# Scottish Highlanders, North American Indians and the SSPCK: Some Cultural Perspectives

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Over the years much has been written and said about the history of the Christian church in the Scottish Highlands, especially in the period after 1690 and the re-establishment of Presbyterianism in Scotland. The emphasis has usually been on the rôle of the Established Church in the Highlands, but the Disruption of 1843 has also loomed large in the consciousness of historians. More recently some work has been done on the attitude of the churches, especially the Established Church, to Highland culture and particularly to the Gaelic language. The examination of the churches' attitude to culture has involved considerable discussion of the ancillary bodies which operated alongside the Established Church, principally the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge.[1] There is also a growing understanding of the activities of Baptists and Congregationalists in the Highlands, and recent research has demonstrated that these bodies came into the Highlands as a result of a wave of missionary activity which began at the end of the eighteenth century.[2]

Nevertheless, the rôle of missionaries and missionary societies in the Highland context has been explored relatively little by modern historians. Some attention has been given to it, but scarcely with the thoroughness which it deserves. The tendency to concentrate on recognised institutions such as the Established Church, and to define "mission" in terms of foreign missions emanating from Britain, has obscured the fact that from the early eighteenth century the Highlands were regarded, within the British Isles, as the equivalent of a "foreign" mission-field. The desire to promote a programme of "de-barbarisation" in the Highlands in the period 1690-1790 was part of an increasing awareness of the need to evangelise peoples whose culture was distinctively different from that of the English-speaking majority in Britain. It was not a desire which was in any way restricted to the Established Church or even to the other agencies operating within the Scottish

[1] V. E. Durkacz, *The Decline of the Celtic Languages* (Edinburgh, 1983); C. W. J. Withers, *Gaelic in Scotland 1698-1981: The Geographical History of a Language* (Edinburgh, 1984).

[2] D. E. Meek, "Evangelical Missionaries in the Early Nineteenth-Century Highlands", *Scottish Studies*, xxviii (1987), 1-34; *The Baptists in Scotland: a History*, ed. D. W. Bebbington (Glasgow, 1988), 26-47, 280-308.

Highlands. In 1786, for instance, the distinguished and far-travelled Methodist missionary, Thomas Coke, whose enterprises came close to a literal fulfilment of the concept of "the world as his parish", was advocating the establishment of a Methodist mission to the Highlands. Following one of several visits to Scotland, he wrote:

> "No kingdom under heaven has been more blessed with the light of the gospel than *North Britain*. Numerous have been the men of most eminent piety and abilities, whom God in his providence and grace has been pleased to raise among that people. And yet, in the *Highlands* and adjacent *Islands*, many scores, perhaps I may say hundreds of thousands, are little better than the rudest barbarians."[3]

Coke, typical of his kind, combined boundless enthusiasm with plain speaking, but it is clear that it was the view of the Highlands as being comparable with the darkest of foreign fields that provided the essential dynamism of the many missionaries and missionary bodies which were active in the area in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Even distant observers of the Highlands shared this view, which is represented in the words of the Anglican clergyman and hymnwriter, John Newton, spoken in 1797:

> "Why should not the Orkney and the Shetland Islands deserve attention as much as the Islands of the South Sea? I hope Gospel zeal will, in due time, sail northward to Shetland, and westward to St. Kilda, and all the intermediate islands."[4]

"Gospel zeal" did indeed spread very effectively throughout the Highlands and Islands after 1797, but, by means of a vigorous home missionary movement, the way was being prepared for it from the beginning of the eighteenth century. In fact, the comparatively early activities of protestant missionary bodies in the Highlands did more than put the region firmly on the international missionary map. The establishment of these bodies for Highland mission contributed to the development of missionary endeavour in other parts of the world. It is no accident that some of the best-known names in early Scottish and international missionary consciousness belong to men of Highland extraction, who stand at the end of one wave of Highland missionary activity, and at the beginning of another, originating after 1790. Their number includes John Campbell, David Livingstone, and Alexander Duff. Campbell had close family links with Killin, Perthshire, and in the early 1800s he twice visited South Africa as an emissary of the

[3] John Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism* (London, 1969), 140.
[4] Alexander Haldane, *The Lives of Robert Haldane of Airthrey and of his brother James Alexander Haldane* (4th edn, Edinburgh, 1855), 184.

London Missionary Society.[5] Campbell's explorations, described in well-written journals, influenced David Livingstone, the great explorer of Africa, whose people came from the little Hebridean island of Ulva, immediately to the west of Mull.[6] Alexander Duff was a Gaelic-speaking native of Moulin, Perthshire, and after a distinguished and often controversial missionary career in India, he became the first Professor of Missions at New College, Edinburgh.[7] Yet the Highlands did more than supply manpower for the foreign mission-field; the area also played its part in the development of early approaches to the indigenous languages and cultures of these fields. By examining the work of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, we have the rare opportunity of exploring how these approaches were transmitted to, and operated within, another mission-field on the opposite side of the Atlantic Ocean.

*The Highlands as a Mission-field:*

Accepting that the Highlands were the scene of much missionary activity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we must ask why this was the case. The first point to note is that the Highlands were culturally distinct from the rest of Scotland and mainland Britain. This distinction was most noticeable in the language of the Highland people, namely Scottish Gaelic, which was spoken over most of the Highlands during the period with which we are concerned. Towards the end of the Middle Ages, Lowlanders were becoming very much more aware of the differences between them and the Highlanders who lived in remote fastnesses behind the so-called "Highland Line". For Scottish (and later British) central government from at least the reign of James VI, the Highlanders were a source of disquiet, and many attempts were made to curb alleged lawlessness and to "civilise" the region. The perceived need for such measures was increased by the political and religious complexions of the Highlands.[8]

This brings us to the second point. Many Highlanders in the seventeenth century supported the Royalist cause in the Wars of the Covenant, and those who did so were mainly of Roman Catholic or Episcopalian persuasion. Following the exile of James VII, the Highlands came to be very closely equated with Jacobitism and

[5] Robert Philip, *The Life, Times, and Missionary Enterprises of the Rev. John Campbell* (London, 1841).

[6] Peter Becker, *The Pathfinders: The Saga of Exploration in Southern Africa* (Harmondsworth, 1987), 156-68; W. G. Blaikie, *David Livingstone* (Westwood, New Jersey, 1986 edn), 17-22.

[7] M. A. Laird, *Missionaries and Education in Bengal 1793-1837* (Oxford, 1972), 201ff.

[8] See, most recently and most comprehensively, James Kirk, "The Jacobean Church in the Highlands, 1567-1625", in *The Seventeenth Century in the Highlands* (Inverness, 1986), 24-51.

insurrection. When the Hanoverian dynasty came to the throne and Presbyterianism was re-established in Scotland in 1690, the identification of the Highlands with popery and Jacobitism was a matter of great concern to the government and to Presbyterian religious bodies. The grounds for such an identification were strengthened by the Jacobite Rebellions of 1715 and 1745 and the abortive uprising of 1719. Of course, not all Highlanders were Jacobites. The Campbells of Argyll, for example, were a strongly protestant and Presbyterian family. Nevertheless, the pall of rebellion hung over the region. The eradication of religious and political disaffection from "the popish parts" was undoubtedly one of the great driving forces of militant Presbyterianism and protestant missionary zeal in the eighteenth century.[9]

In the attempt to win Highlanders from episcopacy, Roman Catholicism and barbarism, the main burden after 1690 fell upon the Established Church. It cannot be said that it faced an easy task. The challenge of providing an adequate supply of Gaelic-speaking clergymen was daunting, and the attempt to reach the people was made all the more difficult by the sheer size of many of the parishes. Even if ministers could have been supplied for every parish, it would not have been possible to provide spiritual means evenly in all parts of the Highlands. The Established Church did its best with the means available. The Royal Bounty, established in 1725, helped to provide catechists and missionary-ministers for remote corners of many parishes, but even such provision was not wholly sufficient.[10]

This, then, was the third reason for protestant missionary activity in the Highlands: the Established Church needed assistance to carry out its task, and its coverage of Highland parishes was frequently inadequate, as it was often aware. This became the chief argument for the maintenance of a missionary impetus long after the Jacobite scare had passed away. If the desire to eradicate Catholicism and Jacobitism introduced vigorous missionary endeavour to the region, the impetus was continued because it was felt that many parts of the over-large parishes served by the Established Church lacked regular spiritual provision.[11] In the

[9] John MacInnes, *The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland 1688 to 1800* (Aberdeen, 1951), 199ff.

[10] *Ibid.* See also W. Ferguson, "The Problems of the Established Church in the West Highlands and Islands in the Eighteenth Century", *RSCHS*, xvii (1972), 15-31.

[11] MacInnes, *Evangelical Movement*, tends to give an over-optimistic view of the achievements of the Established Church in the Highlands prior to 1800. By concentrating on evidence furnished primarily by sources from the northern Highland mainland, and by concluding his survey in 1800, Dr MacInnes has not dealt fully with the condition of the parishes in the southern Highlands (Perthshire and Argyll) and in the Hebrides. It is highly significant that it was in these areas that the dissenting movement took root most strongly after 1800: see Meek, "Evangelical Missionaries", especially 26-9.

period before 1780 or thereabouts, the church's "job" would have been defined primarily as one of bringing civilisation to the Highlands; after 1780, it would have been defined more closely in terms of spiritual edification. The focus of missionary endeavour thus changed gradually from an assault on popery and alleged incivility to a concern with filling the gaps in the parish system, and this was coupled with an increasing desire to bring "revealed religion" (and evangelical experience) rather than "natural religion" (and "civilised" learning) to the area. This had profound consequences for the Established Church in the Highlands.[12] The vast dimensions of Highland parishes gave an opportunity and an excuse to non-Presbyterian missionary bodies to respond to the Highland equivalent of the Macedonian call — "Come over and help us". This call, in its non-conformist tone, was particularly strong in the closing decades of the eighteenth century and the opening decades of the nineteenth, but the earliest response is apparent in a Presbyterian context in the early 1700s.

*The SSPCK as a Missionary Body:*

The first body which came to the assistance of the Established Church in the Highlands was the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (henceforward SSPCK). This had its roots in an earlier society for the reformation of manners, but it was formally instituted by royal charter in Edinburgh in 1709, and it had a special interest in the Highlands. Its primary concerns are clear in its Letters Patent, namely:

> "to erect and maintain Schools to teach to read especially the Holy Scriptures and other good and pious books. As also to teach Writing, Arithmetick, and such lyke degrees of Knowledge in the Highlands . . . and to use such means for Instructing the People in the Christian Reformed Protestant Religion. . . ."[13]

The SSPCK was thus conceived originally as a school-based organisation, and it operated mainly by establishing charity schools to supplement the parochial schools established by the church. These schools were to be ambulatory; that is, they were to move around the parish as required, but it is clear that in practice the schools were fairly static. Besides schools which taught reading and writing, the SSPCK (after 1745) provided schools with an industrial aim, teaching such crafts as spinning and weaving. In addition to schools, the SSPCK supported catechists in the Highlands, and its schoolmasters assumed the rôle of catechist when there was no such agent already appointed in the parish.[14]

[12] Its most striking consequence was the Disruption of 1843.
[13] Scottish Record Office, GD 95/2, Her Majesty's Letters Patent, 3.
[14] MacInnes, *Evangelical Movement*, 236-52.

Two aspects of the ideological basis of the SSPCK are worthy of note. The first of these is the strongly anti-Catholic thrust of its work. The SSPCK schoolmasters were asked to sign a statement which committed them to the removal of popery from the Highlands. In the early 1700s, the Established Church was concerned at the gains which were being made by itinerant Roman Catholic priests in certain parts of the Highlands.[15] The second point is that the SSPCK was initially committed to the extension of English in the Highlands, and to the eradication of Gaelic. This policy was maintained strongly, but not easily, until the middle of the eighteenth century, when it was relaxed to the extent that the society was able to undertake the translation of the New Testament into Scottish Gaelic. This concession was made, however, in the hope that it would provide a stepping-stone towards the acquisition of English. The SSPCK therefore had the desire to integrate the Highlands into a protestant and English-speaking context.[16]

In promoting its aims in the Highlands, the SSPCK regarded itself as a missionary enterprise: it supported catechists and schoolmasters whom it termed "missionaries".[17] It is, however, important to note that the term "missionary" when used in this context in the early eighteenth century has a different meaning from what we might regard as its meaning today. The SSPCK did not usually send "missionaries" from one country to another; it recruited men in the localities, who would then be supported by it, for a "missionary" purpose. It was the purpose or the end in view, rather than the "going out" from one country to another, that defined a "missionary". Nevertheless, we shall see that, on a couple of occasions, in 1735 and 1774, the SSPCK came close to supporting "missionaries" in the more modern sense of that term.

The general missionary aspirations of the SSPCK beyond the Highlands were in accordance with its second stated aim, namely to propagate Christian knowledge in "Popish and Infidel parts of the World". This was, to say the least, a broad remit, but finance was available from a legacy which was to be released to the Society when it took up the challenge. The Society eventually focused its attention on North America. After 1729 the SSPCK set up boards of correspondents in Boston and New York, and it developed a strong commitment to the support of missionaries for the North American Indians.[18] This dimension of its labours is of considerable significance in assessing the international rôle of the society, but we must ask why the Society chose to go to the Indians.

[15] *Ibid.*, 242.
[16] This is discussed very fully in Durkacz, *Decline of the Celtic Languages*, 45-72.
[17] MacInnes, *Evangelical Movement*, 238.
[18] Henry R. Sefton, "The Scotch Society in the American Colonies in the Eighteenth Century", *RSCHS*, xvii (1972), 169-84.

Clearly, it had a special interest in the evangelisation of peoples who were culturally distinct from those of English-speaking Britain, and there can be little doubt that its commitment to the Indian missions owed something to its experience in the Highlands. Indeed, there are grounds to believe that the phases of the Society's work among the Indians run parallel to its changing approaches to work in the Highlands. This is apparent in the Society's view of Indian languages and culture. Yet, there were countries nearer home where it could have found the sort of challenge on which it thrived.

We might, for instance, consider why the SSPCK did not choose to go to Ireland, where "Popery" and "Infidelity" were not lacking, where parishes were large enough to require much missionary activity, and where the majority of the population spoke Irish, a language closely related to Scottish Gaelic. We might suppose that Ireland would have been an ideal location for the SSPCK. Yet the Society showed no interest in Ireland. One reason may have been that the Irish were even more heartily despised than the Highlanders and the Indians. A further consideration may have been that the Church of Ireland was episcopal in structure, and the SSPCK was non-episcopal and strongly Presbyterian.[19] The Society appears to have felt that it could co-operate only with churches and churchmen who shared similar views to itself. Such congenial circumstances were to be found in North America, where there were colonists who had Puritan affiliations and forceful ministers. These men were often Congregationalists, but there was a growing and increasingly vociferous body of Presbyterians in the New World.[20] In addition, the perspectives which these men held with regard to Indians in the early eighteenth century were similar to those held by the SSPCK with regard to Highlanders. In 1710, Cotton Mather, a very influential Congregational minister from Boston, Massachusetts, wrote thus:

> "The best thing we can do for our Indians is to Anglicise them in all agreeable Instances; and in that of Language, as

[19] The English SPCK (Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge) was an Anglican body active in both England and Wales, and it might have been expected to address itself to Ireland more readily than its Scottish counterpart.

[20] Martin E. Marty, *Pilgrims in their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (New York, 1985 edn), 124, notes that Presbyterian ministers, who formed their first Presbytery at Philadelphia in 1706, tended to serve "people who were settling the far frontier, where Indians were close and churches remote". This was because "beyond their bases at Long Island and Philadelphia, they found most coastal lands already taken". These were occupied mainly by Congregationalist bodies. This may help to explain the development of an active Presbyterian interest in Indian missions. It is noticeable that Presbyterian ministers such as Ebenezer Pemberton and Jonathan Dickinson were among the strongest supporters of the SSPCK.

well as others. They can scarce retain their Language, without a Tincture of other Savage Inclinations, which do but ill suit, either with the Honor, or with the design of Christianity."[21]

In the years before 1750, the SSPCK would have subscribed to this view in respect of Gaelic-speaking Highlanders, and in that context it issued statements which are virtually identical with that of Mather in perception and formulation.[22] Many people in Britain at the time would have agreed with such sentiments, since it was doubtless widely believed that it was preferable to integrate "barbarians" into "civilisation" rather than blow them out of existence by gun and cannon. As colonisation and missionary activity led to contact with "primitive" peoples, the SSPCK was probably consistent with the spirit of the age in its desire to integrate the differentiated cultures, especially through the medium of English-based education. The SSPCK therefore found like-minded ministers and a ready-made bridgehead in North America. When such ministers asked for help, the Society was happy to respond.

*Reaching the Indians:*

The SSPCK supported about fifteen missionaries to the North American Indians. They were predominantly natives of New England, and ministered chiefly to various tribes of Algonkian Indians in the north-east of the present-day United States.[23] Three phases can be observed in the work:

(1) *1730-40*: In this period the SSPCK supported three missionaries operating through its Boston correspondents, and located at one trading station and two "places of resort for the Indians". Their work on the borders of New England was, however, a failure because they refused to go beyond these stations and live with the Indians. The SSPCK also sent a Highland, Gaelic-speaking missionary to Georgia in 1735.[24]

(2) *1740-60*: This period shows the influence of the Great Awakening on attitudes to the evangelisation of the Indians. The SSPCK, responding to an appeal to act with regard to "the deplorable, perishing state of the Indians on the border of New

[21] Henry Warner Bowden, *American Indians and Christian Missions: Studies in Cultural Conflict* (Chicago, 1981), 136.

[22] In 1748 the SSPCK was still unwilling to countenance Gaelic translation of religious texts, in the belief that English would become the dominant language; see Durkacz, *Decline of the Celtic Languages*, 66.

[23] The principal published source for the Indian missions is *An Account of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge* (Edinburgh, 1774) [henceforward *1774 Account*], 13-19. This has not been used extensively by previous writers on this subject.

[24] *Ibid.*, 14-15.

York, New Jersey and Pensilvania",[25] supported missionaries who lived among the Indians, mainly in the Middle Colonies, and who were directed by the society's correspondents in New York. These men operated through interpreters, and their work was not entirely successful, for various reasons, including language difficulties. They included Azariah Horton, based in Long Island, New York, and the brothers John and David Brainerd, of whom David Brainerd is by far the better known, chiefly for his work among the Delaware Indians.[26]

(3) *1760-1800*: Missionaries in this period included Eleazar Wheelock and his former students, Samuel Kirkland and the remarkable Samson Occom, a native Mohegan Indian who was converted at the beginning of the Great Awakening and who became an ordained Presbyterian minister. These three men were distinguished for their command of native Indian languages. Wheelock and Kirkland operated influential schools which aimed to provide Indian missionaries for the Indians. Wheelock, who was the mainstay of this embryonic indigenising movement, kept a school at Lebanon, Connecticut, which was established in 1754, and obtained SSPCK support (and its own board of correspondents) in 1764.[27]

Even if we concede that it was of fundamental importance to the work of the SSPCK to find congenial ecclesiastical colleagues in New England, it is likely that its Indian involvement would not have proceeded so rapidly if it had not been operating already in a similar cultural context in the Scottish Highlands. The North American Indians lived in extended families comparable with Highland clans, they were governed in the north-eastern parts by powerful headmen called *sachems*, and, like Highlanders, they regarded their lands as tribal possessions. Because of their lifestyle, Indians were difficult to reach, and it was not always easy to maintain consistent contact with individual tribes. In addition, they spoke a perplexingly large variety of Indian languages with regional dialects.[28] The main differences between the circumstances of the Highlanders and those of the Indians lay in the elusiveness and cultural complexity of the latter. There was little cultural interaction between Indians and English-speaking colonists. SSPCK missionaries, of course, lived among the Highlanders, and were usually Gaelic-speaking Highlanders. It is very significant that in

[25] Sefton, "The Scotch Society", 171.
[26] *1774 Account*, 15.
[27] *Ibid.*, 16-17.
[28] For a discussion of Indian culture and society, see William S. Simmons, *Spirit of the New England Tribes* (Hanover, New Hampshire, 1986); cf. Sefton, "The Scotch Society", 182-3.

1737 the SSPCK sacked its first three missionaries to the North American Indians, because they refused to live among them.[29]

The rôle of the SSPCK in supporting the evangelisation of the Indians was probably further strengthened by emigration from the Highlands and subsequent settlement by Gaelic-speaking Highlanders in parts of North America where there was close contact with Indians. A "North Atlantic circuit" was in operation, and this drew Highlanders and Indians together in the thinking of the SSPCK. The operation of this "North Atlantic circuit" helped to stimulate wider British interest in North American Indians in 1734.[30] The circuit initially focused on the colony of Georgia. General Oglethorpe, who established the colony in 1732, had close contact with Indians, and he brought six Indians back to Britain two years later. As a result of this, an insignificant young man called John Wesley, accompanied by his brother Charles, set sail for Georgia in 1735, with the aim of preaching to the Indians. The Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts supported the venture, but it was not a success, and the Wesleys returned to Britain (and to subsequent fame) in 1738.[31]

It was also General Oglethorpe who arranged, in 1735, the emigration of 160 Mackintoshes (with others, totalling 177 men, women and children) from Inverness-shire to Georgia, where they were to bolster the colony's defences against Spanish attack.[32] At the request of the Trustees of the colony, the SSPCK provided for the colonists a Gaelic-speaking missionary who was to assume the dual rôle of minister and catechist to the Highlanders and missionary to the Indians:

> "The Trustees of the colony of Georgia having, in 1735, engaged a considerable number of people, from the Highlands of Scotland, to settle there, and being desirous that they should have a Presbyterian minister to preach to them in Gaelic, and to teach and catechise the children in English, applied to the Society to grant a commission to such minister, who should likewise act as one of their missionaries for instructing the native Indians, and to allow him a salary for some years, until the colony should be able to maintain him at their own expence. These Trustees farther agreed to give to this missionary, and to his successors, in perpetuity, 300 acres of land. The Society accordingly granted a commission to Mr John Macleod, a native of the Isle of Sky, with a salary of L.

[29] *1774 Account*, 14.
[30] John Pudney, *John Wesley and his World* (London, 1978), 42.
[31] *Ibid.*, 43-54.
[32] Duane Meyer, *The Highland Scots of North Carolina 1732-1776* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1975 edn), 66-7; *Notes and Queries of the Society of West Highland and Island Historical Research*, xxiv (December 1984), 26.

50 Sterling. This mission was supported till the year 1740, when the greatest part of the inhabitants of the colony having been cut off, in an unhappy expedition against the Spaniards at St Augustine, Mr Macleod left Georgia."[33]

Unfortunately, there is no known record of how far John Macleod fulfilled his commission or to what extent he was able to minister to the Indians. The lack of adverse comment in SSPCK records suggests at least that the plan did not encounter any major cultural difficulties. It may have been comparatively successful if Highlanders interacted naturally with Indians. Beyond Georgia, it is noticeable that Highlanders were willing to settle among the Indians, and that this may have facilitated contact with the latter. The settlement of Gaelic speakers on the fringes of New England and in the Middle Colonies from the late 1730s certainly appears to have had a small but beneficial effect on Indian missionary work. Thus, when David Brainerd arrived at Kaunaumeek in 1743, he lodged initially with a Gaelic-speaking Highland family who had come to the area about two years previously and who lived some two miles from his station among the Indians. Brainerd noted that he could converse only with the "master" of the family.[34] In fact Brainerd complained further that he had "but one single person to converse with that can speak English. Most of the talk I hear is either Highland Scotch or Indian".[35] Such interaction of Indians and Gaelic-speaking Highlanders after 1735 may have helped the SSPCK to promote its missionary activity by providing toeholds in Indian territory, and ideally, it could have facilitated the further breaking down of some of the cultural palisades which had separated the English-speaking colonists from the indigenous "savages".

*Cultural Conflict and Language Use:*

The removal of these palisades was, however, an arduous task for the early missionaries in the field. The surviving correspondence of SSPCK missionaries to the Indians, chiefly to

[33] *1774 Account*, 14-15. This John Macleod is perhaps to be identified with the John Macleod who arrived, with a group of immigrants, in North Carolina about 1770; see Meyer, *Highland Scots*, 116.

[34] John Gillies, *Historical Collections Relating to Remarkable Periods of the Success of the Gospel* (Kelso, 1845), 467. Emigrants from Islay had settled in the New York colony in 1738, and further Highland emigrants came in the next two years; see Meyer, *Highland Scots*, 67. It is tempting to suppose that the "master" of the family known to Brainerd had acquired a knowledge of English through an SSPCK school in the Scottish Highlands.

[35] Sefton, "Scotch Society", 173. The "one single person" in this instance was Brainerd's interpreter.

their Boston and New York supervisors, shows initial reactions to Indian culture which can be matched easily in the Highland context. The fact that the SSPCK's first missionaries in the period 1730-40 refused to live with the Indians suggests that, like Cotton Mather, they were not at all sympathetic to Indian culture. In the period 1740-60, consciousness of cultural differentiation, if not confrontation, is still evident, but missionaries were prepared to take the risk of trying to live among the Indians. David Brainerd's accounts demonstrate that he was operating only with great difficulty in circumstances which were not unlike those facing the SSPCK in the Highlands. His comments show that one of the aims of missionary endeavour was to remove the differentiation between customary Indian lifestyles and that known to English-speaking settlers:

> "They are in general unspeakably indolent and slothful. They have been bred up in idleness and know little about cultivating the land, or indeed of engaging vigorously in any other business. . . . They have little or no ambition or resolution. Not one in a thousand of them has the spirit of a man, and it is next to impossible to make them sensible of the duty and importance of their being active, diligent and industrious. . . ."[36]

The goal of these missions was not only to bring salvation to the Indians, but also to direct them towards a whole new mode of living. Indians, like Highlanders, were then regarded by English speakers as uncivilised, indolent and treacherously inclined to insurrection. "When a people are idle or slothful", wrote the SSPCK about Highlanders (and not Indians!) in 1783, "we can hardly expect that any principles will render them virtuous or useful members of the state".[37] "Cultural conflict" of this kind was not, however, the invention of missionary societies. It is found much earlier than 1700; indeed, it occurs in the twelfth century in a Celtic context, in the writings of the Welshman, Geraldus Cambrensis, who visited Ireland and wrote disparagingly about the Irish.[38] The same perspectives are often attested in the observations and writings of "sophisticated" visitors and travellers who, for no religious reason, penetrate the territories of "primitive" peoples in subsequent centuries. Highland examples abound after 1600 and

[36] Quoted in Bowden, *American Indians*, 154.
[37] *A Summary Account of the Rise and Progress of the SSPCK* (Edinburgh, 1783), 49.
[38] Brynley F. Roberts, *Gerald of Wales* (Cardiff, 1982), 79-80.

especially after 1745.[39] Nevertheless, such sentiments were all too easily reflected in, and reinforced by, English-based missionary activity which emphasised the incompatibility of Christianity and "pre-contact" cultures and religions. Highlanders and Indians were therefore to be schooled out of their undesirable cultural inclinations. Even when individual missionaries showed care and concern for Indians, learned their languages and protected their immediate interests against colonial exploitation, the provision of schooling in English and the assimilation of Indians to an "industrious" English lifestyle remained high priorities.[40]

It needs to be noted, however, that Brainerd's comments are muted in tone compared with the confrontational rhetoric of the early eighteenth century. What is, indeed, distinctive about the SSPCK is that, even by 1740, it was ready and willing to act so purposefully in the Indian context. In North America, men like Cotton Mather in New England were prepared to talk about the Indians, and to stress, as Mather did, that the Massachusetts Bay colony had been established with a view to reaching the Indians with the Christian gospel. Did its coat of arms not carry the figure of an Indian with the words, "Come over and help us", engraved above him?[41] Nevertheless, Mather and others would also fulminate against the Indians and their Devil-inspired religion,[42] with the result that very few were prepared to take up the practical challenge of going to preach the gospel to these outlandish people. Protestant missions to the Indians on a concerted basis were extremely rare before 1740; the work of John Eliot among the Massachuset Indians before 1700, and of the Mayhews in Martha's Vineyard for several generations, reflect individual efforts.[43] Even such bodies as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, founded by the Anglican Church in 1701 with the specific aim of evangelising the North American Indians, tended to

[39] Thomas Pennant, visiting the Highlands in 1769, regarded Highlanders as "indolent to a high degree, unless roused to war, or to any animating amusement"; see *Beyond the Highland Line*, ed. A. J. Youngson (London, 1974), 153. A cursory reading of the journals of Highland missionaries suggests that, as the missionary movement became indigenised and more thoroughly evangelical after 1800, the perception of the Highlands as an area of barbarism and indolence was to some extent modified by a more benign "internalised" view which tended to stress spiritual rather than intellectual ignorance. The North American Indians, however, continued to bear the brunt of attempts to bring "civilisation" in the course of the nineteenth century; see Bowden, *American Indians*, 164ff.

[40] It is important to emphasise that missionaries were often concerned to protect Indians from some of the worst features of colonial suppression. However, this does not necessarily mean that they approved of their lifestyles and cultures; a type of paternalism, well-intentioned and seemingly altruistic, coexisted with a desire to integrate "primitive" peoples into a more "advanced" civilisation.

[41] Marty, *Pilgrims in their Own Land*, 110.

[42] Simmons, *Spirit of the New England Tribes*, 38.

[43] Bowden, *American Indians*, 96-133.

give them a wide berth and concentrate on the New England colonies.[44]

As the work of the SSPCK continued, there emerged a progressively more accommodating view of certain aspects of native cultures. In the Highlands, the society had to resign itself rather uncomfortably to the use of Gaelic, which gradually began to be employed in SSPCK schools.[45] A similar toleration of the use of Indian languages is apparent in its North American enterprises, especially in the third phase of its activities, after 1760. The learning of Indian languages was encouraged among potential missionaries:

> "As ignorance of the Indian language had always proved a great obstacle to the propagation of the gospel among the North-American Indians, the board of correspondents [at Boston] adopted a plan for the education of English and Indian youths; in consequence whereof three Indians were put to school [in 1762]: but many inconveniences, and particularly a great deal of expence, having been found to attend this scheme, it was dropped."[46]

It was part of the plan that a number of English-speaking youths should go to live among the Indians in order to acquire their languages, and the SSPCK underlined its desire to implement this scheme by petitioning the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland for financial support.[47] Indeed, such was its enthusiasm for the acquisition of Indian languages that it was prepared to extol the linguistic competence of the missionaries already placed among the Indians. There is some evidence that this step towards indigenisation was attracting Indian scholars to the school held by Samuel Kirkland. In 1774, the SSPCK described Kirkland as "a master of the languages of the Oneydas and Senecas, among whom, and the Tuscororas, he labours with the utmost assiduity and fervency". The Society went on:

> "His chief residence is among the Oneydas, at a great distance from an English settlement. Having lived long among them, he has acquired their entire esteem, affection and confidence. The Indian school under his care at Oneyda is in a flourishing state, and consists of 40 or 50 scholars. . . . They have lately built a church, a thing till now unheard of among savages. But these are not all the good effects of Mr Kirkland's ministry. The Indians among whom he resides, are

[44] *Ibid.*, 135-6.
[45] Withers, *Gaelic in Scotland*, 120-8.
[46] *1774 Account*, 16.
[47] *An Account of Some Late Attempts by the Correspondents of the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge to Christianize the North American Indians* (Edinburgh, 1763), 21.

> convinced of the necessity of quitting their former savage manner of life, and are becoming more civilized than any of their neighbours."[48]

In the district covered by the endeavours of John Brainerd, an even more interesting development had come about by the early 1770s:

> "Several attempts were made to get an English schoolmaster to live among them, and to teach their children; but these proved fruitless. An Indian schoolmaster was therefore established, who has met with considerable success."[49]

It is possible that the missions to the Indians were aided in those years by the less confrontational approach to Gaelic which had emerged in the SSPCK by the mid-century. On the other hand, the SSPCK's linguistic policy on both sides of the Atlantic may have been responding to the impulses of the large-scale and closely related spiritual movements known in America as the Great Awakening and in Britain as the Evangelical Revival. The emphasis on salvation which was central to these movements probably expedited the use of indigenous languages as the quickest means of spreading the Christian message among the largest number of people.[50] It is noteworthy that the SSPCK gave strong support to the work of the native-born Indian, Samson Occom, in the period after 1760.[51] In commending Occom to the SSPCK in September 1761, David Bostwick, a Presbyterian minister at New York, drew attention to his potential as an Indian missionary among the Oneydas:

> "He has met with a very favourable reception; perhaps the more so, on account of his being an Indian. . . . He has retained his mother-tongue, and can speak the language of his own tribe, (which is Mohegan) something better than he can the English. But the Oneyda language differs so much from the Mohegan, that he is obliged to use an interpreter for the present, tho' doubtless he would learn their language well in a little time, could he reside among them. He is married to an Indian woman, who is also esteemed truly pious, and has six children, with whom he would gladly dwell in that wilderness, if he could be supported as a Missionary, and very easily might his children be educated in that language."[52]

Occom was the first Red Indian minister to visit Britain, and his

[48] *1774 Account*, 17. The Oneydas and Senecas belonged to the Huron family of Indians, and were settled to the south of Lakes Erie and Ontario.
[49] *Ibid.*, 18.
[50] The effect of these movements on attitudes to indigenous languages and dialects would make an appropriate subject for further research.
[51] *1774 Account*, 16.
[52] *Account of Some Late Attempts*, 4.

labours attracted substantial financial backing, mainly for Wheelock's school, from British churches and the SSPCK. In supporting Occom, the SSPCK acted more expeditiously than any other religious body in the New World, and it is of some significance that Occom appeared before the General Assembly in Edinburgh in 1767, the same year as the Gaelic New Testament was published by the SSPCK.[53]

Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that Samson Occom, appearing before the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, cuts a lonely figure, and he was, in truth, exceptional even in the Indian context. Although he enjoyed a patriarchal status as a Christianised headman among his own tribal groups, he was virtually unique. Here we can see contrasts, rather than comparisons, between Scottish Highlanders and North American Indians. In the Highlands, the training of men for ministry in the Established Church, and the profusion of Gaelic religious literature which appeared in the second half of the eighteenth century, laid the foundation for the emergence of a religious movement which was linguistically indigenised. The completion of the translation of the Scottish Gaelic Bible, by means of the financial support of the SSPCK and the scholarship of ministers of the Established Church, reinforced this development.[54] In North America, by contrast, there were at this time few native Indians who could preach to the Indians themselves, and fewer still who could translate the Scriptures into the various Indian languages. The Indian missions produced no indigenous scholars of the stature of the Revds James and John Stuart, who were the principal translators of the Gaelic Bible (completed in 1801).[55] The best known Indian translation of the Bible, made for the Massachuset Indians in 1663, was the work of John Eliot, a Puritan minister from England. Written in the Massachuset dialect of Algonkian, it was severely restricted in its usefulness among the Indians, who had such a variety of languages and dialects that a single pan-Indian Bible was an impossibility.[56] The Gaelic Bible, on the other hand, came to be used throughout the Gaelic-speaking areas of the Highlands, in spite of some initial disquiet about its comprehensibility within certain dialect areas.[57]

[53] *1774 Account*, 16; D. MacKinnon, *The Gaelic Bible and Psalter* (Dingwall, 1930), 54. For Occom, see Bowden, *American Indians*, 141-4.

[54] D. E. Meek, "The Gaelic Bible", in *The Bible in Scottish Life and Literature*, ed. D. F. Wright (Edinburgh, 1988), 15-18.

[55] *Ibid.* It needs to be emphasised that the Stuarts were operating within a tradition of Gaelic literary activity which, in its Classical form, stretched back into the Middle Ages and produced a major protestant religious text, John Carswell's translation of Knox's *Book of Common Order*, in 1567. The North American Indians had no comparable literary (written) tradition.

[56] The popular view that the North American Indians *all* had a translation of the Bible before the Highlanders is therefore mistaken.

[57] MacKinnon, *Gaelic Bible*, 66-71.

The failure to establish an indigenised religious movement among the Indians is not, therefore, to be laid at the door of the SSPCK. The attempt came to naught for several reasons, besides cultural complexity. For one thing, there was no American denomination which held extensive sway in the Indian areas, and which was able to work alongside the SSPCK as had happened in the Highlands. For another, the colonial attitudes already in existence and fomented by the thrust into Indian territory ensured continuing distrust of, and conflict with, the Indians. Missionary endeavour sometimes came to grief when warfare broke out. The SSPCK records that when it "attempted to establish schools in the Indian settlements" in 1762, the "measure was attended with little effect" because of hostilities which had been "commenced by Indians on the borders of New England".[58] Such disharmony was by no means absent from the Highlands, but it existed on a much larger scale in North America. It is apparent in prejudice and ill feeling against the school-based movement developed by Wheelock and Kirkland. Soon after Samson Occom's visit to Edinburgh, Wheelock's school at Lebanon moved its location, and became part of Dartmouth College, New Hampshire. Samson Occom was dismayed to find that Wheelock was now teaching mainly white pupils. Wheelock had bowed to pressure; Occom, identifying with his native Indian context, continued alone, and even the tenacious Samuel Kirkland adjusted his methods to accommodate a type of educational provision less closely aligned with Indian culture.[59]

*Achievements and Failures:*

In spite of its failings and misconceptions, and the fragmented nature of its American enterprises, the overall importance of the SSPCK, in both the Highland and Indian contexts, is at least noteworthy. In the first place, it established the principle of having an ancillary society operating alongside a larger ecclesiastical structure. The consequences of this are more apparent in the Highland than in the North American context. The later missionary societies which came into the Highlands after 1786 used this same principle with respect to the SSPCK. Several bodies claimed that they were coming in to help the SSPCK, and their activities were thus legitimised.[60] In addition, some of its teachers and catechists were very influential men, and their example inspired others who were later to become prominent missionaries in the Highlands and

[58] *1774 Account*, 16.

[59] Kirkland's school, Oneyda Academy, eventually beeame Hamilton College (1810); see Bowden, *American Indians*, 143-4, 149-50.

[60] The Relief Chureh, for example, regarded its Highland missionaries as "fellow-labourers" with the SSPCK in the Highlands; see Niel Douglas, *Journal of a Mission to Part of the Highlands of Scotland in Summer and Harvest 1797* (Edinburgh, 1799), 173.

elsewhere. One of the most celebrated of its employees was the Gaelic poet, Dugald Buchanan of Kinloch-Rannoch in Perthshire. His hymns played a part in the conversion of Alexander Duff, and his itinerant ventures helped to shape the aspirations of John Campbell, who was later to reach South Africa.[61] In this way, the Highland thrust of the SSPCK laid a foundation on which later missionaries could build.

Also worthy of acknowledgement is the rôle of the SSPCK in developing models for dealing, by educational means, with a culture which was distinctively different from that of English. In the North American context it has the distinction of being the first protestant society to push its way decisively through the barrier separating English-speaking colonists from despised "natives" and their cultures. In its early years in the Highlands, and apparently in North America too, it subscribed to what might be termed the "aggressive displacement model" with regard to a "foreign" culture; by this model the native language was to be superseded forthwith by English. Latterly, it began to entertain, rather unwillingly, another approach which inclined towards the indigenous mother tongue ("the mother tongue model"). We have seen that this model was used by the SSPCK among the North American Indians after 1760, but even more significant is the fact that in 1774 the SSPCK was advocating a mission to Africa using two emancipated Negroes from Rhode Island, and noting proudly that they "speak their native language, the language of a numerous and powerful nation in Guinea".[62] The question of whether missionaries in "foreign" countries should use English or the native languages was of considerable importance in the subsequent development of missions, and approaches varied between the two that we have outlined.[63]

If we cannot claim that the SSPCK was a "missionary" body in the modern sense of the term, it undoubtedly has its small place in the pre-history of modern missions. The work of the SSPCK in the Highlands and North America stimulated the fresh approaches to foreign mission which were to emerge in Britain in the latter part of the eighteenth century. There is reason to believe that its influence was much greater than has been realised hitherto. The Reports of the SSPCK were probably widely read, and people who knew about David Brainerd could scarcely have been ignorant of the SSPCK. Certainly in Scotland, the work of the SSPCK in the

[61] Laird, *Missionaries and Education*, 201; Philip, *Life of John Campbell*, 40-3.
[62] *1774 Account*, 19.
[63] Alexander Duff's adherence to English as the language in which to educate high-caste Indian boys (in Calcutta) was based on his perception of what was appropriate to the Highlands, especially in producing university-trained scholars, and he appears to have followed the earlier SSPCK model; see Laird, *Missionaries and Education*, 208-9.

Highlands and North America was well known to those Evangelicals who tried to persuade the Established Church to set up a foreign mission in the mid-1790s.[64] Even more important for the history of modern missions is the fact that the enterprise of William Carey in India, beginning in 1793, owed much to the example of Brainerd.[65]

In the final analysis, however, it is apparent that the SSPCK made its strongest impression in the Scottish Highlands. David Brainerd stands out as an heroic figure in the North American and world-wide missionary movement. If it had not been for the SSPCK, of course, he may never have embarked on his career; but without Jonathan Edwards' edition of his journal, he would probably not have achieved so high a reputation. Under such circumstances, Samson Occom is perhaps the individual who best represents the real achievement of the society's North American enterprises; he is no more than a pale shadow of what might have been a thorough-going, indigenised approach to Indian cultures. The labours of the SSPCK were too small, too lacking in clear policy, too devoid of broader support, to be able to surmount the wider complexities of Indian missions. In the Highlands, where circumstances were more stable, the work of the SSPCK was pervasive beyond the labours of individuals. It laid a foundation, which, in spite of its treacherous weak spots, could be used by others. When new missionary bodies began to operate in the Highlands after 1780, they could reconstruct these weak spots, and build the walls in accordance with new designs which were emerging in this period. The most significant of these designs was the spiritual conversion of peoples who had not heard the gospel, or had heard it only inadequately. The emphasis had shifted from civilisation to salvation as the first priority, and at the same time the SSPCK began to lose favour with those who had been its practical supporters in Scotland.[66] By the end of the eighteenth century it was a spent force in missionary endeavour, having been overtaken by the new wave of missionary activity which, to some small degree, it had helped to stimulate.[67]

[64] See, for instance, Alexander Pringle, *Prayer for the Revival of Religion in All Protestant Churches* (Edinburgh, 1796), 23-4, where Brainerd and Kirkland are both mentioned.

[65] *Five Pioneer Missionaries*, ed. S. M. Houghton (Edinburgh, 1987 edn), 88-9.

[66] Gavin Whyte, "'Highly Preposterous': Origins of Scottish Missions", *RSCHS*, xix (1976), 118.

[67] The present article forms the main section of the lecture originally delivered to the Scottish Church History Society under the title, "The Seminal Significance of Missions to the Highlands in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries".