

Introduction

Pastoral care is usually experienced in community: whether in the hierarchical form of an ordained minister counselling a parishioner, or in horizontal exchanges between like-minded believers gathering for fellowship. The shape of these ecclesial structures was radically challenged and reimagined in various ways during the Interregnum creating new intersectional spaces for pastoral care. Following Charles II's restoration these freedoms were reversed, and many conscientious English Protestants were no longer able to gather in corporate assemblies. These proscribed communities adopted a range of creative mechanisms through which to nourish and sustain their personal and corporate spirituality, identities, and doctrinal convictions; sending and receiving letters was one of the most significant and pervasive of these. Though such letters exposed individuals to censorship and prosecution, particularly former clergy, as a literary genre and a technology for communication letters enabled relationships between networks of nonconformist believers to be sustained, and they facilitated the provision of holistic care.

The provision of pastoral care through letters is examined by focusing on two transatlantic case studies of correspondence: letters sent to and from the English (later nonconformist) minister, Richard Baxter (1615–91), and the correspondence of the earliest missionaries of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) in North America (c. 1701–20). Both archives are extensive, moving between manuscript and print, mapping England's uneven development as a nation state, its attempts to sustain a parochially organised national church, and its proto-imperial ambitions in the Caribbean and North America. Pastoral care through letters thus involved British Protestant clerical and missionary engagement with Native Americans, enslaved Africans, and indentured servants, as well as voluntary immigrants from the British Isles and continental Europe.¹ Defining appropriate objects of epistolary care was contentious.² The pluralistic nature of Protestantism in the early modern British Atlantic meant that in some parts of North America the English state church was disestablished and prompted Anglicans to adopt an aggressively evangelical approach to groups such as Congregationalists, Baptists, and Quakers. Equally complex was assessing the use and mediation of communication technologies with disenfranchised populations: literacy was central to how many Protestants defined Christian practice and mission, but it also threatened

¹ Bross, *Future History*; Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*; Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*; Glasson, *Mastering Christianity*.

² The term 'objects' of care is used to identify the ways in which an organisation can be a recipient of care (as the SPG sometimes figures), and to denote the objectification of individuals through persecution or enslavement that shapes the resourcing and provision of pastoral care.

to destabilise settler societies dependent on enslaved labour for survival. This increased the political, emotional, and financial stakes when delimiting who should (and should not) give or receive pastoral care through letters.³

Pastoral care, as a concept and practice, mediates between the spiritual and medical or soul and body. This Element assesses how such care has been solicited, given, and received through the material technology of the letter as a literary genre.⁴ It considers what is at stake when someone writes (and gives) or reads (and receives) a letter as an act of pastoral care, and what distinguishes this from other forms of pastoral care in the early modern period, such as sermons, catechising, or in-person visits to congregational members. Letters have specific affordances that separate them from other textual technologies and centring this genre enables a reassessment of pastoral caregiving in the early modern British Atlantic including how this literary form distinctively shaped and facilitated the sustenance, well-being, and exploitation of individuals and fragile community structures. Letters, for example, were central to the establishment of the bureaucratic processes and administration of the SPG in its first two decades, fashioning mechanisms that allowed the corporate provision of pastoral care across vast geographical distances, and in the process transforming the English state church's understanding of itself and its parochial responsibilities.

Historical Context: The Early Modern British Atlantic

The spaces of encounter formed by transatlantic commerce and Christian mission generated ambivalent zones of experimentation and entanglement in the early modern period that galvanised new forms of creativity and constraint in the provision of pastoral care. This conceptualisation is designed partially to deconstruct and highlight inadequacies in the language of centre versus periphery, or simplistic win/loss models of power, when discussing community engagement, care, and forms of exchange in the historical case studies examined in Sections 1 and 2. These liminal zones of experimentation and entanglement are used to situate and assess the creativity generated either by the breakdown of, or enforced exclusion from, state structures of governance, education, and worship, or the geopolitical logistics confronting Protestant missionaries in a transatlantic context. It facilitates cross-cultural comparisons between nonconformist and conformist communities faced with shifting

³ Though not the focus of this Element, it is important to note that hegemonic practices of curation have shaped surviving personal and institutional archives in ways that further problematise the task of recuperating forms of epistolary caregiving within these transatlantic communities.

⁴ Black, *Reformation Pastors*; Cooper, 'Richard Baxter and His Physicians'; Newton, *Misery to Mirth*; Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul*.

state/church power relations and how such different forms of constraint establish a paradoxical freedom that inspired new ways of doing things, such as communal worship and the administration of the sacraments. Liminal zones also generated often discomfiting accommodations and intimacies across bodies, temporalities, and geographies resulting in the forging of new bonds, intercourse, and conceptualisations of the state that challenged and transformed ways of imagining and building the communion of saints, as well as the body corporate and spiritual, both in time and eternity. Recent intersectional scholarship, attending to gender and race, has produced compelling accounts that provide an essential calibration of how the reception and provision of pastoral care are reconstructed through the analysis of two manuscript archives from the early modern British Atlantic in this study.⁵

Ulinka Rublack identifies the need to embed analysis of Protestant practices through ‘reciprocal comparison’ globally, allowing each case to be viewed ‘from the vantage point of the others’ and thus attending ‘to the experiences of indigenous people as actively producing and reproducing spiritual worlds, knowledge, and life-worlds of wider consequence’.⁶ The close integration between British imperial expansion and the religious and educational mission of the state church in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries sometimes results in the assumption that this characterised English state church practices in earlier periods too. However, the formation of transatlantic structures of care was contingent, occasionally voluntary, and experimental, shaped by the logistics of geographical distance and available communication technologies. It does not fit the template of a metropolitan campaign designed to impose the state church on territories under the English crown abroad. If anything, mission projects reveal the fractured nature of seventeenth-century British Protestantism and evidence ‘the most durable vestiges of the attempt after 1660 to widen the space of the state church to reintegrate “tender consciences” stirred in the years of Civil War’.⁷ Pastoral care was a central component through which these ecclesiological fissures and synergies were worked out between c. 1650 and 1720. Anglicanism was reshaped pastorally rather than politically during the short reign of the Catholic, James II, and the Revolution of 1689, and these changes to the state church eroded sharp distinctions between its practices of pastoral care and those of mainstream Protestant nonconformity.⁸

During this period expansionist projects pushed the English state church into geographical and ecclesiastical spaces in the Caribbean and North America where it was vulnerable and uncertain of its status. Letters were the essential

⁵ Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*; Carby, *Imperial Intimacies*.

⁶ Rublack is partially citing Merry Wiesner-Hanks. Rublack, ed., *Protestant Empires*, 11–17, 28–9.

⁷ Glickman, ‘Protestantism’, 381. ⁸ Sirota, *The Christian Monitors*, 62–5.

textual technology that allowed these new global experiments in pastoral care to work at all, due to their ability to travel, and dramatically stretched the imaginations of those participating. Brent Sirota argues that this ‘increasingly capacious pastoral concern, and the promotional and organizational structures within which it was embodied, must be comprehended within the genealogy of modern British humanitarianism’.⁹ If commerce justified Christian communion, then such humanitarianism ‘in the first instance [is] a problem of ecclesiology’:¹⁰ benevolence and violence are intimately entangled from its inception. Christopher Codrington’s bequest of two Barbados plantations, maintained through the exploitation of enslaved labour, to resource the caregiving and missional ambitions of the fledging SPG irrevocably shaped its developing organisational character and practice and brings such challenges into sharp relief. There were also constraints on what could be imagined.¹¹

The British Atlantic, as a theoretical and geographical paradigm, is a central component to the argument developed here.¹² The SPG’s archive was transatlantic from its point of origin, reflecting the ways in which a small, nationally defined state church attempted to negotiate the challenges that commerce with and emigration to North America and the Caribbean presented to a parochially structured ecclesial organisation. Baxter’s epistolary network is also transatlantic and offers evidence of early Protestant engagement with missionary endeavours, particularly in his correspondence with John Eliot, a Congregationalist missionary to the Narragansett Indians and other Native Americans.¹³ Baxter supported the work of the Company for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England (founded in 1649) and offered an early critique of European Protestants involved in capturing, enslaving, and exploiting African people in his casuistical compendium, *The Christian Directory* (1673).¹⁴ Missionary work is an important aspect of both case studies and demonstrates how pastoral care as a point of analysis can be borne through to other areas of discussion, particularly in the development of correspondence networks and the establishment of new structures of care. As a communication technology, letters were essential to

⁹ Ibid. 225. ¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ For example, the way developing ideas about race shaped eschatology. Trigg, ‘The Racial Politics of Resurrection’.

¹² ‘The “Atlantic” therefore becomes both a category of analysis as well as a method of approach . . . Unified states and nations had not yet fully developed . . . Settlers in Britain’s North American colonies did not live isolated, secluded lives independent of the concerns of their native land’. Colonists’ writings and news ‘shaped ideas, politics, and society in England’. Pullin, *Female Friends*, 23.

¹³ Rosenberg, ‘Thomas Tryon’; Burton, ‘Crimson Missionaries’; Glickman, ‘Protestantism’.

¹⁴ Baxter, *The Christian Directory*, 557–60. Baxter’s critique does not extend to a condemnation of slavery as an institution, but to this aspect of how it was practised. On forms of servitude, see Smith ‘Between the Galley and Plantation’.

facilitating transatlantic commerce and communion, and the opportunities that each offered to expand the imagination of the British public through exposure to new objects and spaces for pastoral care. Correspondence networks were also integral to the material aggrandisement, exploitation, and enslavement that underwrote Britain's nascent imperial project.

The use of two case studies from c. 1650 to 1720 cuts across traditional scholarly periodisation and allows an exploration of how the letter as a genre was adapted to provide pastoral care in a time of multiple and disruptive alterations in the British religious settlement and rapid expansion of Britain's imperial reach across the Atlantic, which precipitated efforts to provide spiritual care to different categories of people. The diversity and range of pastoral correspondence in the Baxter and the SPG archives allow the impact of both these elements to be explored in detail, as they evidence the significance of censorship, persecution, and new communication routes that both enabled and constrained how pastoral care was given and received through letters in the early modern British Atlantic. Interrogating these two archives facilitates a calibrated assessment of how these changing political, religious, and communication infrastructures both emerged from and nourished the ways in which early modern subjects imagined, practised, and developed literary caregiving.

Pastoral Care

In contemporary parlance, pastoral care has become a generic term for broader support networks and caregiving structures, and spiritual care is preferred when focusing on the relationship between humans and a transcendent other.¹⁵ In the early modern British Atlantic, however, pastoral care denotes more precisely the intersection between structures of religious authority, or cure, variously defined, and a responsibility to provide care for the souls, and sometimes bodies, of parishioners or congregants. Early modern pastoral care was personal and holistic – drawing on forensic (interrogatory) and medical (cases) discourses – and administrative or bureaucratic, both scenarios were dealt with on occasion through letters. Different circumstances could precipitate this necessity: for Baxter, it was both the inchoate period of revolution in the 1650s and enforced separation from his congregation due to his principled nonconformity following the Restoration (though letter-writing was also an important component of his pastoral caregiving practices as a parish priest in Kidderminster). For the SPG letters were essential as they built structures for administering the recruitment, training, support, and reporting of missionaries from an institutional base in London across Britain, continental Europe, North

¹⁵ Speelman, 'Shifting Concepts of Pastoral Care'.

America, and the Caribbean. Innovations in the use of paper as a technology were critical to the developments in communication and bureaucracy that underwrote such epistolary exchanges, and the role of the SPG's first Secretary, Joseph Chamberlayne, was central to ensuring that global exchanges of paper packets, and their accoutrements of books and other material, was facilitated with care and efficiency.

These two archives allow Baxter and the SPG's historical practices of pastoral care to be explored and, in turn, require the analysis of pastoral care as a concept. This includes defining relationships between religious, philosophical, and scientific forms of caregiving through examining vocabularies of emotion and experience, exemplified in letters, and assessing what these letters reveal about the epistemologies shaping care provision and the role of the pastor or missionary as a physician of body and soul. These archives reveal how nonconformist and marginal Protestant communities created and maintained horizontal networks of social capital by developing epistolary vocabularies and structures that nurtured their well-being. Tracing the material history of care as a series of moments of lived encounter between pastor or missionary and congregant or the SPG's Secretary highlights the rich interrelationships between care and cure. Focusing on the material ways in which early modern communities used letters to provide care also shows how political exclusion, or geographical distance from the metropolitan centre, contributed to the increasing distinction between professional specialisations as, for example, the roles of pastor, missionary, natural philosopher, or physician.

The political and economic stakes of pastoral care were high in the early modern British Atlantic and debates about how it should be provided acted as a forum where issues of contention were vigorously explored. Baxter's correspondence preserves voices personally witnessing to monarchical and episcopal overreach, the effects of war fracturing communities, and repeated constitutional upheaval, creating political, social, and religious crises. Correspondents raise existential questions in a context where they no longer knew who to ask. This exposes the essential role of correspondence in the intellectual ferment of the early modern British Atlantic. Letters, both public and private, in print and manuscript, allowed Baxter as a minister and scholar to provide pastoral care by formulating creative theological, emotional, and political responses to the experience of revolution, and later, to political exclusion from public life. Section 1 offers a reappraisal of how Baxter's letters functioned as a mechanism of pastoral care during a period when such caregiving was inevitably contentious.

Anglican expansionist projects, following the Restoration, evidence a state church struggling with its insularity and thus represent a de-territorialisation

of Anglicanism. These tensions are frequently evident in early correspondence, such as that from South Carolina, where the SPG missionaries note the success of nonconformist Protestants locally and the lack of financial and political support from their parishioners. Sirota postulates that when thinking about ecclesiastical expansion the state church adopted a primary orientation towards England's maritime and commercial empire, and this neither requires nor assumes that such 'ecclesiastical expansion proceeded with the concurrence of the state'.¹⁶ Integral to an 'increasingly capacious pastoral concern, and the promotional and organizational structures within which it was embodied', is the way spaces of 'free association, commercial enterprise, and intersubjective communication' became imaginable as 'an alternative ecology for Christian life'.¹⁷ The letter-writing activities of both nonconformists and Anglicans experimenting with voluntarism are central to developing a nuanced account of the sacralisation of civil society and its reimaging as 'the preeminent stage of public moral enterprises' in the early modern British Atlantic.¹⁸ Anglican experimentation with voluntarism in pastoral care relied heavily on the cooperation of continental Protestants, with whom they maintained far more ecumenical relations than with Protestant nonconformists in Britain. These matters are examined in Section 2 through an analysis of the significant role played by French Huguenots, such as Elias Neau and Francis Le Jau, in the SPG's early catechising and missionary work amongst enslaved, indigenous, and settler populations in New York and South Carolina.

Persecuted or imprisoned ministers, and boundary crossers, such as missionaries and chaplains, have specific responsibilities and expertise that often require them to operate in transitional spaces with complex entanglements.¹⁹ Pastoral care is both structural (political, economic, parochial) and personal (counselling, administration of rituals, gift-giving), and chaplains and missionaries operate as bridge-builders or spanners between these two levels in various ways. This vulnerable positionality meant that pastors and missionaries faced a range of intersectional and competing accountabilities that could transform their own personal and professional identities. This is evident in the experience of Baxter and other nonconformist ministers after the Restoration, and in the shifting identities and ministerial accountabilities constructed in the letters of the SPG's early missionaries, George Keith, Elias Neau, and Francis Le Jau. Modelling vulnerability in leadership could itself be construed as a form of pastoral care, but one that was less open to administrative representatives for corporations, such as the SPG's Secretary.

¹⁶ Sirota, *Christian Monitors*, 223–5. ¹⁷ *Ibid.* 225, 258. ¹⁸ *Ibid.* 259.

¹⁹ Sullivan, *A Ministry of Presence*; Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century*.

Pastoral Power and Legacies of Enslavement

Care is an aspect of relationality. Correspondents in both these case studies model and question the power hierarchies involved in epistolary exchange exposing areas of potential abuse. Thinking about pastoral care thus also requires theological and philosophical reflection on pastoral power.²⁰ It is necessary to recognise the negative dimensions of pastoral care and the legacies of enslavement and colonialism alongside more positive aspects when excavating and reconstructing historical practices of care. There is an imbalance of power in the relationships between pastor/congregant, missionary/audience, doctor and/or chaplain and patient. Michel Foucault's genealogy of pastoral power is useful here. Pastor and sheep are engaged in an affective, reciprocal relationship:

the Christian pastorate . . . establishes a kind of exhaustive, total, and permanent relationship of individual obedience . . . [It] is also absolutely innovative in establishing a structure, a technique of, at once, power, investigation, self-examination, and the examination of others, by which a certain secret inner truth of the hidden soul, becomes the element through which the pastor's power is exercised, by which obedience is practiced, by which the relationship of complete obedience is assured.²¹

Foucault argues that this process intensified in the ecclesiastical sphere during the sixteenth century and, as pastoralism enhanced and diversified the technologies available to it, a new modality of government spread beyond the ecclesiastical into the field of political sovereignty.²²

This intersection between ecclesiastical practice and new methods of government in the development and expansion of pastoral power has important implications for reflecting on practices of pastoral care on the fringes of state authority including, for example, settler zones in North America and the Caribbean, or nonconformist ministers pursuing their vocation in a hostile English nation-state administered parochially. It is significant that Foucault recognises the role of 'pastoral counter-conducts' as well: forms of resistance 'which tend to redistribute, reverse, nullify, and partially or totally discredit pastoral power in the systems of salvation, obedience, and truth'.²³ These border-elements are not external to Christianity, and they seek 'to disrupt the particular alignment of governance' practised by those authorised to provide pastoral care. Such forms of resistance include asceticism (which challenges the emphasis on obedience to the other by prioritising the self), community formation, the cultivation of mysticism (which disrupts the pastorate's political

²⁰ See Dillen, ed., *Soft Shepherd or Almighty Pastor?*

²¹ Foucault, *Security, Terror, Population*, 183. ²² *Ibid.* 227–83. ²³ *Ibid.* 204.

mobilisation of truth through circumventing examination), a return to scripture, and embracing eschatology.²⁴

Foucault's historical account of the development of pastoral power within the Western Christian tradition has limitations, but his analysis of the configurations of power operating within specific Protestant communities, and the opportunities border-elements offer for counter-conduct,²⁵ enable an assessment of the intersections between knowledge, power, and care in early modern correspondence archives. The utility of pastoral power as a concept lies in its capacity to render visible the potential abuses that pastoral care as a seemingly benign term can inadvertently obscure. Foucault's genealogy of pastoral power calibrates a simplistic win/lose model of exchange where there is a finite amount of power and if one person 'loses' power then another must 'gain' some allowing for a more attenuated account of how benevolence and violence intersect when giving and receiving pastoral care: '[T]he pastor, according to Foucault, has a hermeneutical role of hearing and interpreting the confession such that they can guide the individual toward self-understanding'.²⁶ Such intimate and implicitly reciprocal exchanges are essential to creating and reinscribing but also potentially disrupting the minister's authority. This interpersonal dynamic is not circumvented when thinking about dialogical exchanges via letter, though its textual inscription through the medium of correspondence shapes it in particular ways. The authority of the pastor, like that of the physician, is established by the fact that they each hold knowledges and sets of professional expertise.²⁷ Such expertise was developed and distributed across the British Atlantic through the SPG's structure as an incorporated company: expertise was shared through epistolary exchanges that also demonstrated the importance, and frequent absence, of the Anglican church's episcopal authority beyond England. Paperwork, with letters as the core genre, remains key here.

The interpersonal dynamics both individual and social involved in recuperating a genealogy of pastoral care in early modern religious communities is enriched by an interdisciplinary approach, particularly when dealing with the British Atlantic in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. Willie James Jennings's theological analysis of the historical intersections between European colonisation, the emergence of global Christian missions, and the development of theories of race recalibrates Foucault's account of pastoral power, unpicking the implications of intersectionality when reflecting on

²⁴ Ibid. 204–15; Golder, 'Foucault', 174.

²⁵ Foucault notes that 'these counter-conducts are clearly not absolutely external to Christianity, but are actually border-elements, if you like, which have been continually re-utilized, re-implanted, and taken up again in one or another direction'. *Security, Terror, Population*, 214–5.

²⁶ Mayes, 'Pastoral Power', 488. ²⁷ Ibid. 489.

pastoral caregiving through letters not only in terms of clergy/laity, male/female binaries but also in terms of black/white and enslaved/free. The SPG archive makes two things clear: recuperation of practices of pastoral care in the early modern British Atlantic must also consider the engagement of British Protestants in transatlantic slavery, commerce, and exchange; any act of pastoral caregiving is also an act of pastoral power. This power can be benevolent, violent, or any spectrum of possibilities between and in combination. However, the SPG's archive documents experiments in providing pastoral care resourced by enslaved people as well as to enslaved people. The intimate complexities of the religious, social, political, and economic entanglements that these experiments in pastoral care necessitated were profoundly deforming and impacted those exploited in traumatic ways. The challenge then is to produce an account of pastoral care that also reckons with this legacy of enslavement: 'A Christianity born of such realities but historically formed to resist them has yielded a form of religious life that thwarts its deepest instincts of intimacy . . . [T]he intimacy that marks Christian history is a painful one, in which the joining often meant oppression, violence, and death, if not of bodies then most certainly of ways of life, forms of language, and visions of the world.'²⁸

Pastoral caregiving as a component of Christian mission and pedagogy strengthened the reach and power of transatlantic colonial endeavours. Jennings notes that attempts

to teach and thereby create orthodoxy even in those [designated] the most ignorant flesh, black Africans, produced a reductive theological vision in which the world's people become perpetual students, even where and when faith is formed. What will grow out of this horrid colonial arrangement is a form of imperialism far more flexible, subtle, and virulent than could be explained by appeals to cultural difference or ethnic chauvinism. This imperialist form drew life from Christianity's lifeblood, from its missionary mandate and its mission reflexes. It was therefore poised to follow its currents all along its geographic length and its nationalist breadth, profoundly marking its body.²⁹

Jennings argues that replacing theology with pedagogy allowed evaluation to become a constant operation of the modality of knowledge/power: 'Through that modality, the native subject was formed into a deficient barbarian in need of continuous external and internal self-examination and evaluation. How well or how poorly the evaluations are done stands inside this human subject-generating discursive formation.'³⁰

²⁸ Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 9. See also Johnson, *Wicked Flesh*.

²⁹ Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 112. ³⁰ *Ibid.* 106.