalf of the Non-Episcopal Churches in America* (Boston, MA: Kneeland & Adams, and Leverett, 1768), 202.

¹⁰⁶Thomas Bradbury Chandler, *The Appeal Defended: Or, the Proposed American Episcopate Vindicated, in Answer to the Objections and Misrepresentations of Dr. Chauncy and Others* (New York: Gaine, 1769), 9, 266.

¹⁰⁷Charles Chauncy, *A Reply to Dr. Chandler's "Appeal Defended"* (Boston, MA: Kneeland and Leverett, 1770), 92.

¹⁰⁸Chandler, *Appeal Farther Defended*, 176-77, 239. Landsman, "The Episcopate, the British Union, and the Failure of Religious Settlement," 88-94.

Myles Cooper, responded with the “Whip of the American Whig” essays published weekly between March and July 1767 (in *Gainé’s Gazette*). “The American Whig” and “The Centinel” presented the threat of an American bishop and the imposition of Parliamentary taxation as parts of an integrated scheme to deprive the colonies of their civil and religious liberty. The “Whip” suggested that the same spirit of opposition and insubordination lay behind the protests against Parliament and Dissenters’ resistance to the Church of England.¹⁰⁹ For Carl Bridenbaugh, this newspaper debate demonstrated the religious origins of the American Revolution, not only pre-empting the participants’ subsequent political allegiance but also articulating many of the ideas that were later deployed to justify—or oppose—independence from Britain.¹¹⁰ Whatever its effects on the political contestations of the 1770s, the controversy obliterated any political support that the pro-bishop clergy enjoyed in Britain, as Thomas Hollis cheerfully observed.¹¹¹ In April 1767, Secker and Drummond presented the proposal to the ministry for the final time, and it was definitively rejected.¹¹²

As their campaign for a bishop slowly petered out after 1768, sections of the colonial Church of England were left isolated, embittered, and radically disaffected. While the attention of New England Dissenters turned away from the bishop controversy and toward questions of imperial sovereignty and Parliamentary taxation, American churchmen continued to send angry petitions to England. Pleading the loyalty of colonial Anglicans in 1771, the Connecticut clergy petitioned Terrick: “there never were so few Rebels . . . so many loyal Subjects, bred in any Church, as has been in the Church of England. . .

¹⁰⁹A *Collection of Tracts from the Late News Papers, &c. Containing Particularly the American Whig* . . . (New York: Holt, 1768); Klein, *American Whig*, 469-511; Richard J. Hooker, “John Dickinson on Church and State,” *American Literature* 16, (1944): 82-98.

¹¹⁰Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 260-87.

¹¹¹To Andrew Eliot, May 25, 1768, and July 1, 1768, in “Letters from Thomas Hollis to Andrew Eliot,” 136-37, 140.

¹¹²*Autobiography of Thomas Secker*, 58; Robert Hay Drummond to the Earl of Shelburne, April 10, 1767, Shelburne Papers, 59: 31-37; Samuel Johnson to Sir William Johnson, July 6, 1767, Johnson, *Career and Writings*, 1:411-12.

But this Church cannot be supported long in such a Country as this, where it has so many, and potent Enemies." The injustice involved was staggering: "every blazing Enthusiast throughout the British Empire is tolerated in the full Enjoyment of every Peculiarity of his Sect." The national church alone was denied toleration. Later that year, the New York and New Jersey clergy sent a similar petition: "the strongest and best Security Great Britain can have for the Fidelity of her American Colonies, must arise from those Principles that are taught in our Church, and in ours only."¹¹³

Their expectations were low. When Cooper carried the petitions to England while seeking a royal charter for King's College, Chandler observed the irony:

"He goes partly as a missionary from us, in order to convert the guardians of the Church from the errors of their ways. I think our sending missionaries among them is almost as necessary as their sending missionaries to America. But I fear the difficulty of proselyting such a nation will be found greater than that of converting the American savages."¹¹⁴

American supporters of a colonial bishop were convinced that they were more attuned to the real interests of the Church of England than anyone in Britain; yet, for all their declarations of unyielding loyalty, they were thoroughly alienated from the British Empire.



The profound disaffection felt by sections of the colonial Church of England demonstrates that the bishop controversy cannot be understood as a British effort to impose the Church on America. Always resistant to the prospect of sending a bishop to the colonies, British politicians followed a well-established precedent that allowed different components of the

¹¹³Clergy of Connecticut to Richard Terrick, May 19, 1771; Clergy of New York and New Jersey to Terrick, October 12, 1771, Fulham Papers (Colonial Series), vol. 1 f. 317, vol. 41 ff. 334-35.

¹¹⁴Thomas Bradbury Chandler to Samuel Johnson, October 26, 1771, Johnson, *Career and Writings*, 1:483.

empire to manage their own religious affairs. Even Thomas Secker's short-lived and ill-fated attempt to convince them that a bishop could be sent safely did not fundamentally challenge this system. Secker never argued that the Church of England was established throughout the British Empire. That idea came from the empire's margins: from the New England Anglicans whose constitutionally anomalous position made them the most outspoken advocates of the rights of the Church in America. In reality, the British imperial state never supported the Church of England in the way that Samuel Johnson hoped or Thomas Hollis feared. The empire was held together by a shared Protestantism rather than a single institutional church. But because that shared Protestantism was inherently fissiparous, religious stability depended on compromises, ambiguities, and silences.

This balancing act was upset by Britain's military success during the Seven Years' War. The expansion and diversification of the empire aggravated existing tensions within and between the different colonies, generating an array of local conflicts. Different Protestant groups responded to the diversification of the empire in different ways. For Secker, the empire's religious diversification necessitated a greater imperial role for a tolerant Church of England. For Anglo-American Dissenters such as Jonathan Mayhew, the acquisition of Quebec posed a far-reaching threat to the Protestant interest and fueled their hostility to Secker's proposal. Their opposition to the government's religious policy in Quebec culminated in the widespread protests that greeted the 1774 Quebec Act, by which—it was claimed—popery was “established” in a British colony.¹¹⁵ For the New England and Mid-Atlantic Anglicans, conversely, government support for the Catholic Church in Quebec exemplified its failure to support the colonial Church of England, a long-standing source of resentment. Having reached a breaking point, northern Anglicans launched their own public campaign for a bishop, thereby contributing significantly to the political unrest. The bishop controversy, then, was not a

¹¹⁵Metzger, *Quebec Act*, passim.

Dissenter rebellion against an expanding, state-supported Church of England, but rather a rebellion by colonial Anglicans against an empire that had forgotten them.

How, then, do we account for the overwhelming loyalism of the northern Anglicans during the Revolutionary War? For Carl Bridenbaugh, their subsequent political behavior demonstrated that the pro-bishop party had always been the agents of the British Empire. These churchmen repeatedly argued that strengthening the colonial Church would secure the loyalty and dependence of the American colonies, and did so with mounting urgency as the political crisis worsened. Chandler, Inglis, Seabury, and Cooper continued their pro-bishop publishing campaign as a loyalist publishing campaign in the 1770s, producing some of the most influential loyalist pamphlets. In contrast to the southern colonies, the vast majority of the Anglican clergy in New England and the Mid-Atlantic took the government's side during the war, and around a third of them left the Thirteen Colonies as loyalist refugees.¹¹⁶

However, the loyalism of these churchmen should not be equated with passive, reflexive obedience to government. Doing so misconstrues the contractual nature of loyalist politics. Loyalism offered vulnerable or marginalized groups an opportunity to proclaim their support for the British state in exchange for recognition, support, or favor.¹¹⁷ The loyalism of the New England and Mid-Atlantic clergy was no exception. Throughout the war, they sent letters to Britain insisting that the rebellion could have been prevented had only the government listened to their advice and sent a Church of England bishop to America to begin with.¹¹⁸ After the war, as loyalist refugees in Britain's remaining North American colonies,

¹¹⁶Rhoden, *Revolutionary Anglicanism*, 64-87; Bell, *War of Religion*, 123-210.

¹¹⁷Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011); Allan Blackstock and Frank O'Gorman, eds., *Loyalism and the Formation of the British World, 1775-1914* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2014).

¹¹⁸Samuel Auchmuty, November 20, 1776; Charles Inglis, October 31, 1776, USPG B2 n. 20, n. 68; Samuel Seabury, Samuel Cooke, and Charles Inglis to Thomas Bradbury Chandler, Myles Cooper, John Vardill, and Jonathan Boucher, October 28, 1780, SPG Papers vol. 10, ff. 189-92, LPL.

they successfully convinced the government that supporting the Church in the empire would be in its political interest, and they finally received their wish when Charles Inglis was appointed the first Bishop of Nova Scotia in 1787.¹¹⁹ This group did not want a bishop because they were loyalists. Rather, they became loyalists to obtain a bishop. Their first loyalty was always to the Church.

¹¹⁹Doll, *Revolution, Religion, and National Identity*; Ross N. Hebb, *Samuel Seabury and Charles Inglis: Two Bishops, Two Churches* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010), 212-36; Judith Fingard, *The Anglican Design in Loyalist Nova Scotia, 1783-1816* (London: S.P.C.K., 1972), 74-113; Ann Gorman Condon, *The Envy of the American States: The Loyalist Dream for New Brunswick* (Fredericton, NB: New Ireland Press, 1984), 184-88.

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