Thomas Barton’s Unanimity and Public Spirit (1755): Controversy and Plagiarism on the Pennsylvania Frontier

At a Time when Murder & Desolation crowded the aching Sight, & our poor back Settlers were daily forsaking their Habitations, & flying from the destroying Hands of barbarous Savages, . . . I intended to write for the Pulpit & not the Press [and] . . . borrowed, (or if you please, stole) such Extracts as were applicable to my Purpose.

—Thomas Barton

In October 1748, Anglicans living on Pennsylvania’s trans-Susquehanna frontier petitioned the London-based Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) for a resident missionary. Although the incumbent ministers of St. James’s Church in Lancaster had occasionally attended to their needs, the Episcopalian inhabitants of Huntington and Tyrone townships in western York (now Adams) County perceived with urgency the need to guarantee the survival of their religion against the twin threats of geographic isolation and doctrinal contamination from the dissenting sects who surrounded and greatly outnumbered them. “We Are in A Starving Condition for yᵉ Spiritual Nourishment, of our Souls,” they wrote, “nor can we Ever hear Divine Service without traveling Many Miles. . . . we Dread to think of our children being brought Up in Ignorance as to all Divine Knowledge

1 Thomas Barton to William Smith, Oct. 28, 1755, the Francis Lister Hawks Manuscript Collection, in the Records of the General Convention (hereafter, Hawks Col.), S, I, 19-6-58. The author expresses appreciation to the Archives of the Episcopal Church, U.S.A. (Austin, Texas), for permission to cite from this correspondence.

and [it] Cuts us to ye very harte, to See our poor Infants Dye without being Made Members of Christ, by Baptism.”

Not until almost seven years later was the society able to send them a resident missionary. In the spring of 1755, the Reverend Thomas Barton, newly ordained by the bishop of London, made his arduous way “over Susquehanna” to the settlements along York County’s Conewago and Bermudian Creeks. There he took charge of the Anglican believers scattered over an area stretching from Edward Shippen’s town in the west to York-town in the east, from Sherman’s Valley and Carlisle in the north to Marsh Creek in the south. Surviving evidence recording the speed and efficiency with which Barton came to reside among the Anglicans of the frontier suggests that he and at least some of his new parishioners may have known one another before the spring of 1755 and may even have agreed beforehand to his serving as their minister following his ordination.

Thomas Barton had been born ca. 1728 and raised in Carrickmacross, County Monaghan in the province of Ulster. After studying at Trinity College, Dublin, he emigrated about 1751 to Norriton Township, outside Philadelphia. There he taught school, making the acquaintance of David and Esther Rittenhouse. After moving to Philadelphia in 1752, he joined the faculty of the Reverend William Smith’s Academy (later College) of Philadelphia. In 1753 he married Esther Rittenhouse. The August following the birth of his first son, William, in April 1754, he sailed for London, where he received ordination as a minister of the Church of England and authorization as an itinerant missionary in the SPG. Immediately after his return to Philadelphia in April 1755, “the People of Huntington . . . came generously with their Wagons, & brought away my Effects.”

“About the latter End of May,” he and his young family moved to the Conewago settlement.

In many respects, his parishioners could hardly have obtained a more

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3 Ibid.


5 Thomas Barton to the secretary, Nov. 8, 1756, SPG, Letters, 21:1.
suitable itinerant. An immigrant, like many of them, from Ulster, a former school teacher, a naturalist with a special attraction to botany and mineralogy, and a militant defender of the king and their Protestant faith, Barton became their fierce advocate as well as their minister. More significantly for them, and for us as well, he employed his considerable literary and rhetorical energy in their cause, leaving a rich legacy of letters, reports, and pamphlets that open a unique window into the lives of those who dwelt within the shadow of the frontier's edge during the years 1755-59.

Among the most important of those early writings, his November 8, 1756, official report, or *notitia parochialis*, to the SPG records the excitement, enthusiasm, and optimism with which he initiated his ministry. Within a matter of months, however, his expectations were suddenly dashed, a reversal he poignantly describes in the same letter:

> Just when I was big with the Hopes of being able to do Service . . . we receiv'd the melancholy News, that our Forces under the Command of General Braddock, were defeated . . . . This was soon succeeded by an Alienation of the Indians in our Interest:— And from that Day to this, poor Pennsylvania has felt incessantly the sad Effects of Popish Tyranny, & Savage Cruelty!—A great Part of five of her Counties have been depopulated & laid waste; & some Hundreds of her sturdiest Sons either murder'd, or carried into barbarous Captivity!

Daily, he witnessed the sufferings of a people who, having abandoned their homesteads, now fled eastward,

> groaning under a Burden of Calamities; some having lost their Husbands, some their Wives, some their Children,— And all, the Labour of many Years! In this Condition (my Heart bleeds in relating what I am an Eye Witness to) they now wander about, without Bread of their own to eat, or a House to shelter themselves in from the Inclemency of the approaching Winter!

Both religious leader of his people and de facto representative of the Penn proprietary, Barton lost no time meeting the emergency. As we

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6 Ethnically, the Anglicans of Barton's congregations in Carlisle and, especially, Huntington Township were predominantly Anglo-Irish and Scots-Irish and thus complemented the great numbers of Scots-Irish Presbyterians and Anglo-Irish Quakers also settled in the area.

7 Thomas Barton to the Secretary, Nov. 8, 1756, SPG, Letters, 21:1.

8 Ibid., 9.
shall see, he organized his parishioners into working parties to improve the fortifications at Carlisle and into a militia that might effectively defend against war parties. He also responded in a way more consonant with his sacred vocation. In August 1755, he delivered a sermon entitled *Unanimity and Public Spirit* in which he exhorted all the people of the frontier, Church of Englanders as well as Dissenters, to set aside their factional bickering and unite against their common foe. So popular was it, he wrote to friend and colleague William Smith, that “Many who heard it, importun’d me . . . to make it publick.”\(^9\) Securing a prefatory endorsement by Smith, one of the colony’s leading intellectual lights, Barton saw it through the press in September 1755.\(^10\)

If Barton is to be credited, his sermon contributed to stabilizing the frontier and inspiring most of those living in Cumberland and York counties to resist the frequent incursions of Delaware and Shawnee war parties. Writing to Smith, for example, Barton stressed that “When I preach’d this Sermon, it had a good Effect upon All that heard it. . . . were it not for the Pains I took, few Inhabitants would have remain’d in these Parts. This, Sir, is not boasting. Hundreds can testify it.”\(^11\)

Although he was more concerned with advancing his own cause, Smith himself implicitly acknowledged in a letter to the archbishop of Canterbury the sermon’s value when he enclosed it along with a copy of his own prefatory letter defending and commending Barton’s militant role: “This Letter was soon after published & dispersed by the rev’d Mr Barton, together with a Sermon of his suited to the Times. . . . It [Smith’s letter] had a good Effect.”\(^12\)

The recent rediscovery of a long-overlooked epistolary exchange between the two clerics, however, reveals that Barton’s zeal to meet the crisis inspired him beyond simply marshalling his people against their foe and publishing an exhortation for unity and public service: in writing his sermon, he plagiarized another, apparently fairly well-known tract written ten years earlier and then convinced the apparently unsuspecting

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\(^10\) It was published by Franklin and Hall, Philadelphia.


Smith to introduce the soon-to-be-published sermon with an elaborate endorsement. That Barton’s career and friendship with Smith survived the scandal following the exposure of his plagiarism raises several significant questions concerning not only Barton’s identity as an Anglican itinerant missionary, but also his tacit role as a mid-level agent of the Penn proprietary. Soon after Barton’s exposure, why did William Smith, angry and personally injured, nonetheless defend Barton? Why did Smith and, apparently, Provincial Secretary Richard Peters participate in suppressing the evidence and rumors pertinent to Barton’s plagiarism? Why did Thomas Penn (who must surely have known of Barton’s transgression) continue to support and reward the Anglo-Irish cleric, even forging a friendship with him beyond the bounds of the conventional patron-client relationship? And more broadly, what do Barton’s plagiarism, its publication, and its successful concealment imply about the roles of proprietary placemen during the turbulent period following Braddock’s defeat? The discussion that follows seeks to explore these issues. Before actually doing so, however, it examines a more fundamental question: what circumstances motivated the Reverend Thomas Barton essentially to pilfer a popular sermon and then boldly publish it under his own name?

In the months following the rout of Maj. Gen. Edward Braddock’s army on July 9, 1755, Pennsylvania’s western frontier collapsed. The new trans-Susquehanna counties of Cumberland and York, which for a hand’s-count of years had been staging points for those venturing into and over the barrier ridges of the Alleghenies, became a marchland of gutted cabins, smoking fields, and massacred or fleeing settlers. Backed by the Susquehanna and buttressed by a flimsy string of makeshift fortifications centered on Carlisle, the settlements of Sherman’s Valley, Cove Valley, Conococheague Creek, and even Marsh Creek etched in blood the de facto extremity of the province’s western border.

As is well known, the crisis in western York and what remained of Cumberland counties was exacerbated by the provincial government’s inability to respond decisively to the emergency; the pacifistic, Quaker-dominated Assembly would not initially vote the funds needed to purchase munitions and raise an army. Even while Shawnee and Delaware war

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13 For useful discussions of this background, see Ralph L. Ketcham, “Conscience, War and Politics in Pennsylvania, 1755-1757,” William and Mary Quarterly (hereafter, WMQ) 20 (1963),
parties attacked, and those back-settlers resolved not to abandon their holdings and flee over the Susquehanna, the bickering government and especially the legislature appeared to abandon the men and women of the frontier to whatever fate might overtake them. Quite naturally, the despairing settlers looked for relief from their own local leaders, secular and religious. Responding to the military threat and the near-hysteria of their communities, such figures as surveyor and land-agent John Armstrong, ferry-owner John Harris, and farmer Hans Hamilton commenced organizing their people and channeling the collective anxieties into positive action.

The borderers naturally relied as well on their religious leaders, and in this they were not disappointed. Largely Scots-Irish Presbyterians from Ulster, the people of the frontier had inherited well-tested strategies to meet the threats of what they perceived as a rapacious landowning class of Anglo-Irish and a human sea of vindictive, dispossessed native Irish. Yeomanry, vigilantes, nightriders, often sanctioned by a clergy acclaimed for its militancy—these were part of the ethnic legacy the Scots-Irish had carried on their exodus from religious- and faction-divided Ulster. It was altogether natural, therefore, when the Reverend John Steel of Hill Church, near present-day Mercersburg, fortified his log church and rallied his congregation into militia, or that he should be followed in this response by his colleague the Reverend Andrew Bay of the Lower Marsh Creek settlement near today's Gettysburg.14

The Anglicans, too, notwithstanding their smaller numbers, turned to their incumbent, the recently arrived Rev. Thomas Barton. Following the lead of Steel and Bay, Barton set out to inspire his congregations. His log churches in Carlisle and Huntington Township became rallying points during times of danger. Day and night, at his little plantation south of Mud Run in Reading Township, he succored his fearful people. Writing from Huntington Township to the Reverend Richard Peters,

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friend, Anglican minister, and secretary of the province, Barton described the new martial role fate had thrust upon him:

I was oblig'd more than once to call together the Inhabitants to meet in a Body at my House, in Order to encourage them under their present fearful Apprehensions. Some skulking Indians which were seen to pass towards the South-Mountains, have rais’d such Commotions among them, that they are ready to quit their Habitations, & flee to preserve their Lives. . . . what a poor, defenceless Situation this is. Not a Man in Ten is able to purchase a Gun.— Not a House in Twenty has a Door with either Lock or Bolt to it. So that a very small number of Indians might totally destroy the whole Inhabitants (in their present Circumstances) without the least Opposition.  

Additionally, Barton gathered his parishioners into parties for working on the fortifications at Carlisle, and he rallied, drilled, and led them as militia. The Pennsylvania state archives and letters to the SPG preserve the extensive record of Thomas Barton’s martial leadership. Not so well-known, however, is the part he played in the political war informally carried on by the Penn proprietary and the scandal he precipitated, in all of its strange permutations.

There is nothing in Barton’s extant writings to suggest that he experienced qualms about shouldering his musket along with his Irish-born, albeit Presbyterian, colleagues and guiding his predominantly Irish-born congregations in making their stand. The Pennsylvania marchland, as suggested, resembled in several ways the turbulent, unsettled Ulster from which they had emigrated. In both locales, the small but powerful Anglo-Irish ascendancy class and the numerically greater and largely disenfranchised Scots-Irish collided over religious, ethnic, and social differences. In both places, the two groups, which had come as colonists, had evolved strategies for dispossessing the original inhabitants—Irish or Native American—of their land and for defending and protecting themselves against the guerrilla tactics employed to punish, if not drive, the invaders  

15 Barton’s small plantation is situated south of Mud Run, Reading Township, in present-day Adams County. The glebe lands adjoining Christ’s Church in Huntington Township had not yet been cleared.

out. All the Hibernian groups—Scots-Irish, Anglo-Irish, and "mere" or pure Irish—had thus already acquired considerable experience in defending their own. In Pennsylvania a minister acting in any way but in strict conformity to traditional conceptions of his sacred role, however, often invited scorn and abuse from other groups, particularly from the pacifist factions. Although the latter might condescendingly dismiss the expected militancy in a Presbyterian cleric, they eagerly exploited such deviations in decorum to embarrass their powerful rivals in the Church of England, which was allied to the proprietary. Rebutting such criticism, two of Barton's Anglican, but non-Irish, colleagues in Philadelphia championed and explained his new role.

The English-born provincial secretary, Rev. Richard Peters, in a letter possibly to Thomas Penn, praised Barton's military leadership, stressing that his martial stance, far from undermining his religiosity, actually augmented it:

Mr Barton in a more particular manner deserves the commendations of all lovers of the Country, for he has since November last put himself at the head of his Congregations and Marched by Night or by Day on every Alarm. Had others imitated his Example Cumberland would not have wanted Men enough to defend it, nor has he done anything in the Military way but what has increased his Character for Piety and that of a sincerely Religious Man and Zealous Minister. In short, Sir, he is a most worthy, active and serviceable Pastor and Missionary, and as such please mention him to the Society.

From the hand of one of the province's most powerful men, Peters's commendation trenchantly underscores Barton's value to the proprietary. It also reveals to us, as does the Reverend Peters's own example, how closely allied the interests of the Church of England and the proprietary were.

The Anglo-Scot William Smith undertook a more elaborate justification. The provost of the College of Philadelphia wrote to the bishop of Oxford in 1756 that "poor Mr. Barton" has withstood the dangers on the frontier "upwards of a Year at the Risk of his Life, like a good

18 Richard Peters to Thomas Penn [?], Sept. 16, 1756, Penn Papers, Official Correspondence, 4:36, HSP.
Soldier of Jesus Christ, sometimes heading his People in the character of a Clergyman, and sometimes in that of a Captain, being often obliged, when they should go to Church, to gird on their Swords and go against the Enemy.”

Smith’s testimonial is consistent with the defense he published prefacing Barton’s sermon the previous year; to Smith, Barton was one those preachers “who are placed as Watchmen on the Walls of our HOLY ZION, to cry aloud and spare not on the Approach of every Thing that can hurt or make us afraid.” Smith, himself frequently attacked for being meddlesome and all-too worldly, defined in another letter the quandary SPG missionaries such as Barton and himself often found themselves in:

If we exhort to a manly Defence of our inestimable Liberty, we are said to be Dabblers in Politics, & not Ministers of the meek and blessed Jesus. [The Quakers] are afraid of seeing a Spirit of Virtue and Freedom raised among the People, which would spurn those Quietest & non-resisting Principles which at present sway the Government of this Province.

Inspired by his “Conscience, & Charity to our poor suffering back-Inhabitants,” Smith refused to be cowed by pacifist scruples. Instead, he “wrote to the Missionaries on the Frontiers . . . exhorting them to make a noble Stand for Liberty.” Smith also implied to the archbishop of Canterbury that he had inspired Barton to adopt the martial attitude so controversial among their detractors. He intimates as well that his letter influenced Barton to write his 1755 sermon urging unity and public spiritedness: the former “was soon after published & dispersed by the rev'd M' Barton, together with a Sermon of his suited to the Times.”

Here and elsewhere Smith maintains that his initial letter, which suppos-

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19 William Smith to the bishop of Oxford [Nov. 1, 1756], in Perry, Historical Collections, 2:556.
21 Albert Frank Gegenheimer, William Smith: Educator and Churchman, 1727-1803 (Philadelphia, 1943), 127-36, details Smith’s controversial career during these years.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 See also William Smith to the bishop of Oxford [Nov. 1, 1756], Perry, Historical Collections, 2:556.
edly inspired Barton, was duly published with Barton’s sermon; yet the printed letter, because it also comments on Barton’s sermon, is actually a later, expanded version of the original.26

That Barton published the sermon had apparently little to do with his original motives. He simply wrote his appeal, he explains in own his preface, in order to contribute his “best Endeavours towards the Support of our common Protestant Cause, according to the Duties of my Station, in this Time of public Danger.”27 Repeated requests, especially from his distinguished friend the Reverend Mr. William Smith, however, finally persuaded him to commit it to the press and thereby to a far greater audience than he had originally envisioned. Before he agreed to its publication, Barton prevailed upon Smith to introduce it with something from his own pen. In the event, Smith provided an augmented version of his earlier exhortatory missive to Barton in order to introduce the sermon to a larger and more scattered readership, especially to those Philadelphians who might not appreciate fully the trials and dangers that had inspired Barton’s appeal. Because it is prefatory and introductory to Unanimity, it might be useful to consider it before examining Barton’s sermon.

Reflective of a man who, with all his faults, must be ranked as one of the eighteenth century’s foremost educators,28 Smith’s epistle elaborates its thesis with far greater sophistication and skill than the sermon it introduces and rivals in length. Smith begins by stating his reservations concerning Barton’s “Want of Method,” which has resulted in a somewhat loosely organized piece: “the Parts are not strictly arranged [;] you have fallen,” the rhetorician chastizes Barton, “into several Repetitions.”29 Conceding the character of Barton’s special audience and the imminent danger to which the missionary spoke, Smith himself prefers the “Art of making one Part rise gracefully out of another.”30 Accordingly, he subtly transforms what begins as an apology for and reassurance to Barton into a thinly veiled attack upon those political factions which naively

29 *Unanimity and Public Spirit*, v.
30 Ibid.
carry on as though the human race still inhabited an unfallen world. First, he confronts already voiced objections to the paradox of “a Minister professing the Doctrine of the meek and blessed JESUS. . . . blowing the Trumpet of War, and declaiming against Popery.” He then constructs his rebuttal toward its resonant conclusion by insisting that people be realistically governed for the mixture of good and ill that they are. We no longer live in an Eden “where the Rose bloomed without its Thorn; and, till we are admitted into the KINGDOM OF UNIVERSAL RIGHTEOUSNESS, we must not look for the Blessings of Peace, entirely free from the Miseries of War.” National sins beget “national Chastisements.” Indeed, he affirms that

it behoves those who are placed as Watchmen on the Walls of our HOLY ZION, to cry aloud and spare not on the Approach of every Thing that can hurt or make us afraid, either in our civil or religious Capacity; surely no Warmth can be unseasonable at a Time when all that we account dear or sacred is threatened with one indiscriminate Ruin.

His rhetorical fire now burning white, Smith casts aside the last vestiges of reserve. In this public forum, he does not refer to his Quaker readers directly, but he patently attempts to refute their principles. He reminds Barton’s critics of the great distance, spatial and moral, separating their city from that western landscape haunted daily and nightly by unimaginable horrors, an infernal marchland where panicked back-settlers flee their habitations and the mutilated corpses of their loved ones. How, he asks, can anyone “be silent to avoid the Imputation of being thought too warm?” “Shall we expose ourselves to worse than Persecution,” he continues, layering rhetorical question upon question, “for Fear of stirring up a Persecution of others?”

Barton’s unseemly meddling in public affairs, his call for unity, and his martial valor—the actions the pacifists excoriated—are thus not only defensible but virtually obligatory, morally necessary. “Most certainly, my Friend,” he assures his colleague, “all this may be done; and I think it has been clearly shewn that all this ought to be done by every Minister,

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31 Ibid., vi.
32 Ibid., xiii.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., xiv.
and more especially those of our national Church, which is the great Bulwark of the Protestant Interest."  

With this, Smith launches into an impassioned, sustained apology for the Episcopal church as the sword and buckler of civil authority, an argument that Barton in his more ecumenical appeal had avoided and that the Quakers must have received as sobering confirmation of their worst forebodings of Anglican tyranny. Although it occurs near the conclusion of his epistle, we suspect it was one of Smith’s principal motives for writing, a corrective to Barton’s omission. Indeed, it builds upon Smith’s earlier premise that a “CHIEF RULER” administers law and superintends the “public Weal”:

The Priesthood rests on the same Foundation with Society itself, and takes its Rise from the Necessity of human Affairs, which requires some Institution for assisting the Busy, rousing the Indolent, and informing ALL. Without this, every other Institution for the Good of Mankind would be but of little Avail; and there never was a Society of any Kind, which did not find it necessary, under some Name or another, to appoint certain Persons, whose particular Business it might be, to study and explain what was conceived to be the great Interests of that Society.  

The priestly calling justified in secular terms, Smith can then lecture—gently, of course—the inexperienced Barton on how best to execute his very special role:

If we exert ourselves manfully in such a Cause, who knows, but at last, thro’ Almighty Grace, a Flame may be kindled which shall not only exalt the meanest Bosom among us, equal to the foremost of our Neighbours; but which shall also burn and catch and spread, like a wide Conflagration, till it has illumined every Part of this immense Continent, with the sublime Spirit of TRUTH AND FREEDOM?  

While Thomas Barton’s impassioned exhortation was well tailored to the perilous challenges in Cumberland and York, it required this vision of someone distant from the immediate danger addressing a larger readership to bring the sermon’s martial resonance into a more broadly persuasive perspective. Although he does not fully seize the Quaker bull by its

35 Ibid., xiv-xv.  
36 Ibid., ix.  
37 Ibid., xvi.
theologically blunted horns, William Smith's prefatory letter justifies his colleague's religious militancy in order to lay bare the great threat which he and the Anglican proprietary perceived imperiling the colony's survival. As detrimental as Barton's "Race of Priests, and Monks, and Inquisitors, and other Tools of a foreign Yoke" might have been, Smith attacked the political impotency and ethical dubiousness of a policy founded simplistically and unrealistically upon the pacifism of the Quakers and some other sects.

Barton's sermon is in many ways a noteworthy effort. Not only does it eloquently and resonantly exhort his congregations to the defense of "our pure Protestant Faith, our equitable Laws, and our sacred Liberties, . . . When such a dark and dismal Cloud hangs over our Heads," but it also trenchantly exposes a major weakness in the fabric of Pennsylvania's frontier life—its disabling factionalism. Although it is sometimes maintained that the Paxton disturbances of 1763-64 first signaled how factionalism, along with a seeming legislative indifference to the French-Indian threat, was eroding the frontiers's fragile security, Barton's sermon, coupled with its prefatory epistle by William Smith, clearly identified both problems as early as 1755.

Barton took for his principal theme the passage from 1 Corinthians in which Paul pleaded "that there be no Divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same Mind, and in the same Judgment." What Barton calls unanimity is the fountainhead of those benefits nurturing the flourishing commonwealth—justice, honesty, truth, and those other "humane and generous Affections, all the soft and endearing Actions, which alone can render Man useful and sociable to Man!" Each day offers up, he elaborates, ample proof of the "pernicious Consequences of Divisions and civil Discord," evidence that he urgently summarizes in all of its horror and fear. But far worse than their everyday misery will be their future torments should the inhabitants of the back country fail to withstand the enemy and thus be "obliged to exchange our holy

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38 Ibid., 10
39 Ibid., 4
41 Unanimity and Public Spirit, 6
42 Ibid., 7
Protestant Religion for Popish Error and Delusion" which will "hold our Souls and Bodies in miserable Bondage!" After he vividly catalogues present sufferings and the even more harrowing outrages to come should the settlers suffer defeat, he appeals to all his readers—"MEMBERS of the CHURCH of ENGLAND, and PROTESTANT DISSENTERS of all Denominations"—to "lay aside every idle Division and Distinction, and be heartily united for the future in the same Mind, and the same Judgment" that Paul had celebrated.

When the threat had appreciably moderated a year later, Barton wrote out his first official report, or notitia parochialis, to his superiors in the SPG. Along with a general description of his missionary activities in his new home, Barton acknowledged receiving a copy of the recently published Instructions from the Society, for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, to Their Missionaries in North-America (London, 1756). In several respects the charge to the missionaries conforms so closely to what Barton had already been about on the frontier that reports of his successful undertakings probably influenced the formulation of those instructions. One of these, the third, reflects almost perfectly the spiritual, hortatory, and military leadership he had provided: "In order to prevent . . . dreadful Calamities, . . . exhort the People to employ, with a true Christian Zeal and Courage, those Means of Defence and Opposition, with which Divine Providence has intrusted them, for the Preservation of themselves, their Families, and their Country; and for the just Punishment of wicked and barbarous Aggressors." This is a transparent injunction to respond with exactly the action Barton had performed in writing and then publishing his sermon. In addition, the Society enjoined its missionaries to oppose forcefully the pacifism that attracts violence and brings wars upon the inhabitants of a province or country:

43 Ibid, 9-10
44 Ibid, 13-14
45 Barton to the secretary, Nov 8, 1756, SPG Letters, 211, Perry, Historical Collections, 2:275-81, also reproduces the report
46 Barton wrote "I received lately the Society's Instructions to their Missionaries in North America which are very seasonable and justly adopted to our present circumstances, and if duly observed and properly enforced, may do infinite service to our bleeding Country," Perry, Historical Collections, 2:279
47 Instructions from the Society, for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, to Their Missionaries in North America (London, 1756), 4-5
In the Spirit of *Meekness instructing those that oppose themselves*, . . . represent, with all due Force, that the Neglect of this natural and *now* necessary Duty of Defence, is nothing less than inviting and encouraging brutal Murderers to shed innocent Blood, and commit the most atrocious Outrages. . . . all, who omit this important Branch of their Duty, become Accessaries and Partakers of the Guilt of Murder, by wilfully delivering up honest, innocent, quiet Subjects, with their whole Country, to the Fury of our avowed Enemy, or the unrelenting Violence of single Assassins, or of associated rapacious Murderers.  

Although Barton might have been executing informal SPG policy in 1755, this official document published less than a year after the printing of *Unanimity and Public Spirit* tacitly and perfectly reflects and ratifies the motives that inspired him. Consequently, it is at first puzzling that he never details his military actions at this time nor acknowledges in any of his extant official reports the writing and publishing of his sermon.  

His official reports were intended in part to provide his superiors with information they needed to evaluate and reward him. If he were to obtain the favor essential to his advancement, he needed in effect to boast. Additionally, all of Barton’s correspondence shows him to have been a man who enjoyed writing about himself and explaining his actions. The closest he comes to revealing his recently deployed martial character occurs when he acknowledges that his “Churches, are Churches militant indeed” and describes his pleasure “every Sunday” in beholding his “people crowding with their Muskets on their Shoulders; declaring that they will dye Protestants & Freemen, sooner than live Idolaters & Slaves.”  

Of his publication he says not a word. His silence is perplexing; it invites speculation.  

Correspondence found recently among the William Smith papers in the archives of the Episcopal Church in Austin, Texas, discloses an explanation for his reticence. Barton plagiarized an earlier sermon when

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48 Ibid., 5.
49 He does speak of his military activities elsewhere, however; see, for example, Barton to Richard Peters, April 11, 1758, *Pa. Arch.*, 1st ser., 3:377.
50 Barton to the secretary, Nov. 8, 1756, SPG, Letters, 21: 1.
writing his appeal for unanimity.\textsuperscript{51} In a letter of October 9, 1755, Smith demanded of Barton "by next post without Evasion a Categoric Answer" to five questions. These center on the latter's knowledge of "a Sermon preached by M'r Roberts to the dissenting Congregation at Salisbury in the late Rebellion" and, more importantly, on Barton's abuse of his friendship with Smith.\textsuperscript{52}

After an impassioned opening outburst, the Philadelphian detailed how he came to discover Barton's misdeed. Upon hearing rumors of Barton's literary theft, he set out one day to vindicate his friend's reputation in the "Coffee house" where his detractors were busily comparing the two sermons page by page. Unhappily, the evidence compelled Smith to acknowledge the plagiarism: "great was the Power of Truth." And great must have been Smith's sense of injury and outrage. In his eyes Barton, appealing to their friendship, had persuaded him to introduce—without his knowledge, of course—a piece of shameless plagiarism. His personal reputation as a scholar was thus called into question. In the perception of their detractors, either he condoned Barton's theft or he had ignorantly failed to recognize a fairly popular work.\textsuperscript{53} Feeling used and betrayed, Smith nonetheless promised to do what he could to suppress the gossip and to "strive to prevent any ill-natured Exposure of you in the Prints." In this, he succeeded well.

Smith's remarks obliquely intimate that he suspected Barton had written out of profound naivete and tactlessness—the latter had not even eliminated details from Roberts's original that had become anachronistic, irrelevancies that the puzzled Smith had deleted when he edited Barton's manuscript for publication. For example, he had found such references as the "Tool of France," i.e., the Pretender, to denote "no Meaning here." Smith's incredulity was total: "Could you think it possible that a Sermon so famous among Dissenters as Roberts's was not in the Hands of many here?" And indeed, a comparison of Barton's \textit{Unanimity} with

\textsuperscript{51} See note 1. The correspondence in the Hawks Collection is catalogued as follows: (1) Barton to Smith, S, I, 14-6-53/15-6-54/16-6-55/18-6-57/19-6-58; S, III, 51-67-25; and (2) Smith to Barton, S, I, 17-6-56. These are apparently the letters William S. Perry laconically refers to in a note in his \textit{Historical Collections} (2:567) as being concerned with Barton's published sermon; he fails to comment on their significance.

\textsuperscript{52} Smith to Barton, Oct. 9, 1755, Hawks Col., S, I, 17-6-56.

\textsuperscript{53} Roberts's sermon, apparently popular enough to justify at least six editions in 1745, was published in Dublin and Belfast as well as London.
Samuel Roberts’s *Love to Our Country, and Zeal for Its Interest* . . . *Preach’d to a Congregation of Protestant Dissenters at Salisbury on Sunday, October 6, 1745* . . . reveals such wholesale and undisguised theft from the earlier tract that Smith’s disbelief almost strikes us as understated.

Generally, Barton’s contribution to the exhortation consisted of an introduction and a conclusion to Roberts’s sermon. *Love to Our Country* had been inspired by similar circumstances during the Great Rebellion of 1745, but it needed to be adapted to the present emergency. In addition to refocusing it, Barton shifted some paragraphs about, improved Roberts’s style, deleted some of the more glaring anachronisms and irrelevancies, although, as we have seen, it remained for Smith to identify and remove still others. In other respects, he simply lifted whole paragraphs from Roberts. Indeed, it might be accurate to say that Barton essentially updated *Love to Our Country* by providing it with a new frame. The following comparison typically illustrates how closely Barton followed his original:

There is no person here, I imagine, but who will easily conceive to what End these Reflections are directed, and to what Purpose they naturally lead. The present Circumstances of this Nation, threatened [sic] with Evils of the most formidable Kind, and alarmed with Apprehensions of the most horrible Danger, necessarily call upon us to quicken the Ardor of public Spirit, to stir up every latent Spark of Love for Liberty, and mutually to receive and spread the glorious Flame of Zeal for the common Cause, which at the same time that it warms only and enlivens ourselves, will effectually scorch and consume our Enemies.


There is no Person here, I imagine, who does not easily conceive to what End these Reflections are directed, and to what Purpose they naturally lead. The present Circumstances of this Province, threatened with Evils of the most alarming Nature, necessarily call upon us to quicken the Ardor of public Spirit; to stir up every latent Spark of Love for Liberty; and mutually to catch and spread the glorious Flame of Zeal for the common Cause, which, at the same Time that it warms only and enlivens ourselves, will effectually scorch and consume the Disturbers of our Peace.

To his credit, Barton replied to Smith's queries without delay, albeit lamely. In all of his rationalizations, it becomes clear that he was inspired by little beyond the frontier's wildfire of fear and anguish. Fame, reward, advancement—these had no meaning to one who had witnessed the suffering in Carlisle and Huntington. If he sinned, it was not in the cause of personal gain. Those who criticized his thefts, he explained, simply ignored the impending catastrophe:

At a Time when Murder & Desolation crowded the aching Sight, & our poor back Settlers were daily forsaking their Habitations, & flying from the destroying Hands of barbarous Savages;—I thought it no Crime, in a Protestant Country, to stand up in Defence of a Protestant Cause; and beseech them “with one Mind & one Judgment,” to guard against Popery & popish Tyrants. . . . I borrow'd, (or if you please, stole) such Extracts as were applicable to my Purpose.—In all this I could not imagine there was any Crime.

Barton's response to Smith is crucial to appreciating his guilelessness and the degree to which he regarded his use of Roberts as something transcending issues of honesty. After he tries to excuse his theft, as we have seen, on the grounds of its relative inconsequence when appreciated within the context of the crisis that inspired it, he reminds Smith that he, Barton himself, had earlier objected to publishing it. Originally, he had intended it only for the ears of his congregations. In a conversation the two had had in York, he had forthrightly acknowledged the sermon's two principal defects: "ill Nature was predominant . . . [and] many Thoughts in it were borrow'd." He recalled to his friend that he, Smith, first promised to "prevent" criticism of its rhetorical inelegancies and then dismissed Barton's second reservation by insisting that "there was no such Thing in the World as new Thoughts." Even after Smith had rather glibly set aside Barton's half-hearted confession of his debt to others, Barton considered "throwing away Roberts's Part"—although we must conclude that that would have left a very abbreviated sermon indeed. To have done so, however, would have disappointed those who

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57 Ibid.
had requested that he publish exactly "that very one they [had] heard me preach. . . . From this Dilemma, I freed myself, chusing rather to venture it as it was, than not Oblige my People, & shew my Concern for my injur'd King & Country."

Following their discussion in York, Barton sent Smith a copy of the sermon on August 15. His cover letter shows that he still had reservations about setting it before a larger audience. As earlier, he tries to shift at least part of the decision for publishing it to Smith's scholarly and critical judgment. "I submit it entirely to your Direction," he wrote, "to suppress, or publish it, at your Discretion." He offers Smith another opportunity to delete any potentially offensive or inappropriate material when he requests a testimonial from Smith's hand: "If you think it worth an Impression; I must beg the Favor of you to add Something in Behalf of it: And whatever Corrections, or Amendments you shall be good enough to make, I shall thankfully acknowledge; And without such I should never venture to send it to the Press."

Unanimity and Public Spirit was printed by Franklin and Hall in September 1755, to be sold for nine pence. Immediately, it seems to have produced the intended effect of galvanizing the collective will of the frontiersmen. Left to their own devices, the inhabitants of the back counties united to meet successfully the threats that daily imperiled their lives. Barton's insistence on his pamphlet's salutary effect carries with it the ring of truth: "When I preach'd this Sermon, it had a good Effect upon all that heard it. . . . were it not for the Pains I took, few Inhabitants would have remain'd in these Parts. This, Sir, is not boasting. Hundreds can testify it."

In other respects, the discovery of the plagiarism threatened to undermine the proprietary's and the church's twin efforts to discredit Quaker opposition to the war and to mount a counteroffensive during the bleak months following Braddock's defeat. Barton's opening paragraph in the October 28 letter reveals his appreciation of the negative impact: "I am equally surprized & sorry that the Interest of the Church, my Character, & your Engagement should be in Danger of suffering, by Means which might be thought insufficient to disturb any one of them."

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58 Barton to William Smith, Aug. 15, 1755, Hawks Col., S, I, 14-6-53.
59 The publication was advertised in Franklin's Pennsylvania Gazette, Sept. 25, 1755, and Oct. 2, 1755.
The plagiarism also spawned rumors that tarnished Barton’s career and fed his uncommonly profound insecurity. Throughout his life, gossip-mongers targeted Barton, and he even occasionally suspected evildoers when apparently none was active; but in 1755 some of the charges at least were genuine enough. Barton informed Smith that on October 18 he had “receiv’d a scurrilous, & anonymous Letter much upon the Subject of robbing Mr. Roberts &c.” Of greater concern, he continues, were charges by the “uncharitable Author” that he, Barton, despised “the Dissenters,” an accusation patently designed “to make me odious in these Parts, where the Dissenters are many. And indeed the Propagation of such a Falsehood would have that Effect.”

Apparantly, this assault on Barton’s character contributed significantly to his distress, for we find the missionary’s self-control capitulating under the rumor campaign: “I am threaten’d, abus’d, & treated like a Criminal!—I cannot bear it.” The opprobrium under which he had to continue in his priestly offices must certainly have fueled Barton’s determination to leave the Carlisle-Huntington-York circuit. His exposure, moreover, might also have further exacerbated his worsening relationship with Presbyterian John Armstrong, the other principal proprietary representative in Carlisle and therefore possibly a rival in his struggle for favor, and a man with whom Barton came into serious conflict a few years later.

61 For an example of Barton’s paranoia, see the exchange between Barton and Sir William Johnson in The Papers of Sir William Johnson (13 vols., Albany, 1921-62) where Barton complains “I am afraid some ungenerous Person, who envied me the Honor of your Friendship, has endeavoured to interrupt it” (Barton to Johnson, Nov. 6, 1769, 7:240). Johnson replied: “you may be Assured that there is not the Least grounds for your attribute [my silence] at any time to the endeavors of any person” (Johnson to Barton, Feb. 16, 1770, 7:391). Barton’s reply (March 31, 1770, 7:515) registers his great relief that a gossiper had not turned Johnson against him.


64 See Barton to Thomas Penn, April 7, 1758, Penn Papers, Official Correspondence, 9:21, HSP, wherein Barton speaks of having requested “some Time ago . . . to be remov’d; & it is with Concern that I am oblig’d to renew my Application.”

65 Although the causes for this conflict remain obscure, its sources seem generally rooted in traditional religious and ethnic rivalries—Presbyterian/Anglican, Scots-Irish/Anglo-Irish—that had evolved during the previous hundred years in Ulster. For a fuller discussion of the personal conflict, see James P. Myers, Jr., “The Reverend Thomas Barton’s Conflict with Colonel John Armstrong, ca. 1758,” Cumberland County History, 10 (1993), 3-14.
Before Barton and Smith succeeded in interring the plagiarism "in the dark backward and abysm of time," the former referred to it once more. Laconic and teasing, Barton discloses in a letter of November 2, 1755, that "Mr. Bradford is the Gent" who has been so industrious to injure me. More of this in my next.\textsuperscript{66} Either the promised letter has been lost or Barton failed to provide further information. We may, however, infer several possibilities from the remark. The Mr. Bradford identified here was clearly behind the apparently successful effort to discredit Barton. He may, furthermore, have authored the anonymous letter Barton referred to in his October 19 communication. In citing only the surname, Barton implies that Mr. Bradford is known to both himself and William Smith—his detractor is no obscure malcontent lurking in the shadows and requiring further identification. That the accuser was Presbyterian Philadelphia printer William Bradford III is reinforced by Smith's letter of October 9 in which he explains how he first learned of Barton's misdeed: "Your Sermon & Robert's [sic] were both put in the Coffee house, page confronted to page & your Name in the Title stigmatized both as Thief & Murderer."\textsuperscript{67} Smith's particularization "in the Coffee house" must surely denote William Bradford's London Coffee House, the print shop/gathering place he opened in 1754 on the corner of Market and Front Streets.

That Smith could enter the shop, view the indisputable evidence, maneuver to remove "the Sermons from the Coffee-house," and promise Barton to "strive to prevent any ill-natured Exposure of you in the Prints" was a measure of his authority in Philadelphia. "I shall strive to wipe off the Reproach wherever my Influence extends," he promised. Achieving that end, of course, would also erase any blame that might have attached itself to his own reputation. The silence into which the controversy subsided intimates that Smith's influence must have indeed extended far and wide.

Judging by the correspondence that has survived, Smith never faltered in his support for Barton. Whether or not he discussed the plagiarism with anyone else cannot be determined. Beyond Barton's reputation, of course, Smith had his own image, already under rather constant attack, to preserve. The most likely person in whom Smith might have confided,

\textsuperscript{66} Barton to William Smith, Nov. 2, 1755, Perry, \textit{Historical Collections}, 2:559.
\textsuperscript{67} William Smith to Barton, Oct. 9, 1755, Hawks Col., S, I, 17-6-56.
Richard Peters, apparently never alluded to Barton’s transgression. But because it is probable that Peters would have heard the same rumors bruited about Philadelphia, it seems likely that he too participated in the suppression undertaken by Smith. Significantly, following the autumn of 1755, both Smith and Peters wrote letters warmly commending Barton’s efforts on behalf of church and province.68

Barton, too, drew the veil of silence over his misdeed. Panicked, as we have seen, by Bradford’s rumor-campaign, he informed Smith that he would “lay the whole Affair before the Archbishop & Society, by whose Decision I shall stand or fall.”69 Either he thought better of this plan and never apprised the society, or whatever communication he did dispatch has disappeared. After November 1755, he never alludes to his dubious use of the Samuel Roberts sermon.

This episode helpfully illustrates several noteworthy points. It shows us a mid-level proprietary Anglican placeman responding to the frontier’s crisis by freely, if ingenuously, pilfering the writing of another cleric, ironically a Dissenter. Vilified by critics in Philadelphia as a “Thief & Murderer,” Barton, through his association with William Smith, the Anglican Church, and the Penn proprietary, potentially exposed them all to censure and discredited the causes they advocated. William Smith’s, and very probably Richard Peters’s,70 suppression of the rumormongering and the evidence implies a semiofficial effort to shore-up the damage wrought by Barton’s literary theft. Smith’s triumphant spiriting away from the coffeehouse the pamphlets being compared and his having “the Prints” expeditiously censored succeeded not only in redeeming the images of all the parties at risk, but also in virtually burying the episode from historical scrutiny until modern times.

Instead of destroying his exchange with Barton, however, Smith reserved the correspondence for later examination or perhaps for adding to the list of whatever misdeeds Barton might enact in the future. His

68 William Smith to the archbishop of Canterbury, Oct. 22, 1755, Perry, Historical Collections, 2:557-8; Richard Peters to Thomas Penn, Sept. 16, 1756, Penn Papers, Official Correspondence, 4:36, HSP; William Smith to the bishop of Oxford [Nov. 1, 1756], Perry, Historical Collections, 2:555-7; William Smith to the secretary, Nov. 1, 1756, ibid., 562-64; and William Smith to the secretary, Nov. 5, 1756, ibid., 565-66.

69 Barton to William Smith, Oct. 19, 1755, Hawks Col., S, I, 18-6-57.

70 It is difficult to envision Smith acting as he did without Peters’s knowledge and, at least, his tacit approval.
annotations on the cover of his emotional letter of October 9, 1755, suggest that Barton’s plagiarism was far from being a dead issue in his own mind. Describing the packet’s contents, he wrote: “To Mr. Barton, on finding [a] great Part of his Sermon taken from Mr. Roberts. W* his unsatisfactory Answers. Oct. 19th 1755.” And below this, with an unintended irony that later readers can now appreciate, he added: “Correspondence to be preserved & re-examined on some future occasion.”

Additionally, the affair also intimates that persons highly placed in the proprietary hierarchy—Richard Peters and Thomas Penn, most probably—recognized Barton’s potential usefulness as a propagandist and polemicist. Instead of sacrificing him to his detractors, the officials silenced the strident criticisms, or allowed them to subside, and rewarded the plagiarist.

Ironically, Barton soon found himself enjoying the modest favors that fell to those who could valuably serve the Proprietary. For example, notwithstanding the potentially explosive conflict with Presbyterian John Armstrong, the Penns’ powerful land-agent, surveyor, and leader of militia in Carlisle, Cumberland County, site of one of Barton’s churches, he managed in 1758 to obtain a commission as Anglican chaplain-at-large to the combined royal and provincial army preparing to wrest control of Fort Duquesne from the French.\(^\text{71}\) In 1759 he was transferred to a more favorable living in Lancaster, where he soon became one of the principal intellectual influences in that community. Thomas Penn awarded him monetary gifts, and the SPG increased his salary. His anonymous contribution to the pamphlet war ignited by the Paxton disturbances of 1763-64 brought him new rewards, the most significant being the lifetime grant of Thomas Penn’s Conestoga Manor.\(^\text{72}\)

As the conflicts that gradually climaxed in the American Revolution achieved momentum, however, Barton began to suffer reversals. Although not rabidly committed to the royal cause, as were some of his colleagues, he was unable to make the same compromises as other Anglican clerics such as William Smith and William White. Refusing to take the test

\(^\text{71}\) For a discussion of this, see Myers, “The Reverend Thomas Barton’s Conflict with Colonel John Armstrong, ca. 1758,” 5-9.

oath to the new government, Barton was ejected from Pennsylvania in 1778. His health broken, destitute, and separated from his beloved children, Barton died in 1780 in the city of New York, waiting to sail on the ship that would have returned him to the British Isles, from whence he had sailed thirty years earlier to seek fortune and possibly fame in the new land.

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